

# Newsletter

A group of farmers working collaboratively on the Downs and Vale between Devizes and Pewsey to enhance the local landscape for wildlife

Issue 6

June 2020



Visit our new website [www.pewseydownsfarmers.org](http://www.pewseydownsfarmers.org)

Welcome to the sixth edition of the Pewsey Downs Farmers Group newsletter. It has obviously been a strange time during the last few months with the lockdown meaning we haven't been able to do some of the activities and events we had planned at a time when we would normally be really busy. Farming and wildlife, of course, don't stop! Indeed it does seem to be a good year for flowers and butterflies so far, the Downs look fantastic!

We have been very busy working on trialling Landscape Enterprise Networks (LENs). LENs links management and investment in landscapes to the long-term needs of business and society. The objectives of LENs are two-fold: it is intended to both create business value from healthy landscapes, and to help drive investment in healthy landscapes by mobilising their value to business.

As a pilot project to initiate LENS within the Hampshire Avon Catchment the Group is working with Natural England and 3Keel to develop a 'Farmed Landscape Prospectus' for the purposes of investment by supply chain interests

in the landscape. The pilot has developed a range of projects (practical land management and business interventions) to protect the landscape Assets. As an initial focus for the pilot the PDFG have identified projects to reduce phosphate losses on farmland, building on the work we having been carrying out with CSF's Paula Sage. The initial investment is from Wessex Water and Wiltshire Council with the Group putting forward over 80 projects on to EnTrade, an online platform providing a marketplace between funders and landowners.

We have also been working with the Game and Wildlife Conservation Trust on a trial looking at on-farm wildlife surveys.

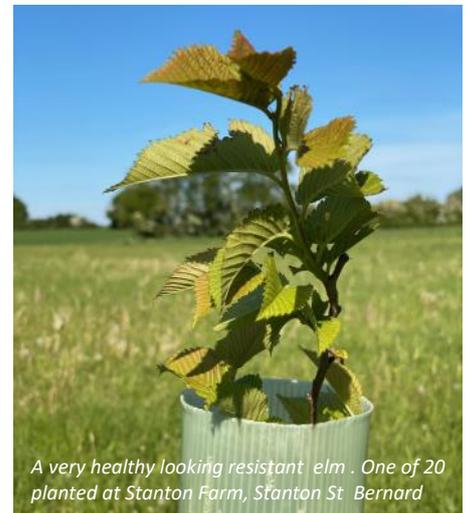


Our last meeting before lockdown! Discussing the Big Farmland Bird Count at Manor Farm, Alton Barnes

Findings from this trial will inform the design of the future Defra agri-

environment scheme – 'ELMs'. As part of this, members carried out GWCT's Big Farmland Bird Count and the Partridge Count Scheme with some great results.

Over the winter the Group planted over 150 resistant elm trees.



A very healthy looking resistant elm. One of 20 planted at Stanton Farm, Stanton St Bernard

This is to help encourage the rare white-letter hairstreak butterfly whose caterpillars feed on elm. They declined drastically in the 1970's following the decimation of elms by dutch elm disease.

The recent dry weather has meant members have had to water the trees to keep them going!

## Rough Grassland: *an undervalued habitat?*



Whilst the provision of rough grass corners is no longer an option in Countryside Stewardship, the provision of tussocky grass areas can provide really valuable wildlife habitat. Rough grassland provides shelter for insects in turn providing food supply for birds and bats, as well as being important habitat for many other species including small mammals, amphibians and reptiles.

Tall herb and rough grassland provide key pollen and nectar sources from spring until late summer and support numerous plant-feeding and predatory invertebrates.

Coarse tussocky grassland provides summer nesting habitat for carder bumblebees and shelter for many other insects throughout the year, including for overwintering, in the base of tussocks, hollow stems, such as hogweed and teasel, and seed heads.

Strategic placement of this option can help to reduce the movement of sediment, nutrients and pesticides by wind and water erosion within fields and from field to field. It can also help to buffer sensitive habitats from the direct impact of agricultural activities.

Areas don't have to be large – consider using areas which are awkward to reach with machinery and are less productive (*avoid taking these areas out of arable if they support rare arable plants*).

Tall herb and rough grassland are most valuable where it supports good quantities of flowers and a good flowering sequence from spring until late summer. Key flowers include cow parsley, hogweed, thistles, teasel, knapweeds and scabious.

Cutting tall herb and rough grassland is best done on a rotation (i.e. don't cut all of it in one year) to leave some areas undisturbed over the winter months.

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## Metal detecting



Metal-detecting can provide valuable information about the history of your land and many important archaeological discoveries have been made over the last 20 years by detectorists. However, some less responsible detectorists have given the hobby a bad name by targeting archaeological sites, leaving damage and removing artefacts without recording them, some of which are then sold. There are concerns this has been happening in the Pewsey Vale in recent years. To ensure that metal detecting happens responsibly all detectorists should follow the [Code of Practice for Responsible Metal Detecting](#).

### Landowners Checklist

- Have a written 'finds agreement' with anyone wishing to search on your land.
- Get any necessary permissions in writing before allowing detecting on your land; such as on that part of an agri-environment scheme or on protected sites.
- Ask to see all finds and ask that all archaeological finds are recorded with the local Portable Antiquities Scheme Finds Liaison Officer.
- Consider donating important finds to a local museum to benefit the local community or giving them first refusal on objects offered for sale.
- Report any illegal activity to the police via 101 or 999.

For more information visit <https://finds.org.uk/>

## Metal detecting and agri-environment schemes

- Metal-detecting is *not* allowed on any 'known archaeological sites' on Agreement Land without permission from RPA/Natural England and penalties may be triggered for non-compliance; such sites are identified on the Historic Environment Farm Environment Record (HEFER) held by the Agreement Holder.
- On any other Agreement Land, metal-detecting is allowed (including rallies - see below) as long as it does not conflict with the requirements of the Agreement; for example, disturbing ground-nesting birds.
- All hobby metal-detecting allowed by Agreement Holders must be undertaken in accordance with the current, and all finds must be reported to the Portable Antiquities Scheme as set out in that Code.
- RPA/NE requires up to 12 weeks' notice of any large-scale metal-detecting events on environmental stewardship land and may refuse permission if they consider the event will damage environmental features.

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## To Do List

- Nectar mixes in Environmental Stewardship Schemes—top half area 15th Jun-15th Jul to encourage later flowering.
- Maintain wet, muddy puddles in and around yards for swallows and house martins. These need only be a metre in diameter and are really important in periods of dry weather such as this spring.

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