Book Review

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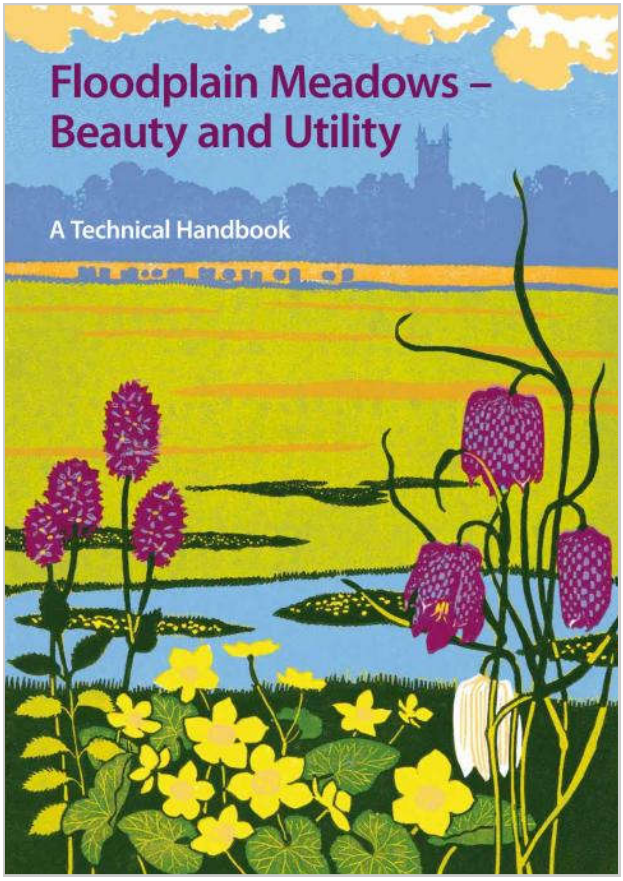
Rothero, E., Lake, S. & Gowing, D. (eds.) 2016. Floodplain Meadows – Beauty and Utility. A Technical Handbook. Milton Keynes, Floodplain Meadows Partnership. Open University, UK. – available at http://www.floodplainmeadows.org.uk/floodplain-meadow-technical-handbook

The even mead, that erst brought sweetly forth
The freckled cowslip, burnet and green clover,
Wanting the scythe, all uncorrected, rank,
Conceives by idleness, and nothing teems
But hateful docks, rough thistles, kecksies, burs,
Losing both beauty and utility.

These lines of Shakespeare from play Henry V were not accidentally chosen by John Rodwell as an epigraph to the Preface to this book, since their last line contains the leitmotif of the entire book, also reflected in its title. It is beauty, which also implies biodiversity, as well as the economic utility of the meadows, which are the main subjects covered in the reviewed handbook.

The book consists of 11 chapters. The introductory chapter (Chapter 1) explains what floodplain meadows are, and also introduces the objective of this book – namely to raise awareness of the sensitivity of floodplain-meadow plant communities to changes in water level, management and soil fertility to help conserve the few remaining species-rich floodplain meadows.In the next three chapters, the main components of floodplain meadows are characterized - wildlife, including plant communities, plant species, invertebrates, birds, mammals (Chapter 2), the origin and history of floodplain meadows, as well as changes in society's views on the value of meadows at different times (Chapter 3), major threats and conservation status, the role of the EU Habitats Directive and especially the contribution of the Floodplain Meadows Partnership to floodplain meadow conservation (Chapter 4). The next few chapters are devoted to the edaphic and hydrological features of floodplain meadows – soils (Chapter 5), nutrients (Chapter 6), water regime (Chapter 7). Special attention is paid to how to practically characterise thesefunctions , with particular emphasis on the indicative properties of plants. Chapter 8 describes the main plant communities of British floodplain meadows, in accordance with National Vegetation Classification (Rodwell 1992) - Burnet floodplain meadow (MG4): *Alopecurus pratensis-Sanguisorba ofcinalis* grassland, Kingcup-carnation sedge meadow (MG8): *Cynosurus cristatus-Carex panicea-Caltha palustris* grassland, Sedge Lawn (MG14): *Carex nigra-Agrostis stolonifera-Senecio aquaticus* grassland, Meadowsweet sub-community (MG6d) of MG6 Ryegrass pasture: *Lolium perenne-Cynosurus cristatus* grassland, Cuckooflower grassland (MG15p): *Alopecurus pratensis-Poa trivialis-Cardamine pratensis* grassland (provisional)



andFoxtail plash (MG13): *Agrostis stolonifera-Alopecurus geniculatus* grassland. Almost all of the characterized types include several sub-communities. The key section is Chapter 9, which deals with the detailed management of floodplain meadows, including its purpose and main practices. It is constantly emphasized that management must be flexible and be sensitive to site-specific circumstances . The impact of management on wildlife - invertebrates, birds and mammals is also considered. Other specific topics in this chapter include managing conflicts of interest and the economic value of a hay crop. Chapter 10 is dedicated to the topic of floodplain meadow restoration and creation . It provides justification for such activity, as well as a simple assessment system that allows the user to choose the optimal restoration or creation methodfor a particular site. It should be especially emphasized that in this chapter there is a subsection outlining the funding options for such activities. The last chapter (Chapter 11) describes how to carry out investigations and monitoring, as key elements of floodplain-meadow management and restoration. It describes in detail how to properly set out transect lines with monitoring quadrats using the standard method and how to carry out investigations using standard protocols.

Case studies are presented at the end of each chapter and illustrate and reinforce the information provided therein. The handbook is profusely illustrated with photographs, charts and diagrams. The abundance of hyperlinks makes it

easy to access many related information resources. At first glance, the initial perception of the book from the perspective of a non-English reader is the drawback that the names of plants and animals are only given in English. However, the authors have solved this problem by placing a nomenclature list in the end of the book, that provides both the English and Latin names of plants, mammals, birds, invertebrates. In addition, a list with matching British classification units and European phytosociological associations is provided. The glossary of basic terms given at the end of the book will be useful to a wide range of readers. Of particular value for botanists and ecologists is an Appendix, that provides the characteristics of other plant communities of floodplains, including species-poor grasslands, mires, swamps and ephemeral communities that are not described in detail in the book.

In my opinion, this book will be of interest to everyone who is engaged in the study and management of floodplain meadows, not only in the UK, but also abroad.

Anna Kuzemko, *Kyiv, Ukraine,*
anyameadow.ak@gmail.com

Ranunculus illyricus **pollinated by a cuckoo-wasp (family** ***Chrysididae*****). Photo: M. Janišová.**