

NEWSLETTER

Wildlife Matters



AUTUMN 2022

Autumn time at Pertwood

Autumn post-harvest seems to be an excellent time to publish our regular wildlife newsletter.

Lower Pertwood Farm had the best harvest in 15-years. Although the heatwave was of concern, it happened after the crops had reached maturity and in fact the heart warm sunny conditions made for a harvest which was not affected by adverse weather conditions.

The fire risk was extremely high and one of our new tractors did suffer some heat damage but did not actually catch fire.

As always, we have a representative selection of articles written by professional people who monitor our progress on various fronts. We would like therefore to take this opportunity to thank the wide cross-section of people,

many of whom are retired and all of whom give their time and advice freely. Every category of living creatures at Lower Pertwood Farm are monitored by people who have a deep understanding of what they need in terms of habitat and food to be successful. We cannot thank them enough for their contribution.



The sunshine yellow flowers of the Lower Pertwood field margins - Corn marigolds (*Glebionis segetum*) and Chamomile.



Autumn ~ Haerfest

By Jane Hall-McLean

Nature is always calling me to stretch my legs and relax my mind and an open invitation awaits at Lower Pertwood Organic Farm.

Nature is always calling me to stretch my legs and relax my mind and an open invitation awaits at Lower Pertwood Organic Farm.

'My kind of roads to travel' - no double yellow lines, save vibrant yellow wildflowers in the Summertime. And very little traffic, save a friendly farmer waving as the tractor trundles by. Our favourite walk is what Neil and I call 'the loop' - about a 6 mile stretch. Every step along the way is good for the heart, emotionally and physically. Good for the lungs too, the hills certainly take a lot of puff! No breathing in no nasty agro-chemicals or tractor fumes here, just fresh country air. It's also good for me artistically - at least that's my argument for regularly truanting away from my drawing desk. Notably, Henry David Thoreau - American naturalist, essayist, poet and philosopher, once wrote: "Me thinks that the moment my legs begin to move my thoughts begin to flow".

But we (well, okay, the 'me' in we) love to dawdle too - and even stop for a snooze!

One of our favourite places to enjoy a snooze is somewhere along the perimeter of Peewits. To me, Peewits is a fairytale tangle, akin to the forest that enclosed Sleeping beauty in her castle where, cursed, she slept for a hundred years.

If not a forest of trees, brambles and thorns, as described in the tale, a dense thicket of gorse, brambles and thorns have certainly sprung up here over

the years. Is there a princess asleep at its heart? I think not. But we do know that countless birds, mammals and insects enjoy sanctuary here, so always tread softly.

Back in July, for my part daydreaming, we skirted 'Peewits Castle', looking for such a place to settle - to sit back against our rucksack and enjoy the view, which is magnificent from there. Raspberries hung like jewels from their brambly canes, staining my lips princess pink as I enjoyed a handful or two. They were prickly too - thank heavens I'm no princess I pondered, fated to sleep for a hundred years should I prick my finger! In any case, I thought, at least I have my prince with me.

We found the perfect spot, and I drifted off. Watching rainbows cast through my eyelashes by the bright sunlight. Listening to the high reeling calls of buzzards, soaring across the brightest blue sky - and the skylarks sweet lyrics. Bliss.

Of course, so 'delicious' was this afternoon, we promised ourselves we would return again and again, whilst those juicy rubies hung heavy from their canes. Yet somehow we 'looped around' Peewits on our numerous return visits, not finding our way back until this, late August day.

The raspberries were long over, but the blackberries, hips and haws were equally jewel bright - and the blackberries were deliciously ripe. A sense of 'Haerfest' hung heavy in the humid Summer air.

Haerfest is Anglo-Saxon for harvest, meaning Autumn. Within ten paces along one of the tangly perimeter paths, my hand full of blackberries attested to this fact.



A handful of ruby red Raspberries picked along the winding pathway through Peewits



Though, understandably, not everyone finds wild animal faeces as fascinating as me, one can discern knowledge from even casual study of them. Here, one can easily see, that the Foxes of Lower Pertwood Organic farm love Raspberries as much as me!



Blackberries - my cupped hand soon 'runneth over'!



A beauty amongst thorns - Speckled wood butterfly (Parage aegeria) resting in the Gorse



Honeysuckle - sweetly twining through Peewits Gorse



Blackberries - Rubus fruticosus

On this occasion, the blackberry juice, bought a more witchy colour to my teeth and nails. Indeed, my thumbnails are still stained purple as I sit here writing.

Blackberries *Rubus fruticosus*, are actually deep purple, not black at all. Not a true dye in natural dying terms, they create a colour that ranges from bluish lavender to purple-grey.

There are over 1000 micro species of blackberry in the UK alone. In fact, it is not uncommon to find up to 20 individual species within a mile radius - each with its own unique flowers, size, shape, scent and fruity flavour, ranging from 'Sweetheart kiss' to 'pucker sharp'.

Many moth caterpillars live on blackberries, enjoying the plant as a whole - unlike our species, bent solely on the berries. Adult butterflies enjoy the bramble flower nectar and sweet fruit juice too, as do mammals, such as Badgers, Foxes, Bank voles, Wood mice (who build their nests directly within the bramble crowns during the summer months) Hedgehogs and Deer. Neil and I often encounter deer resting or browsing here, throughout the year. When we do, it's impossible to say who's the more startled - us or the deer! Moths, butterflies and other insects are less inclined to head for cover. I could while

away at least an hour - or two, playing butterfly kiss chase, following winged beauties from one juicy berry or bramble flower to another. I have regularly 'captured': Red Admirals, Peacocks, Small tortoiseshells, Brimstones, Small heaths, Speckled woods, Meadow browns, Ringlets... occasional Skippers and Blues at Peewits. I understand that Common pug, Oak eggar moths and Peach blossom moth caterpillars favour Brambles as their food plant too. Of course, in the circle of life this is good news for the birds of Peewits, providing valuable forage.

A Bramble thicket possibly provides more nesting



The prickly perimeter of Peewits Gorse



Juicy ripe blackberries amongst unripe ruby jewels

opportunities for Bird-life than any other species of plant in the UK: Dunnock (*Prunella modularis*), Blackbird (*Turdus merula*), Thrush (*Turdus philomelos*) Long-tailed tit (*Aegithalos caudatus*), Robin (*Erithacus rubecula*), Wren (*Troglodytes troglodytes*) - all nest within the branches of mature Blackberry bushes.

Superstition holds that you shouldn't eat blackberries beyond Michaelmas, as the devil will undoubtedly have spat, or peed on them on them by then! According to folklore and legend, he landed in a blackberry thicket when he fell from heaven - sore or what! Blackberries also feature in Ancient Greek legend. Bellerophon - the Corinthian hero was blinded by thorns when he dared to fly Pegasus and was thrown into a blackberry bush... who knew?! I'm deliciously satisfied that I now do. Knowledge I'll hold onto - inevitably displacing something more important that it's imperative I remember. Such is a creative's mind! One thing I know more pragmatically is that damper weather does allow toxic moulds to grow on blackberries, so I for one subscribe to not eating them beyond September - if not entirely subscribing to superstition.

Nutritionally, they are very good for our health, particularly as we head - albeit grudgingly into Winter. Rich in vitamins A B C - nature's antioxidants, they help ward off those colds, coughs and sneezes. I read that their young Spring leaves are also good in tea, an astringent tonic remedy for diarrhea... though I've yet to partake of it. According to the renowned herbalist Nicholas Culpepper (1616 - 1654): the berries (are) 'powerful remedy against venomous serpents' and 'leaves boiled in lye, (are) cure for itchy scalps, sores, and excellent black hair dye'. Particularly suitable for those with itchy scalps then!

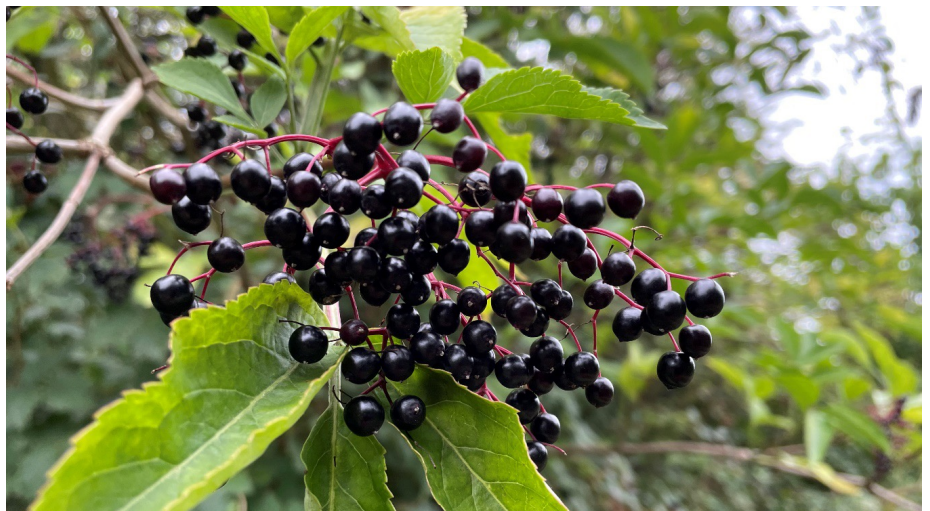
Though less abundant, there are Dewberries (*Rubus caesius*) in Peewits too. Dewberries are larger, individual fruits, waxy, not

shiny. They have larger flowers too. They scramble along the ground rather than growing tall, proud and arching like blackberries. Curiously, I've never tried one.

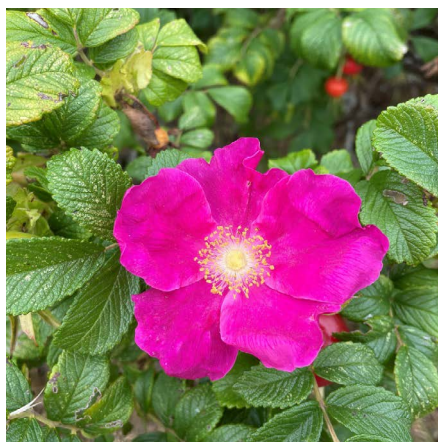
I always intuit what Nature can spare - mindful of the value of what is wild 'to' the wild. Nature first. Somehow, to me, Dewberries always seem too few.



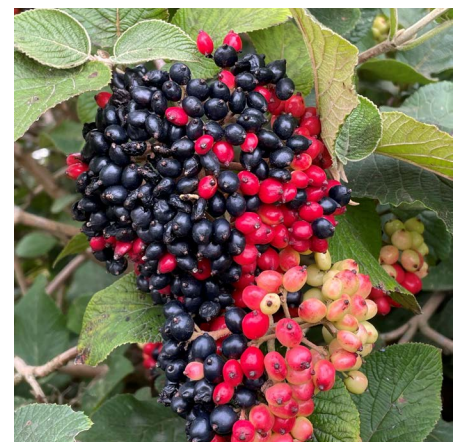
Rose hips - *Rugosa rose*



Elderberry (*Sambucus*)



Rugosa rose



Wayfaring tree berries

If you're still with me after my foray in Peewits, perhaps you'd care to saunter a little further along the 'Lower Pertwood highway' with me.

'There be' a bountiful Haerfest to be had' -say's she, imbibing her ancient Wiltshire/Somerset past!

Crab and wild apples lined our journey. Hedgerow trees and shrubby bushes, bowed down with fruits held the wayside. Birds, fluttering and scattering away from the juicy ripe harvest - buzzing with bees and wasps.

Hawthorn trees (Crataegus) are a particular favourite of mine. They are thorny safe havens for countless birds and small mammals, who enjoy the red berries - safe from predation. As the harvest becomes sparser, some become defensively territorial over certain trees, their song lyrics, not writ to charm, but to usher: 'Move along'!

Sloes (the fruit Blackthorn - Prunus spinosa), with their beautiful dusty blue bloom are a true feast for the eyes - if not fit for feasting upon straight from the hedgerow. The dust is actually a yeast bloom - thought

to enhance UV light reflection, making the berries look all the more appetizing to birds with their UV vision. Though they look delicious, and they are edible, they are so sour they make most folks faces convulse into a gurn! Best, leave them for the Thrushes, who love them - or for the makers and tippers of sloe gin!

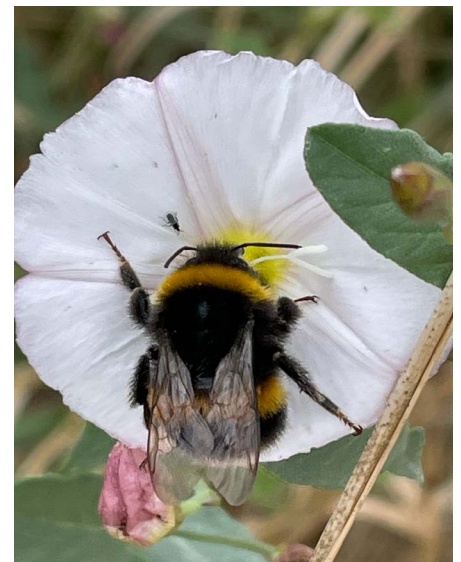
Elderberries look delicious too - though they shouldn't be eaten straight from the tree - unless you're a wild thing. They are poisonous to us when unripe. Birds, notably: Pigeons, Blackbirds, Blackcaps, Warblers, and Whitethroats - Squirrels, Mice,



Harvest time in the fields - field beans



Field beans



A beautiful Buff tailed Bumblebee (*Bombus terrestris*) supping Bindweed nectar. The ultimate wildflower goblet!



A Badgers latrine. Clearly, unlike Mr Fox, this particular Badgers has more of a taste for cereals and shiny insects than berries!



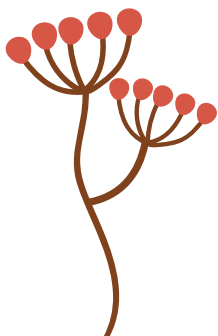
Dewberry fruit

Deer and all manner of insects, including Butterflies love them, especially when they've fallen to the ground, becoming mushy and bruised. A nourishing, sticky picnic, laid out by Mother Nature herself. They may be concocted into wine, cordial, jelly or pickle for human consumption.

Such beauty... such bounty - yet for me, on this particular late summers day, favourite of all for me was the Wayfaring tree. It was named by John Gerard - a sixteenth century botanist, who claimed it was: 'ever on the road'. A small tree of woodland edges, hedgerows and downland, they are certainly 'ever on the road' at Lower Pertwood - a wayfarers companion.

It's creamy, dreamy umbels of white flowers are a delight in Spring. Flowering from May through to late June, they usher a subtle lily scent. The flowers are followed by red berries - slowly ripening to liquorice black. Birds and small mammals love them, though, save to our eyes, they are poisonous to mankind - inducing vomiting.

Traditionally it's strong, supple branches were used to tie hay bales. Archeological finds also evidence that its ridged straight wood was also once used for arrows. The preserved body of a hunter, dating from c4,00 - 3,500 BC, was discovered in the Austrian Alps with a quiver full of Wayfaring tree arrows. Perhaps this is the perfect point for my final full stop! - I can ramble on... and on!



A beautiful, pollen dusted red tailed bee (*Bombus lapidarius*) nuzzling a Woolly thistle (*Cirsium eriophorum*)



Dewberry flower (*Rubus caesius*) - with fewer 'berry blobs' - or drupelets than Blackberries

Lower Pertwood Farm Corn Bunting Breeding Survey 2022



By R.H. Creighton

Method

A previous survey was carried out by Nick Adams in 2015, and to enable comparisons, his methods have been largely followed. This survey was based on The British Trust for Ornithology's Common Bird Census, which entails recording breeding evidence on a number of visits to the same area. Due to the size of the area to be surveyed, multiple visits have not been possible at Pertwood. The method employed here has been to record male Corn Buntings at their breeding site, as a singing male can be taken as good evidence of a breeding pair.

An initial visit was made on 20th April, when some males were singing, but many birds were still in feeding parties. This made it apparent that it was too early for the survey to be begin. Hence, it was started on 3rd June.

Ten three hour visits were made to the area of Lower Pertwood Farm, Brimlock Down Farm and Haycombe Down Farm in all, over 500 Ha. These areas being walked over to within 150ms of all suitable habitat, as at this range any singing bird could be heard. All Corn Buntings, and particularly singing males were marked with suitable symbols on an A3 map of the area being surveyed on that particular day, a further visit was also made on 25th June, to cover some previously under recorded areas.



The photograph above was taken from Peewits Gorse, facing South on 11th July, to illustrate the habitat used by breeding Corn Bunting on the farm. The fields in the middle distance containing 18 breeding pairs.

It is also of interest to note that the valley behind the copse on the left of the photograph was where the unusual, red and black, day flying moth the Narrow-bordered Five Spot Burnet was recorded. Another interesting record for the site was a Quail calling from the unimproved grassland in the foreground at the time of the taking of the photograph.

Results

The three farm areas that comprise Lower Pertwood are Brimlock Farm, (formerly Manor Farm), Haycombe and Lower Pertwood. The area covered in the 2015 survey did not include Haycombe as it was not a part of the estate at that time.

Within Lower Pertwood and Brimlock Farm, 125 Corn Bunting Territories were recorded. This is in comparison with the total of 134 territories in the previous survey of 2015. Haycombe contained 25 breeding pairs.

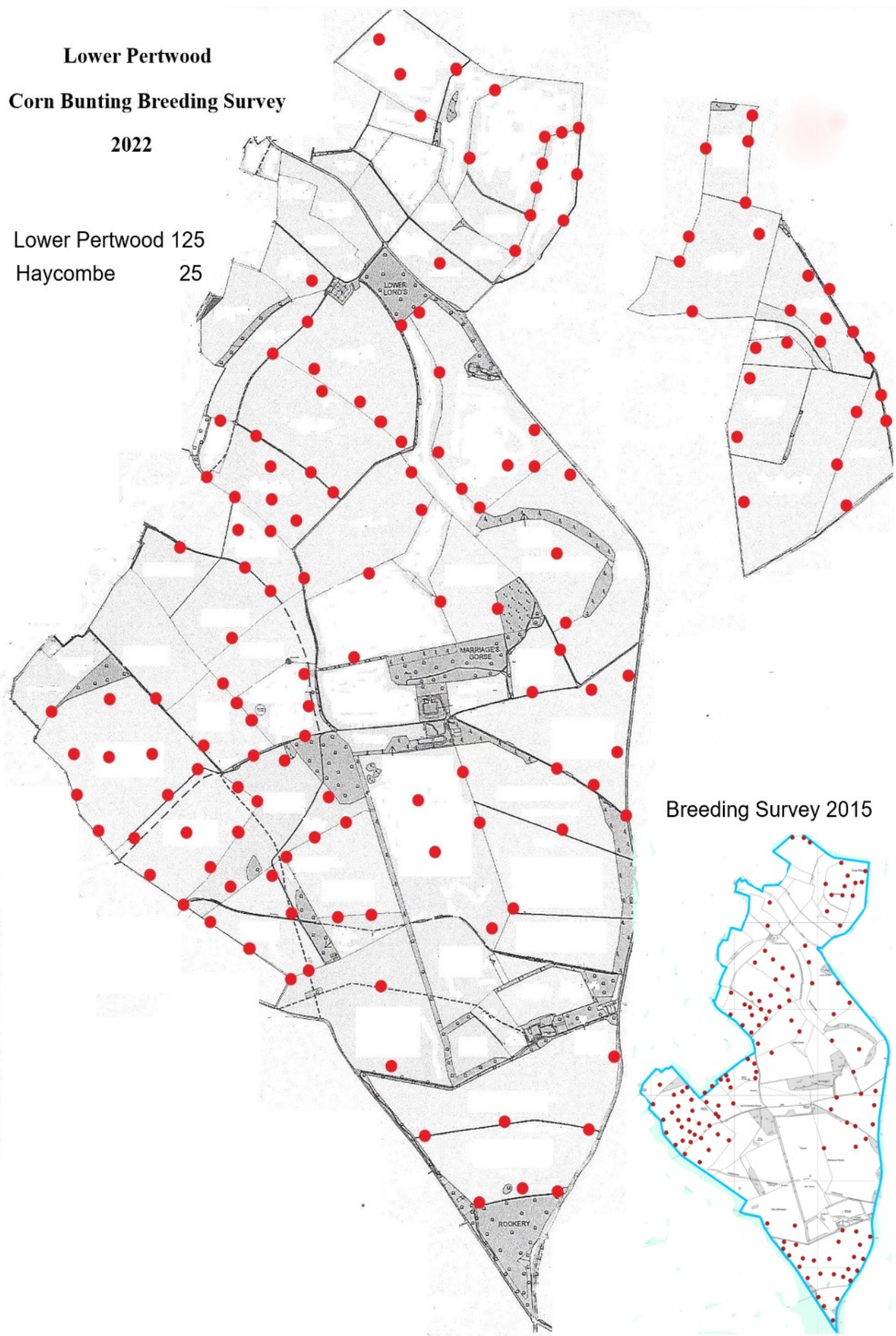
Whilst the number of breeding pairs is roughly similar, the most noticeable change is the distribution of territories throughout the farm. The 2015 survey showed that there were concentrations of territories in the areas of Wet Fields, North and South (to the south of the farm) and Petersfield (to the West of the farm). At the time of the present survey the number of territories in these areas were greatly reduced. The reason for the reduced number in Petersfield would probably be the current planting of field beans. This crop does appear to support pairs but not on the same scale as when planted with grain. The reason for the fall in numbers in Wet Fields is less clear, perhaps the east-west running beetle banks have become less diverse in the variety of vegetation compared with other areas.

I did however record a good scattering of breeding birds in the more central fields, particularly around Waterloo, this area being largely deserted in 2015, also the areas grazed by sheep and cattle in the central area, with no arable, were found to support a few pairs, where none had been recorded previously. This may be a result of the increase in the number of insects associated with the grazing stock. Interestingly, this central area also supported by far the largest number of Corn Buntings in the winter survey. Perhaps birds wintering here found the area suitable and stayed on to breed.

An indication of the timing of breeding at this site would be the recording of two birds carrying building material for a nest on 7th June, and a bird carrying food for nestlings on 17th June. This would indicate that most birds would be building nests, sitting on eggs and feeding young in June, and the peak for singing males would be in the first two weeks. A brief extra visit on 4th July recorded very few singing males, as most nests would at this time would have contained young.

**Lower Pertwood
Corn Bunting Breeding Survey
2022**

Lower Pertwood 125
Haycombe 25



Other records:



Stonechat

Three pairs were found to be holding territories on the farm. One at Haycombe, one at Badgers Bank, and one at Peewits Gorse.



Meadow Pipit

Three or four pairs breeding in the unimproved grassland areas around Two gates, Penhill and Big Down.



Quail

Calling to the South of Peewits Gorse on 11th July.



Painted Lady

One or two seen on most visits in June when this migrant butterfly was being recorded throughout the country in large numbers on its northward migration.



Narrow-bordered Five spot Burnet

Several noted on unimproved grassland on the southern side of Two Gates on 10th June.



Bird Ringing Studies at Lower Pertwood Farm - 2022



By Tim Ridgers-Steer and Richard Creighton

It's now mid-September, with the autumn migration fully underway. We completed our 7th ringing session of the season at Peewits Gorse with a total of 65 birds, with the majority of these being juveniles. As we all are aware the weather from mid-July was extremely hot, this extreme weather may have caused some unusual behaviour in birds inhabiting drier areas. Evidence of this could be the record of a Chiffchaff ringed as a recently fledged juvenile at Peewits Gorse on 8th July and recaptured in the Marsh Longbridge Deverill on 12th July. Whilst as a mature bird this species may migrate to North Africa, at this stage of its development it would have been very sedentary. Could this individual have moved the three kilometres down into the Wylde valley to find more benign conditions?

Taking this evidence into consideration we created a small drinking pool at Peewits Gorse, which was used by birds and animals in the following weeks.

To date, we have now ringed well over 2000 birds on Pertwood Farm, providing some interesting results. Ringing is such a valuable tool. As well as being able to confirm whether a certain migrant returns to the area in subsequent years. We are also able to confirm whether a bird is actually breeding. When we fit the unique numbered ring, we also examine the bird looking for signs of breeding. For a female, we look for a brood patch, a featherless area on the breast. For a male we look for a Cloacal Protuberance.

The following birds have been

confirmed breeding, along with good numbers of juveniles:

Stonechat, Willow warbler, Chiffchaff, Blackcap, Robin, Wren, Dunnock, Tree Creeper, Blue Tit, Great Tit, Coal Tit, Marsh Tit, Whitethroat, Yellow Hammer, Linnet, Bullfinch, Blackbird, Song Thrush.

Analysing this year's ringing records, we can provide some fascinating data. No less than 7

Chiffchaffs returned from last year, two of which were ringed as juveniles now confirmed to be breeding. The Chiffchaff is a very small warbler, which migrates to Southern Europe and North Africa.

We also re-trapped a Blackbird first ringed in 2016. Making this bird at least 6 years old.

Autumn ringing is always very exciting, with the chance of intercepting migrants that are



Willow Warbler



Robin

using Peewits Gorse as a stop off site for rest and refuelling.

Although early in the season, to date, this autumn, we have ringed the following species passing through:

Lesser White Throat, Tree Pipit, Redstart, Spotted Fly Catcher, Willow Warbler, Chiffchaff, Blackcap. Garden Warbler.

Further sightings of other interesting species during ringing sessions:

Winchat, Wheatear, Sand Martin, Meadow Pipit.

Quail heard calling in Two Gates valley.

We recently ringed a first year male Sparrow Hawk, which almost certainly would have been reared on Pertwood. The photograph clearly shows it being a first year male by the brown-fringed markings at the tips of feathers.

Richard and I started a habitat management programme 4 years ago, to improve its attractiveness to migrating and breeding birds, insects and plant life. It is very satisfying to see the efforts of our labour coming to fruition, with areas of Gorse recolonizing along with flowers and ferns.

Lastly, I would like to share a memorable sighting on Pertwood.

On the 27th August I was looking over towards Glebe Barn,

When I caught sight of a Marsh Harrier being mobbed by a Red Kite! If that wasn't exciting



Sparrow Hawk at Pertwood Organic Farm

enough, they were then joined by a female Goshawk, a truly wonderful site, if only I had my camera!

May we take this opportunity to thank Mr Mole and staff at Lower Pertwood who have made all of our work possible.



Report on Barn Owls and Kestrels on Lower Pertwood Farm

By Alison Rymell, Deverill Raptor and Owl Group

2022 has been a reasonably good year for barn owl breeding on Lower Pertwood Farm and an excellent year for kestrels. In the last newsletter we had a brief update on the season which has not ended yet for barn owls who in good years will have second broods.

To date we have had seven young barn owls from four boxes and five kestrels from one box. Both barn owls and kestrels have a similar preferred food source i.e. voles so it is interesting that the kestrel pair have had a large healthy brood of five while the barn owls have had very small, albeit healthy, broods, why would this be? It is likely to be due to weather. Kestrels hunt in the daytime and have a preen gland which can help in the waterproofing of their feathers whereas barn owls do not and they cannot hunt successfully in wet weather. There was slightly higher rainfall resulting from

showery weather especially at night in May and June which will have impacted on the owls.

Now for a look in more detail at two sites in particular, one highlighting barn owls and the other kestrels.

Barn owls have raised young every year since 2009, except 2016, at a location on Summerslade Down. In 2013, a year which was really disastrous for breeding owls, this site produced the only successful brood from all the boxes which are regularly checked within the wider Deverill Valley. The following year, 2014, a pair at this spot had two broods, raising a total of eleven owlets, four in the first brood and seven in the second. The key to success is availability of a dry safe nest site, a good food source and the right weather for hunting. While nothing can be done about the weather, farms like Lower Pertwood who manage

their land with wildlife in mind can make a huge difference by allowing the erection of nest boxes and providing rough grassland habitat where voles can re-produce. Overall more than 35 owlets have been raised at this site since 2009.

In December 2013 we began to put up boxes for kestrels, a bird of prey of medium conservation concern. Our second more in-depth look is at a kestrel box on the farm, facing out from a woodland fringe close to Longbridge Deverill.

During the first season of 2014 a squirrel took up residence; both squirrels and jackdaws love our boxes! However in 2016 the kestrels usurped the squirrels and raised four young and in 2017, five young. In 2018 they began nesting only to be pushed out by the squirrels so on 14th April we put up a new box in an adjacent barn and by 15th May, the female kestrel was sitting on five eggs in the new box. She, ably provisioned by her male partner, raised this brood of five, all of whom successfully fledged. The box was successful both in 2019 and 2020 but in 2021 there was a glitch. Gerwyn, a knowledgeable and observant naturalist/stockman on the farm noticed the male was not bringing much food to the sitting female and by the time she had laid four eggs and hatched four young, he had disappeared completely. Despite this, the diligent mother managed to raise two young to fledging stage, thus hunting for food for herself and the young while keeping predators at bay. What an achievement! By 2022, there was again a pair on site; I like to think that the female had



Brood of seven owlets; 5 males and 2 females. This is the largest brood which the Deverill Raptor and Owl Group has ever monitored in seventeen years of checking.

found a new mate but cannot be sure it was the same female. Together this pair raised and fledged five chicks! So since 2015 this box with its hard working pairs has produced 33 young kestrels - a record among the Deverill Raptor and Owl group kestrel boxes of which we have seventeen.

And now for a quick observation on food. Those who have read anything which I have written about barn owls and kestrels will know that voles are their prey of choice so it was somewhat of a surprise when we found

two decaying corn bunting youngsters in a box with thriving barn owl chicks. Barn owls have exceptionally good hearing and we can only imagine that the adult was hunting low to the ground over an arable crop [where corn buntings nest on the ground], heard the young corn buntings and pounced. The fact that the two corn buntings were not eaten suggests that the adult owls went on to find prey items more to the owlets liking. Barn owls will eat birds but it is not their preferred food. Lower Pertwood Farm supports a nationally important number

of corn buntings but even so, I would prefer our barn owls not to predate this farmland passerine of high conservation concern! Especially as the young owlets chose not to eat them and left them to rot! But as we know from Tennyson "nature, red in tooth and claw" so I'll forgive them!

A Magical Evening



A magical evening!



A 1910 surviving World War One Veteran Peerless truck

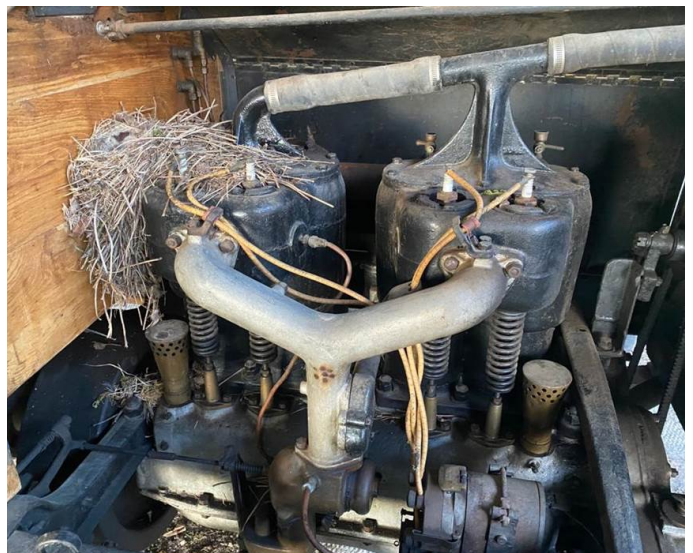


Photographs of Peerless trucks that landed in France usually show them with slightly buckled rear mudguards like this one. This was caused when cables were attached to the wheels when they were unloaded by crane from ships. The rear mudguards appear to have been more vulnerable to damage from the cables than the front ones, and they would get pulled out of shape until they were crushed against the body as the truck was lifted. The lettering on the nameplate of these three Peerless trucks has been picked out in white paint, not a common practice but probably a whim of the commanding officer. To the left of the dog can be seen the rolled-up canvas door. The canvas is rolled around a thin metal bar with a spring and hook on the top, which clips over a stud on the side of the body when the door is in use.

Like this!



An engine compartment



With a difference?



A clutch of newly hatched

112-years later life springs eternal. Nature will prevail despite our 'civilisation'.

Farm and Nature Walk and Talk

By Climate Friendly Bradford on Avon

Visit report

A group from Climate Friendly Bradford on Avon visited the farm recently and produced a visit report which they have kindly agreed we can feature in this newsletter. Please read below.



Have you ever heard the call of Corn Buntings? It sounds like jangling keys and was a bird call I heard in my youth in rural Oxfordshire. But it is rarely heard any more in the English countryside. So, imagine our joy at hearing many calling to us on our visit to Pertwood Organic Farm near Longbridge Deverill. They have 500 corn buntings over-wintering and this year 135 breeding pairs! The farm is rich in bird life – Barn and Tawny Owls, Yellow Hammer, Linnet, Skylarks, Stonechat, Tree Pipits and many more. And we also saw deer and two hares, as well as several species of butterfly including the stunning Marbled White and of course there were many wild flowers too.

We walked over the chalkland to see these delights and then were given an hour long talk in one of the 17th Century restored barns, plus a question and answer session with the farmers.

We learnt about the organic farming of oats, rye and barley. The rotation consists of 2 years of crop growing, followed by 3 years

when rye grass, red clover and sainfoin are grown to enrich the soils. 10 tons of manure is needed per acre to ensure soil structure and fertility for the crops on the thin chalk soil. Presently, there are 1,000 sheep and 100 cattle on the farm. However, much more organic manure still needs to be brought in from elsewhere (about 5,000 tonnes each year according to the website). On farm stocking levels are to be increased to make

more of a closed loop in terms of maintaining soil fertility.

Time on the farm is spent looking and assessing the crops rather than on spraying regimes; or on how to use companion planting to increase crop yields. Questions included robotics in farming, genetic engineering, water management, mineral content in manure and herbal leys.



We finished with an opportunity to purchase organic rolled oats and muesli from the farm.

There are several footpaths and bridleways over the farm, so if you have the opportunity, do go and have a look, treating yourself to the wildlife on offer and seeing how farms can be farmed organically and in harmony with our flora

and fauna. The oats and muesli are available from the farm office, which is signposted off the A350.

Lower Pertwood Farm, Hindon, Wiltshire SP3 6TA
www.pertwood.co.uk

Thanks to Eunice Parker for the report and those who sent in their photographs.





Visit to Pertwood Organic Farm

By Clive Patten and Mike Fuller

We were welcomed by Chief Security Officer, Dave Scales and given an instructive Land-Rover tour of the farm in bright but quite breezy conditions. The primary objective was to inspect the butterfly banks but during the tour it was good to see large swaths of wildflower areas and uncut grass. Being late in this very dry, hot season, most flowers had gone to seed but it was not difficult to imagine how attractive they would have looked a few weeks earlier, and no doubt attracting a lot of insects. We did notice some Large and Small White butterflies and had a fleeting glimpse of a Clouded Yellow – an immigrant from the continent with several recorded this year.

The butterfly banks were becoming rather overgrown with nettles, docks and invasive grasses but some large patches of Kidney Vetch (the sole larval foodplant of the Small Blue butterfly) were evident, plus some Small Scabious and some of the finer-leaved grasses favoured by some species. The bank's potential for supporting some of the scarcer butterflies, in particular the various blues, was apparent, providing the above-mentioned invasive species could be removed, creating more bare chalk areas for the butterfly's larval foodplants. Dave readily agreed that this could be done with machinery by scalping the area and most importantly, also removing the cut material. Following this, a return visit next year in the late spring should help to assess what further improvements could be made. Possibly additional planting of specific foodplants if necessary. The much more sheltered and unploughed area where the cattle were grazing known as Pertwood



Small Blue



Chalkhill Blue

Down on the OS map and with ancient 'field systems', would also be well worth visiting as Brown Argus and Chalkhill Blue butterflies have been recorded there in the recent past.

A single fresh male Meadow Brown was seen in the sheltered hollow of the smaller chalk bank. The surrounding uncut grassy areas no doubt support most of the commoner species including



Marbled White



Meadow Brown

Large and Small Skippers, Marbled White, Gatekeeper, Meadow Brown and Ringlet. Small Heath may also be present. The banks are at the highest point on the farm so tend to be more exposed than other areas and consequently more breezier.

Data gathered by Butterfly Conservation shows that butterflies are already being strongly affected by climate change. Since 1976, 76% of butterflies have declined in abundance or distribution or both. In the last 15 years the date of the first emergence of various types

of butterflies has set new records with many butterflies emerging earlier. The Orange Tip butterfly is now spotted up to a month earlier than it was 30 years ago. Some butterfly species have benefitted and expanded their ranges with over one-quarter of UK species colonising new sites further north. The Comma, once confined to the South-west, is now breeding in Scotland, spreading its range northwards at a rate of about 10km a year. Migrant species such as the Painted Lady may become more common, especially if they become residents. However, not all butterflies can keep pace with the

speed of change. Our countryside is becoming increasingly fragmented, with the best wildlife sites often occurring in a 'sea' of unsuitable habitat, and so a large farm like Pertwood is invaluable to help to avoid small, isolated populations of butterflies which are more vulnerable to extinction.

Clive Patten

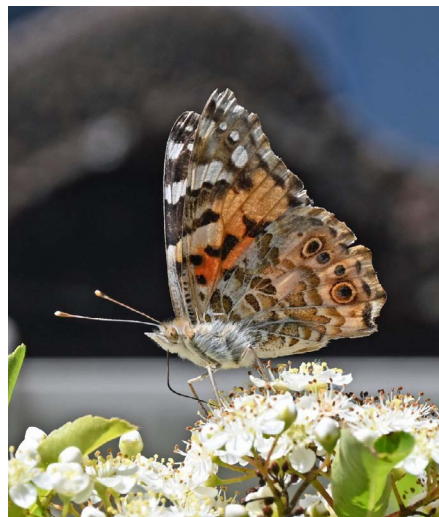
Chair of BC, Wiltshire Branch

Mike Fuller

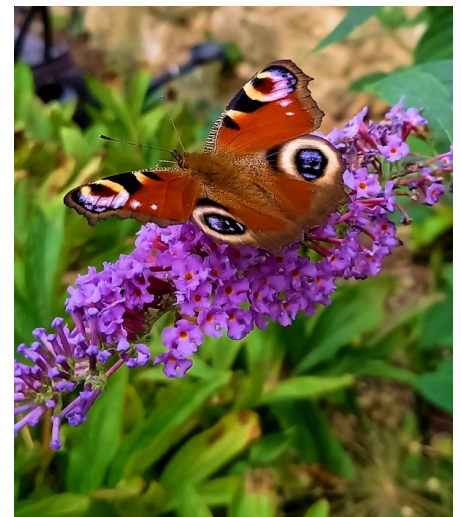
Wiltshire Butterfly Recorder



Orange Tip



Painted Lady



Peacock Butterfly

Trees at Pertwood



In a future edition of our newsletter, we will be publishing an article by a specialist on regenerative forestry.

Lower Pertwood Farm is blessed with many different woodlands, large and small. They contain a great diversity of trees, most of which are indigenous. However, for them to maintain their vibrancy they need to be maintained. Older forestry methods are being questioned and new regenerative programmes are being implemented which we will describe.

One interesting issue that we have an open mind on is the impact of ivy. Many of our big trees have been seriously compromised by the amount of ivy that they are having to carry

and in the winds of February this year many of them came down, probably because they were top heavy as a result of the above. We have been following a programme of liberating them from the huge amount of growth that can develop into trees, large and small. Our picture (on the left) shows an Ash tree which is almost certainly more than 100 years old, which was so strangled by ivy that it was difficult to actually see the trees natural leaves and branches. By cleaning the base of the tree, it is now flourishing again but one can see clearly from the photograph the degree to which the dead ivy still clings to the tree. This is a good thing because it has now created a habitat for many different creatures. To be fair, that habitat probably existed before the ivy was killed off but we took the view that the survivor of the

tree came first. There is still an abundance of ivy on the farm on dead trees and it often carpets the forest floor in many places.

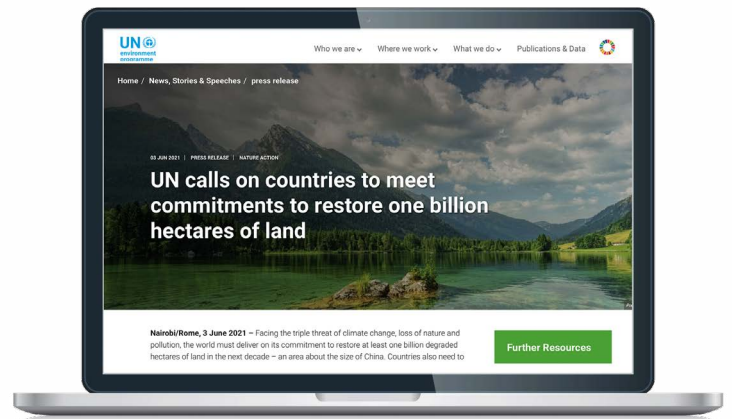
We certainly invite comment on the subject.



A lone Maple tree stands guard in the middle of the farmyard



Ash tree



We fully support the United Nation's call to arms with regard to rehabilitating one billion hectares of land.

As farmers we have major responsibility to farm in a sustainable way so that our land is not only used for agricultural purposes but is fully regenerative.

[Click here for more information](#)

Grey partridges at Lower Pertwood Farm

By Tim Hewes

Grey partridges used to be a common sight throughout England's countryside. Over the last 30 years greys have declined heavily in most areas of the countryside. The decline was linked with changes in farming practices/ habitat loss and predation.

Pertwood used to have a healthy population of greys living on the farm years ago but unfortunately most of the coveys declined leading to very few wild greys observed over recent years. This trend had been documented in most parts of the countryside.

Lower Pertwood Farm has an environment which would be very beneficial for grey partridges. The owners of the farm are very conservation minded and proactive to helping wildlife thrive.

Four years ago, a release programme was set-up at Pertwood. Several small pens were



Grey partridges at Lower Pertwood Farm

set up and coveys of up to 14 birds were released over a period of time, and supplementary feeding was introduced and monitoring undertaken. This has continued each year and some coveys have been seen in undisturbed areas of the farm. The coveys will pair off in late winter, early spring and hopefully breed.

Released coveys will be hatched and brooded by bantams and then put in small pens in safe areas on the farm. Barren pairs of grey partridge which failed to breed are very maternal and often hang around pens with young partridges in. If barren pairs are

seen around release site pens, the young would be fostered onto the barren pair of grey partridge, any barren pairs will be very aware of predators and look after any chicks.

Unfortunately, the main threat to recovery is the impact of predators and disturbance during the breeding season and when chicks are young, walkers with dogs off leads can have a big impact on ground nesting birds, it is essential that all dogs are under control when entering the farm.

It is hoped the grey partridges will be successful at Lower Pertwood Farm.

Regenerative Forestry - Why do we need it and what is it?



By Clive Thomas, Senior Adviser, Regenerative Forestry, Soil Association

Before I address these two big questions, it is perhaps important to address the question: Why the Soil Association? Many readers and farmers will be aware of our role as an organic standard setter, and maybe some of you are clients of our organic certification services. And maybe others recognise our organic brand in your shopping baskets.

But as both a charity and certification body, we also work with farmers, foresters, companies and citizens to ensure forests around the world are protected. We helped set up the Forest Stewardship Council® (FSC®) in 1993. Since then, we've certified over 27 million hectares of sustainable forest in over 35 countries with the FSC® and the Programme for the Endorsement of Forest Certification (PEFC). So as we state in our [Regenerative Forestry Report](#) [Regenerative Forestry Report \(soilassociation.org\)](#), trees and forests are at the heart of our work to transform the way we eat, farm and care for our natural world.

The case for regenerative forestry

UK forestry currently faces many challenges:

- Woodland cover in the UK is very low at 13% compared to the European average of close to 40%
- Despite citizen's almost universal love of trees, the public perception of forestry as an industry is much less positive.
- Our woodlands and forests are in poor ecological condition, with only 7% of native woodland

and 1% of planted forest classified as in good ecological condition

- We have a very mixed approach to the management of our woodlands and forests. Almost half of our woodland area is not actively managed, typically the small woodlands on farms e.g. 41% of woodland (mostly broadleaved) is unmanaged in England. But our commercial woodlands are managed very intensively, primarily by clear-felling meaning all the tree are harvested at once, every 40-50 years and we start again by replanting with young trees
- More than 80% of our timber is imported and with the notable exception of Scotland in recent years, government tree planting targets are consistently not being met, with the shortfall very significant in England and Wales

And once we add in the threats to our trees and woodlands from climate change, pests and disease, deer and grey squirrels the challenges add up further.

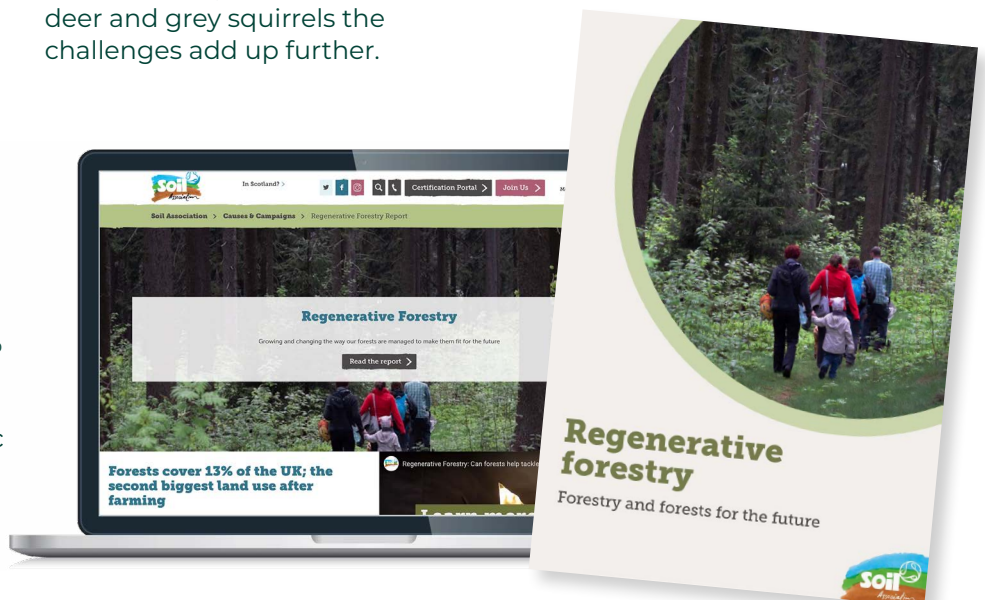
So we need to try something different, which in our view is a more regenerative approach to forestry in the UK.

Our vision for regenerative forestry

Our thoughts operate at both a land use level, but can also be applied to the management of any specific forest.

Our first goal, is that regenerative forestry operates as a whole system, delivering benefits for climate, nature and people, both within the forest and from the products and wider benefits outside the forest.

Our second goal is that regenerative forestry is integrated into our wider farmed landscape, through mainstream adoption in farming systems. And that we innovate to ensure that small scale forestry, including at a farm level, can deliver some of our timber needs



Our third goal is that regenerative forestry is resilient and adaptive and allows the forest to take care of the forest itself as an ecosystem, so that benefits for climate, nature and people can be provided for the long-term. The way to achieve this resilience is through diversity – species and age class, as well as low impact practices such as continuous cover forestry where instead of clear-felling all the trees from a site, the canopy is maintained and only specific trees are harvested on a continuous cycle.

Our fourth goal is that regenerative forestry adopts a set of improved forest management practices that deliver combined benefits across the whole forest. So instead of zoning some forests for people and other forests for nature and usually a much larger forests for timber growing, we should manage the whole forest for climate, nature and people through improved practices.

And finally, regenerative forestry should support high levels of true engagement by people to deal with some of the public perception issues, as well as delivering strong livelihoods. And to work in practice, regenerative forestry is rewarded for all the products and services it delivers

for climate, nature and people, not just through timber values.

At a forest level we propose the following checks to evaluate whether a forest is being managed using regenerative practices.

- Is this stand or forest in a better condition than before?
- Is it locking up carbon in soils, trees and timber?
- Is it home to more nature?
- Is it supporting local people and livelihoods?
- Is it contributing to a diverse and ecologically functional landscape?
- Is it more resilient?
- Can it continue to do all this for the foreseeable future?

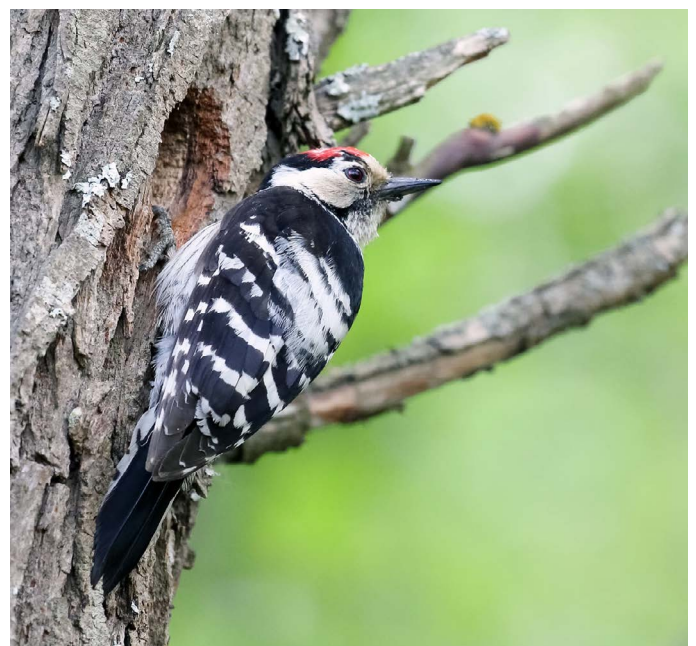
This checklist works as a comprehensive set of checks and not as a menu to select from as would be the case under a zoned approach to delivery of objectives.

Finally, in the report, we set out some thoughts on how we might transition to a regenerative forestry approach. The crucial role of forest owners, forest managers

and forest industries is recognised in this transition but we also call on governments, policy makers, and civil society organisations to play their role.

We think that we are at a significant moment to broaden the case for forestry in the UK through this regenerative approach. And as the Chief Executive of the Soil Association, Helen Browning, concludes in the foreword to the report, we are optimistic about the future of forests and forestry, and a transition to a more regenerative model. There is government and citizen support for tree planting. Society is increasingly valuing the health and wellbeing benefits of woods and trees, and the benefits of timber as a sustainable material. This should lead to an increased UK forest resource, which, combined with the ingenuity of the professionals operating within the sector, means that a transition to more regenerative forestry is not only possible, but also hugely exciting.

[The main report and evidence annex are available on the Soil Association website Regenerative Forestry Report \(soilassociation.org\)](#)



Lower Pertwood Farm Organic Porridge Oats & Muesli



Please contact **Louise Norton (T: 01747 820499, E: louise.norton@pertwood.co.uk)** if you are interested in trying our breakfast cereals that originate from a farm with an organic footprint of more than 30-years then we would love to add you as a customer.

[Click here for our Farm Store](#)



Please feel free to contact us.

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