

Fritillary Facts

Snake's head fritillaries (*Fritillaria meleagris*) are nationally rare, but can be very abundant locally. There are only a few sites in the UK where the population is truly native.

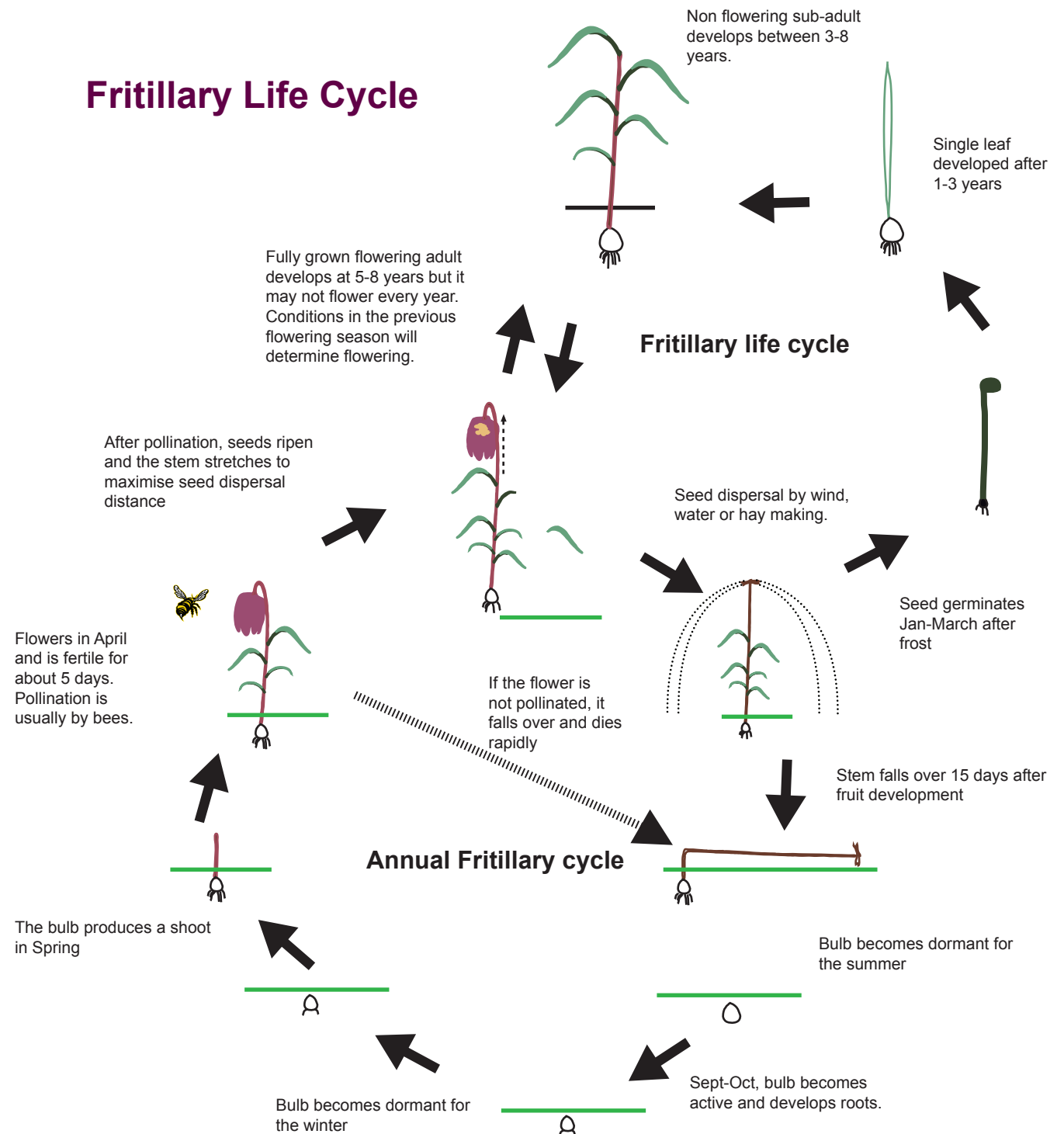
The bare patches of earth left by the floods create areas where fritillaries can germinate. The fritillaries rely on the traditional meadow system for survival as they cannot tolerate grazing during the growing season.

Other names recorded include: Chequered Lily, Dead Man's Bell, Leper's Bells and Oaksey Lily. Fritillary and '*Fritillaria*' come from a Latin origin '*fritillus*' which means 'dice-box' as the markings are similar to a chequer board. '*Meleagris*' means 'speckled' and is the Greek name for a Guinea hen.

Fritillary flowers are pollinated by bees and attract them by waving their chequered flowers and reflecting near infra red and UV light, so bees can 'see' which flowers are ready for pollination.

An old country belief of the wild fritillary was that it followed the path of the Romans, springing up wherever their footsteps had fallen.

Fritillary Life Cycle



Fritillary identification

The fritillary is a member of the lily family and flowers from April to May. It arises from a small green stem that can vary from 200-500 mm in height and has slender curved leaves.

The pendulous lily shaped flowers are either purple, pink or white and have a chequered pattern. Each plant usually has only one flower. Occasionally two or very rarely three flower heads are seen.



All photos: Mike Dodd

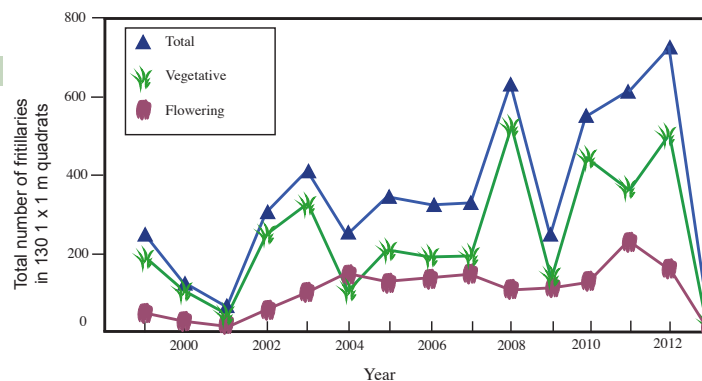
Floodplain Meadows Partnership Research

Research has been carried out on the fritillary populations at North Meadow, which makes up 80% of the total UK population.

The plants are counted annually at fixed positions by the Floodplain Meadows Partnership. Volunteers count the numbers of plants and flowers (including the colour) and measure the plant height.

The graph below indicates that the species was steadily increasing from 2001 to 2012 followed by a catastrophic crash in 2013. The increase in vegetative plants in 2002 and 2008 suggests that the fritillary population benefits from occasional summer flooding but excessive flooding as seen in 2012 can be disastrous.

Abundance of fritillaries at North Meadow, Cricklade 1999-2013 in 130 1 x 1 m quadrats



Snake's Head Fritillary (*Fritillaria meleagris*)

