



Chalke  
Valley  
Farmer  
Cluster

Issue 12 Winter 2022/3

# 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.*



*The Winterbourne at Fifield Bavant (A.Reis)*

[www.chalkevalleyfarmercluster.org.uk](http://www.chalkevalleyfarmercluster.org.uk)

Happy New Year everyone! We are looking forward to a busy and active year for the Cluster supporting its members undertaking valuable conservation activities alongside their day jobs of farming.

We ended 2022 with a visit to Martin Green's museum, near Sixpenny Handley, on a very cold December day.



Martin gave us a fascinating tour of the museum which gives a insight in to the archaeology and history of the local landscape from ammonite fossils found locally right through to artefacts from the 1940s. We then had a tour of some of the archaeological dig sites in the field next door followed by mince pies and mulled wine to warm up!

CVFC member's have collectively reached a milestone using our wildlife recording App, reaching 1000 records! The 1000th record recorded by the CVFC was a Kestrel by member Alex Sykes. 113 species have been recorded including rare butterflies such as marsh fritillary and Duke of Burgundy, birds such as corn bunting and lapwing. Collecting this information is important as it allows us to target appropriate management for the species on our farms, shows how wildlife-rich our area is and ensures we are a priority for existing and future environmental support including ELMS.

## [The Chalke & Chase Landscape Partnership Scheme \(LPS\)](#)

The LPS is a group of organisations working to protect and enhance the special landscape of Cranborne Chase and Chalke Valley.

With Cranborne Chase Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) as the lead partner, and with support from the National Lottery Heritage Fund, this 5-year partnership is working with local communities to better connect people with the landscape.

As part of the LPS, various grants and opportunities are available to landowners.

- Training volunteers to carry out tasks such as scrub clearance and wildlife surveys
- Training in wildlife ID to carry out your own surveys
- Grants to aid restoration of key features (such as Dew Ponds), fencing to enable resumption of grazing chalk downland & other works to improve condition of high priority sites,

corridors and encourage species of conservation concern such as lapwing, turtle dove, & rare butterflies

- Crystal Clear Ebble - A small grant scheme, together with local volunteer labour to positively impact water and habitat quality and bring the community together
- Wonderful Woodlands Grants: 100% grants to help restore important woodland heritage features to sustain them into the future, and 50% grant for selective thinning where landowners are encouraged to trial the reintroduction of positive management for wildlife & landscape
- Champions of the past: 100% grants on Scheduled monuments to address issues such as damage from burrowing mammals & scrub encroachment.
- For more information please visit [www.cranbornechase.org.uk/the-chase-and-chalke-projects](http://www.cranbornechase.org.uk/the-chase-and-chalke-projects) or contact Tracy Adams Office: 01725 517417 , [tracyadams@cranbornechase.org.uk](mailto:tracyadams@cranbornechase.org.uk)

## Sustainable Farming Incentive

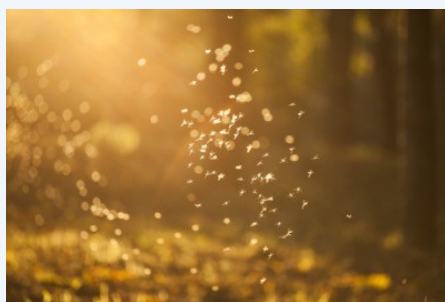
The Sustainable Farming Incentive (SFI) is one of the new Environmental Land Management (ELM) schemes that Defra has designed to incentivise and reward farmers for providing public goods such as improved water quality, enhanced biodiversity and climate change mitigation, alongside food production.

Arable and horticultural soils	
The introductory level (£22 per ha) actions are:	The intermediate level (£40 per ha) actions are:
<b>action 1:</b> complete a soil assessment and produce a soil management plan	<b>action 1:</b> complete a soil assessment & produce a soil management plan
<b>action 2:</b> test soil organic matter	<b>action 2:</b> test soil organic matter
<b>action 3:</b> add organic matter to all land in the standard at least once during the 3-year SFI standards agreement	<b>action 3:</b> add organic matter to all land in the standard at least once during the 3-year SFI standards agreement
<b>action 4:</b> have green cover on at least 70% of land in the standard over winter	<b>action 4:</b> green cover on at least 50% of land in this level of the standard over winter & multi-species cover crops on an additional 20% of the land

Currently there are three standards available to farmers: arable and horticultural soils (see above), improved grassland soils, moorland. The annual health and welfare review is also available. More standards are due to be released over the next 3 years including Integrated Pest Management and Hedgerows

If you would like to discuss SFI on your individual farm get in touch with Simon.

## Ghosts & fairies



There are not many insects on the wing in winter, but a small window of sunshine can bring out swarms of tiny dancing flies, often in late afternoon when the sun is setting. These are fungus or winter gnats (*Trichocera* sp.); delicate leggy flies and it is the males which are dancing to attract the females.

They are actually active year-round, but are most noticeable in the colder months when there are very few other insects active and the males perform their courtship dances. Swarms gather in areas that are kept warmer by the sun, such as woodland glades, they will even follow people attracted by the heat they give off. Don't panic though, although they look like mosquitoes they don't bite!

Males gathering together to attract a female is known as 'lekking', similar to that carried out by black grouse, where it is thought that it make it easier for female to find them.

Each male flies up, then floats back down to the group before repeating his display. If the light is right, particularly in low winter sunshine, their delicate wings catch the light beautifully - in the past they were thought to be fairies or even ghosts!

Once the females have mated she lays her eggs amongst decaying vegetation, such as rotting wood and wet leaves, which the larvae feed on.

The clouds of midges also provide a valuable food source for small birds and bats at a time of year when there are very few other alternatives.

## To Do

**Fallow plot management:** It doesn't seem like very long ago at all that Stone-curlew left the Chalke Valley for their wintering grounds in southern Spain and northern Africa; however, they will soon be back again! We have had such great success with breeding Stone-curlew in the last couple of years we need to ensure all of our fallow plots are in good condition ready for their imminent return.

Manage your plots in February by discing/light cultivation to create a rough bare fallow ready for the first nesting attempts.



This will also benefit lapwing. If you see, or hear, Stone-curlew (or lapwing from February onwards) please let Simon know so that we can monitor breeding success.

**Big Farmland Bird Count:** Undertake the count 3rd-19th February

**Hedgerow management:** If possible leave hedgerow cutting until February, allowing the birds to enjoy the berries. Leave some hedgerows uncut to provide flowers and fruit for next year.

**Supplementary feeding:** Keep feeding until the end of April (end of June if for Turtle Dove in area around Bowerchalke). Let Simon know if you need any feeders.

**Harvest mouse:** Keep looking for harvest mouse nests in long, tussocky grass.

## GET INVOLVED

For more information on the CVFC and to be kept up-to-date please contact Simon Smart - [07748155143-simon@blacksheepcm.co.uk](mailto:07748155143-simon@blacksheepcm.co.uk)



The CVFC is supported by funding from Natural England



[Cvcf.group](https://www.cvcf.group)