



## Celebrating hay meadows

### *Curriculum themes*

Geography	Farming Investigating the local area
Science	Environmental enquiry Diversity of life Habitats

### *Resources required*

Celebrating hay meadows resource sheet  
 10 x quadrats  
 10 x North Pennines Hay Meadow Identification Guides  
 10 x sweep nets  
 10 plastic pots  
 10 x hay rakes  
 Pike nets and stones  
 Celebratory refreshments (These could be made in school or by the farmer by prior arrangement. Check for allergies)

### *Background information*

#### **Best time of the year for the activity**

Summer, when the hay meadows are in flower.

#### **Timing**

This activity will take approximately 2 hours.

#### **Location on the farm**

This activity will take place at several locations on the farm. The first site will be the pasture field marked A on the map on the resource sheet and the second site in the hay meadow marked B on the map on the resource sheet.

#### **Background information**

Hay meadows are one of the rarest habitats in the country. A single hay meadow may have up to 100 species of plant in it and every square metre up to 30 species. These plants in turn provide an important habitat for birds, insects and mammals.

Hay meadows have been made by and survived due to traditional farming methods – meadows are spread with muck, harrowed and rolled early in the year so as not to disturb ground-nesting birds, sheep are cleared from the meadows in May to give 7 weeks for the hay to grow, the first cut of hay is not made until at least mid-July so late flowering plants can set seed and the cattle graze the meadows after the hay has been cut, trampling the ground and creating places for seeds to germinate.

#### **Introducing the activity**

This activity looks at the importance of hay meadows as wildlife habitats, encourages the children to make a hay pike and explores why hay time was a big occasion on the farm in earlier times.

Introduce the activity using the facts on the resource sheet. Explain there are 3 parts to the activity.

### Undertaking the activity

#### Hay meadows – a wildlife habitat

This first activity looks at the diversity of plants and animals in a pasture and compares it to a hay meadow. The work is undertaken in the pasture to the north of the farm house (Site A on the map on the resource sheet) and in the hay meadow to the east of the farm house (Site B on the map on the resource sheet).

At Site A find out how many different plants there are in a square metre by placing a 50cm x 50cm quadrat on the ground in the centre of the pasture field. Use the North Pennines Hay Meadow Identification Guide to name as many plants as possible. Record the plants you find on the resource sheet and calculate the total number of different plants. Find out what insects live in the pasture by moving the sweep net through the grass. Empty the sweep net into a pot and count the number of different insects that have been caught. Encourage the children to name them if they can. Record the results on the resource sheet.

At Site B repeat the work done at Site A. Discuss the results for each site. Which site has the greatest variety of plants? Which habitat supports the most insects?

#### Making a hay pike

Before mechanisation (pre 1960), much of the hay making process was done using horsepower and by hand. Discuss the process of hay making using the resource sheet. A small area of hay will be cut if this activity is chosen – the location of this may vary. Use the hay rakes to make a hay pike. Top the pike with a net and stones to weight it down.

#### Celebrating hay time

Hay time was a big job without machinery and often neighbours helped. Workers would stay in the field all day and refreshments would be brought to them. Celebrate having made hay pikes with some typical refreshments. The recipes are shown on the resource sheet.