



A Year in the Life of a Hay Meadow

A meadow is a field from which livestock are excluded during the main grass growing season, May - July. The crop of hay is then cut and stored to be used as winter feed.

Meadows are a markedly seasonal habitat consisting of many different flowering plants, thriving together by dividing up the growing season. Thus the appearance of a meadow changes dramatically throughout the seasons.



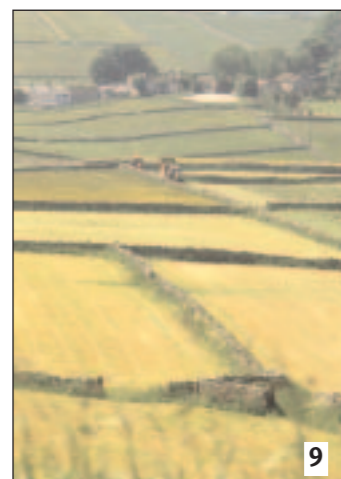
12. Winter or spring - farm yard manure originating from the over-wintering barns is spread on the meadows.

1. Early spring - the cycle of the hay meadow begins. The meadow may be grazed by stock. Ground nesting birds and mammals begin to find their territories.



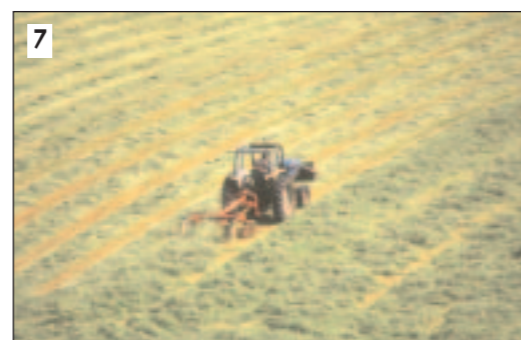
11. Winter - livestock may stay on the meadow. The hay is fed to the stock.

10. Late summer/autumn - the majority of meadows are aftermath grazed by cattle or sheep.



9. Late summer - the newly mown meadow looks strikingly bare but the grass soon grows again. In the new growth grasses tend to dominate.

8. The hay is baled and then carted off the field to be stored in the barn for winter feed.



7. The making of hay is a time of intense activity. The lines of hay are tedded (turned to aid the drying process).

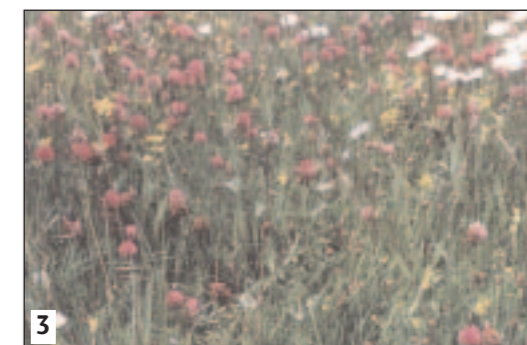


2. May - a white and yellow haze of meadow saxifrage, pignut and buttercup providing food for a variety of insects. Livestock are removed.

3. June - a rich tapestry of plants with different grasses and a host of flowering herbs like ox-eye daisy, hay rattle and meadow clover.

4. July - the meadow grasses ripen and turn to shades of mustard and fawn. The later flowering species, such as field scabious predominate.

5. Before the hay is cut, birds such as skylark raise their young.



6. Summer - The hay is cut. The timing is dependant on the weather and farming preference.

