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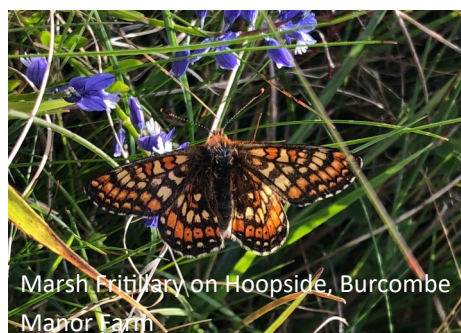
# Newsletter

*Farmers working together in the Chalke Valley landscape to benefit wildlife, soil, water and the historic environment. We have over 25 members covering over 9,000 hectares.*



## Welcome to the fifth edition of the Chalke Valley Farmer Cluster newsletter.

It has been a very busy summer with a huge amount of survey activity being undertaken on our farms. We have had experts from Natural England's Field Unit (NEFU) looking for bumblebees, whilst Sue Clarke, Dave Green and Simon Smart continued their hunt for Marsh Fritillary and Duke of Burgundy butterflies with great success!



Marsh Fritillary on Hoopside, Burcombe Manor Farm

Funding from Natural England also allowed us to get Gareth Harris back in the Valley following his bat walk last spring to undertake a number of surveys across the area. We are currently accumulating all of the data from these surveys but it is certainly looking as though the Chalke Valley really is an amazing area for wildlife! We

have found a number of new sites for Marsh Fritillary and Duke of Burgundy, both very rare butterflies, and new records for the Rare Red-shanked bumblebee.



Matthew checking his AudioMoth bat recorder

The bat surveys carried out by Gareth and the Wiltshire Bat Group suggest that the Chalke Valley, with its mix of chalk grassland, woodland and chalk stream, is also very important for bats. Fourteen different species including Greater and Lesser Horseshoe and Barbastelle bat were recorded during the surveys. Gareth will provide an assessment of the results and what we can do to help these amazing animals later in the autumn. Additional to this our very own Matthew Pickford, once a bat sceptic but now a

real bat enthusiast, got involved in trialling a remote sensor for the Bat Conservation Trust as part of the national British Bat Survey. We look forward to the results from this too.

The results of all these surveys tell us what we have and where so we can better target our efforts to encourage wildlife on our farms.

Apart from surveys we have also been busy with various training and events. Back in May local forestry consultant Bill Ayers gave us a fascinating tour around Andrew Reis's Gurston Knowle giving us a valuable insight into how we can improve our woodland for wildlife, opportunities for financial returns from timber and dealing with diseases such as ash dieback.



Discussing woodland management with Bill Ayers

In early June GWCT's Jonathan Reynolds provided a fascinating talk on their research into water vole and the impact of non-native mink. This was followed by a practical demonstration of mink raft used for monitoring and trapping mink. Simon will be in touch later in the year to organise a catchment wide mink monitoring programme.

Later in June Richard and Katie Jowett, along with Simon Smart, provided a farm walk for the public at the Chalke Valley History Festival. This was a great opportunity to show festival goers some of the Jowett's conservation activities and discuss how a long history of farming has influenced the landscape and its associated wildlife.

In early July, just before harvest we held our annual farm walk and barbecue at Chalk Pyt Farm by kind invitation of Ben and Andrew Jeans. It was a great evening and an opportunity to see some of the habitats on the farm including a look at the River Ebble and chalk downland, followed by a delicious barbecue provided by Heidi Upton.



Whilst members were busy with harvest it was a good time to invite agronomists to Stoke Farm for some environmental training with Pete Thompson. Topics covered included soil health, pollinators and arable habitat management with all attending agronomists receiving valuable BASIS CPD points.

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## Don't forget pollinators!

Whilst we may be at the end of summer that doesn't mean we can forget about pollinators! As with farmland birds it's important to think about year round habitat and this includes what they need over-winter.

Dense vegetation such as tussocky grassland, scrub, mature trees, and piles of wood and stone can provide essential habitat for hibernating pollinators. Insect pollinators can spend the winter in a variety of life stages (egg, larva, pupa, or adult). For example, solitary bees spend the winter in their nest cells as pupae, emerging as adults the following spring or summer, so it is critical to protect nesting areas from disturbance all year long, not just during the nesting season. With bumblebees it is the new Queens which over-winter as adults digging into well-drained soil, usually on north-facing banks.



Bumblebee on bird's-foot trefoil

All need sheltered areas in which to spend the winter. Do not be too tidy and set aside undisturbed areas of habitat such as uncut field margins and 'rough' field corners.

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## Celebrating Ivy



Ivy provides important food and shelter for wildlife

Ivy is one of our most important autumn flowers, attracting huge numbers of butterflies, bees and flies, some of which will overwinter as adults, making this final feast vital. It also provides shelter for insects, birds, bats and other small mammals. The high fat content of the berries is a nutritious food resource for birds and they are eaten by a range of species including thrushes and blackcaps.

Ivy uses trees for support, allowing it to reach upwards to better levels of sunlight. It is not a parasitic plant and has a separate root system in the soil and so absorbs its own nutrients and water. In

most cases the growth of ivy is controlled by the healthy crowns of trees which limit the amount of sunlight reaching ivy leaves. When ivy does grow on trees, it usually adopts its mature flowering form and ceases climbing before it reaches the crown of a tree.

It is only rarely that Ivy will cause significant direct damage to a supporting tree. As such avoid cutting ivy as a matter of course unless there is a specific reason such as tree safety.

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## Autumn to-do list

**Cut nectar flower mixes** Cut the whole plot to roughly 10cm tall removing or shredding cuttings to avoid patches of dead material (HLS— EF1/HF4 by 31st Oct; CS— AB1 by 30 Mar).

**Cut wildflower strips and plots** (HLS— HE10, CS—AB8) Cut, and remove if dense, or graze 90% of the area by 31 October - leave 10% of the area uncut or ungrazed.

Removal is ideal for both the above options, but particularly wildflower strips, as cuttings left in situ can smother the flowers encouraging grass, nettles and docks in their place. If removal is not possible ensure that material is well shredded and avoid leaving large lumps of cuttings. For nectar mixes cutting twice a few days apart during dry weather could help. Flail toppers work best to break up cut material.

**Inspect barn owl & kestrel nest boxes** this autumn. Remove approximately 75% of old pellets and nest material, leaving some pellets in for a scrape in the new breeding year.

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## Training & Events

The training schedule is designed to help members improve their environmental knowledge and skills. If you have any ideas on topics you would like covered please contact Simon.

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For more information on the CVFC and to be kept up-to-date please contact Simon Smart  
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