



Meadows

A meadow is a place where grasses and flowering plants grow and where there are no trees. They mainly exist because of the way people farm the land.

Meadows are places where grasses and other flowering plants thrive, but where trees are rare (Picture 1). Natural meadows are only common on high mountains where trees cannot grow. But they are also found in valley bottoms where farmers have cut down the trees to make grazing land for animals (Picture 2).

Many varieties of plants

As animals graze, they eat the shoots of trees so new trees can't grow.

▼ (Picture 1) This meadow consists of a variety of grasses whose flowers are on the top of tall thin stems. Many other plants can also be seen, including the yellow flower of a buttercup.

Meadows have more variety of grasses and flowering plants than any other place. Over 500 kinds of plants have been found in one meadow. This is because trees do not shade them out.

A wealth of animals

Even though farmers want the meadow to be used for their animals, there is also much wildlife. This is because meadows are a much better place to find food than woodlands.

Many birds nest in among the plants. The skylark is a common meadow bird that eats seeds and insects. It makes its nest on the ground and camouflages it.



Many hunters

With many animals using the meadow for food, meadows attract many winged hunters such as hawks, that patrol by day, or owls, that patrol by night.

Burrowing is one way to make a home that is safe from these hunters. Rabbits and voles are among many burrowing animals that can thrive in a meadow.

Below the surface

The plants on the surface shed lots of leaves that rot and become food for soil animals. The dung of grazing animals can

be another source of food. Below the soil there may be tons of earthworms in each hectare of meadow. And there will be a small army of moles and other tunnelling animals trying to eat them. Tunnelling animals like moles have bodies shaped so they can push themselves through the soil. They have strong, short, front legs and spade-like paws with sharp claws so that they can dig rapidly.

Summary

- Meadows are places of great variety.
- With so much food, meadows are home to many animals.

▼ (Picture 2) Animals and plants in a meadow.

