



Barningham Scything and Grassland Management



1. Introduction

[Norfolk Rivers Trust](#) (NRT) has been working on behalf of the [Air Wick](#) and [WWF](#) partnership to restore meadows and wildflower habitats. To achieve this end, NRT has been hosting workshops to create a legacy of sustainability through the sharing of traditional skills and knowledge, many of which have been lost to time and modern machinery. A particular focus has been grassland management using scythes.

Scything has emerged as one of the most effective management strategies to restore meadows and nurture biodiversity. It is a tool that encourages the user to work with nature and the lifecycles and movements of insects, birds and mammals.

The teaching of these time-honoured skills hold the promise of profound benefits, not only to our local communities, but also for the wildlife that shares our environment.



Figure 2. Volunteers practicing their new skill.

2. Why is scything a winning formula for grassland management?

There are many advantages of scythe use for grassland management:

- Prevent hearing loss, vibration damage and hip problems, which usually accompany the use of machinery.
- Quieter and therefore less disruptive to wildlife.
- Better control over when to cut and what you are cutting.
- Able to fit into areas unsuitable for machines such as steep slopes and small spaces.
- A social activity for groups who want to work together without the health and safety risks of powered tools.



Figure 1. Expert, Richard Brown of Wild Scythe, showing the volunteers the importance of proper blade care.

3. Scything top tips

- When selecting your scythe, make sure it fits your height and build, adjusting if necessary.
- When adjusting your blade, you need to consider: too open = grabs too much grass; too closed = won't pick up any grass. Your blade needs to be central.
- Posture is key. The aim is to mow for as long as possible with little strain. A gentle, upright and balanced posture with soft knees and feet beneath the shoulders is required.
- If you're scything next to a water course, prevent vegetation from falling into the water, which will pollute it.
- For cleaner and easier cuts, remember the importance of sharpening your blade, as well as learning the practice of peening. Working the edge of the blade with a hammer to maintain the sharp edge.



Figure 4. Measuring scythe size.



Figure 3. A volunteer scything Barningham Meadow.

- Your senses are your ally. When cutting grassland with your scythe, use all your senses to get feedback from your meadow.
 - Use your sight to see the species that are growing and the direction they grow in.
 - Use your sense of smell to help identify scented plants such as wild mint. You can see if the scents have increased or decreased the following year.
 - Use your hearing to record what the grass sounds like when cutting. Is it tough or smooth?

4. Creating a Lasting Legacy - a quote from our volunteers

“We learned how to assemble a scythe and use it and had lots of practical experience. We came away with a scythe, ready to get to work on our wildflower and wildlife area.”

5. Next steps

NRT is committed to sharing skills and knowledge whenever possible. As such, the Trust hopes to host more of these workshops in the future, as well as run practical meadow conservation tasks for the Air Wick and WWF partnership project to restore wildflower habitats across the UK.

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This workshop was made possible through the generous support of the Air Wick and WWF partnership. The funding provides essential training, resources and opportunities for communities and wildflower conservation efforts across Norfolk.

