

NEWSLETTER

Wildlife Matters



SUMMER 2023

Editorial

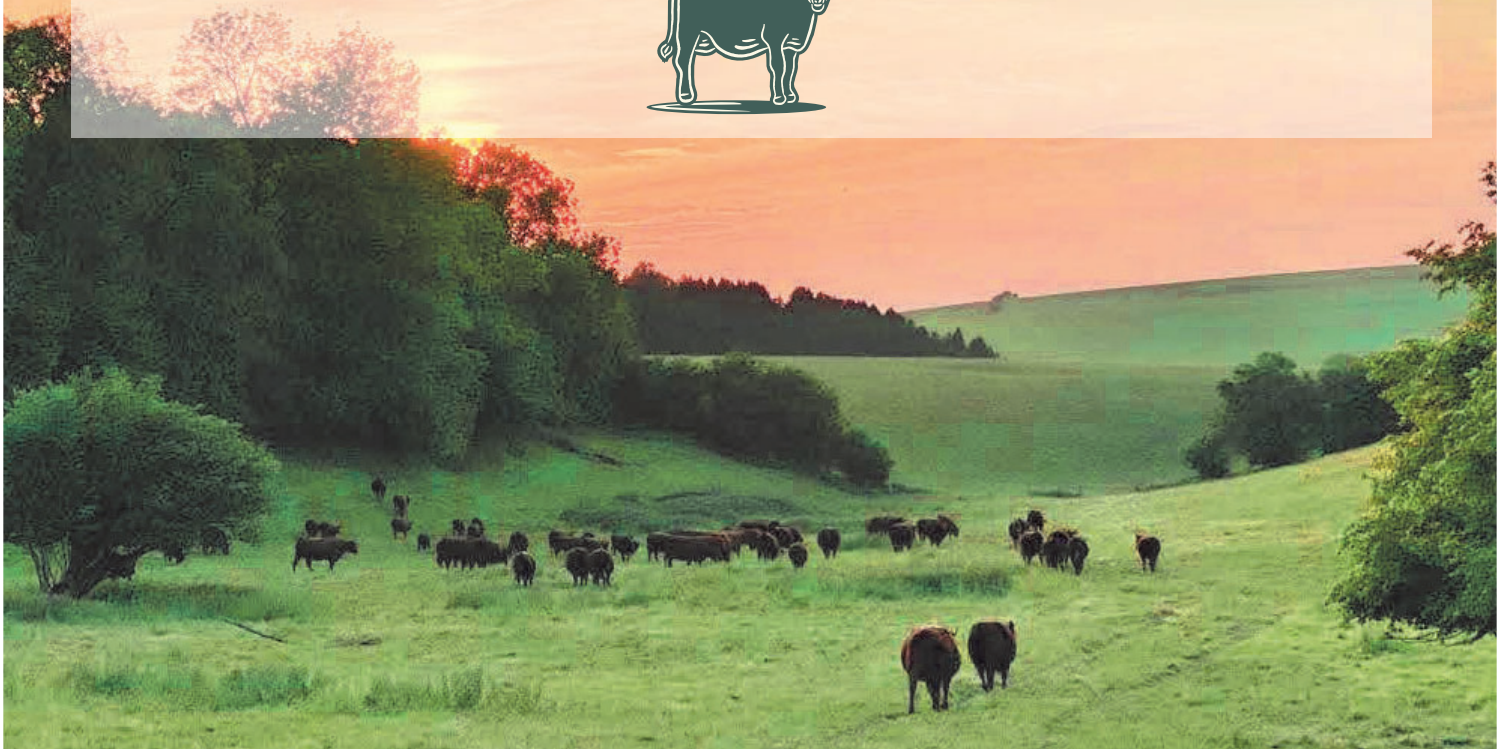
It has been a while since we published the last edition of Wildlife Matters. That is not because of a sparsity of news; it is because we have too much to tell people and we have to try and work out what is the most relevant in terms of our diversified habitat improvement and wildlife protection programme.

Lower Pertwood Farm has large areas of classic ancient

chalk downlands which by their very nature are pretty much free of what we call intrusive agricultural activity. We do graze sheep and cattle on them but in relatively small numbers so they are not under pressure. Both these animal types bring specific benefits to downlands because of the way they graze and what they prefer.

We are once again indebted to our very highly qualified and

competent volunteers who fall into specialised interest groups. Our entire newsletter is made up of articles from people who really know what they are doing and who have had great continuity in terms of their ability to monitor their own speciality at Lower Pertwood Farm. This adds tremendous integrity to their observations because none of them are superficial in any way.





Lower Pertwood Farm and Public Rights of Way

Lower Pertwood Farm has over 8 miles of public rights of way that cross our beautiful farmland, including long stretches of footpaths for those on foot and bridleways for cyclists and those on foot or horseback.

We welcome people using these ways responsibly. Those who do enjoy spectacular views of the stunning chalk downland in the Cranborne Chase Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty and observe the wide range of wildlife and wildflowers that we support on the farm.

Those of us who work on Lower Pertwood Farm are fortunate to meet many wonderful people crossing the farm on rights of way. What is important is they act as our eyes and our ears on the farm, reporting any problems, letting us know of animals in trouble or telling us of people engaging in illegal activity such as hare-coursing.

We are currently planning to open a series of new and

additional paths and bridleways for people to use – whether permissive footpaths or permissive bridleways. This will enable us to increase the number of routes that can be used and also to improve access to the right-to-roam land on our farm. We are installing new gates and stiles where they are needed to allow easy access.

These new routes will also increase the opportunities for long circular walks and rides on either side of the farm where there are many more footpaths and bridleways to enjoy. What is not generally understood is the fact that these clearly marked footpaths which criss-cross the British countryside must be kept open by law. Unfortunately, not all our neighbours comply with that, which means that people who wish to go on long walks are often frustrated because they can find a footpath on the map which does not exist in real terms. It is Wiltshire Council's responsibility to enforce the law and to keep these paths open but they appear to be reluctant to do that.

We will post details of new permissive routes – footpaths and bridleways – on our website when they are ready for use. We are working with various organisations to prepare them, including the Open Spaces Society, the British Horse Society and the Ramblers Association.

We already support many organised groups - schools, clubs and wildlife groups - to visit the farm and to walk, cycle or ride.

In the spring of 2024, we are planning to provide a Ride Out day for British Horse Society members, as well as other local riders.

If you would like to arrange a group visit to the farm, please contact us by email at **E: louise.norton@pertwood.co.uk** or phone us on **T: 01747 820499**. We really look forward to seeing you on the farm!



Photography by: Tyrone Power

Visit to Pertwood Organic Farm by Butterfly Conservation group

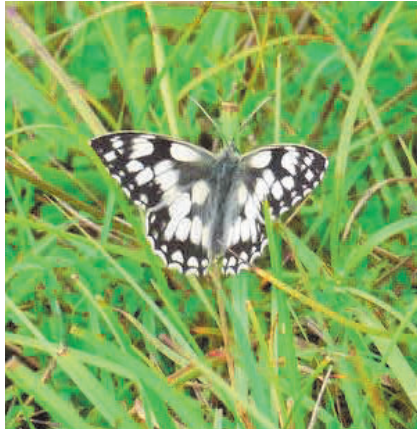
**Article and photography by:
Clive Patten - Chair of BC, Wiltshire Branch
Mike Fuller - Wiltshire Butterfly Recorder**

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 during our visit last year. 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 last 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 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 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



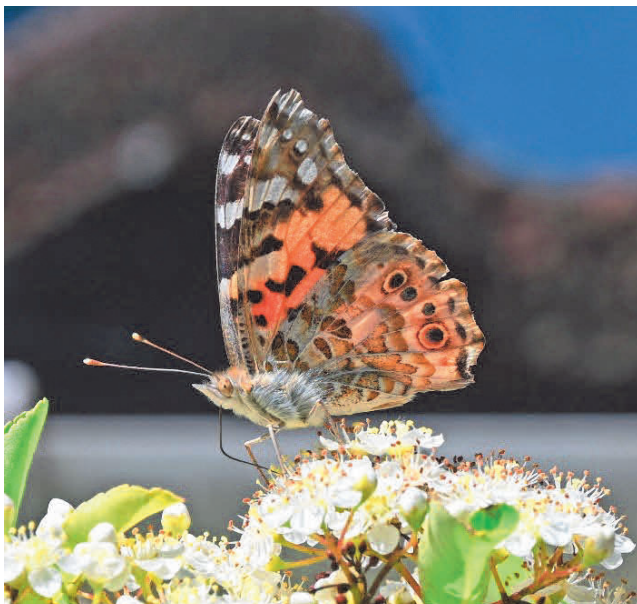


Large and Small Skippers, Marbled White, Gatekeeper, Meadow Brown and Ringlet. Small Heath may also be present. The banks are at the highest point on the farm so tend to be more exposed than other areas and consequently more breezy.

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.





Report on Barn Owls and Kestrels on Lower Pertwood Farm

Article and photography 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, 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



Two young owls from Falconers Barn

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 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!



Two young owls from Field Barn



Two barn owlets ringed at Haycombe



Barn owls and kestrels ringed on Lower Pertwood Farm

Name of site	Barn owl chicks ringed	Kestrel chicks ringed	Comment
Glebe Barn	Since 2009 - 33		BO have bred every year although some years broods have failed owing to weather.
Piggeries	Since 2018 - 4		Two other breeding attempts usurped by jackdaws.
Pumphouse field boundary	Since 2017 - 2		This is one of a pair of boxes other box adjacent to LP farmland has had 5 ringed
Field Barn		Since 2015 35 kestrels ringed	Kestrels have used this box every year since 2015
Field Barn	2022 - 2		First year BO have used this box, previously usurped by jackdaws
Mole Barn	Between 2014 - 2017 - 9		2018 onwards jackdaws have used bod
Wessex Water box	2019 - 3		Brood of 5 previously predated. Box often taken over by jackdaws
Brimlock [Robin's barn]	Box erected 2015 - 17		BO have bred every year since box went up except one when a brood failed owing to weather.
TOTAL	70 barn owlets ringed	35 kestrel chicks ringed	





Upper Deverills Wildlife and Conservation Group

Article and photography by: Peter Marsh

Bird Survey Report 2022

Background

1. At the start of this year plans were developed to undertake bird surveys of selective species on farmland in the Upper Deverills. A briefing paper and methodology was produced in March 2022 and widely circulated, including external review by Wiltshire Wildlife Trust and the AONB Farm Conservation Advisor.
2. The consequences of intensive farming in general, and the effect on biodiversity and the natural environment, are well documented. It is not clear to what degree these apply within the Upper Deverill's countryside and how farmland birds may be affected. Surveys will assist in establishing the presence, or absence of selected species.
3. A new process of Environmental Land Management Schemes (ELMS) is being rolled out by DEFRA as a means to encourage biodiversity and regeneration. ELMS will replace the EU system of farm subsidies. Bird surveys could advise and support the ELMS process and help reverse the rapid and significant decline in farmland birds.



Target Species

4. It was agreed to target farmland birds that are known to exist in the area and are susceptible to decline. Species selected are Yellowhammer, Skylark and Corn Bunting. These species are red listed as birds of high conservation concern in BOCC5 [Birds of Conservation Concern 5 issued in December 2021].

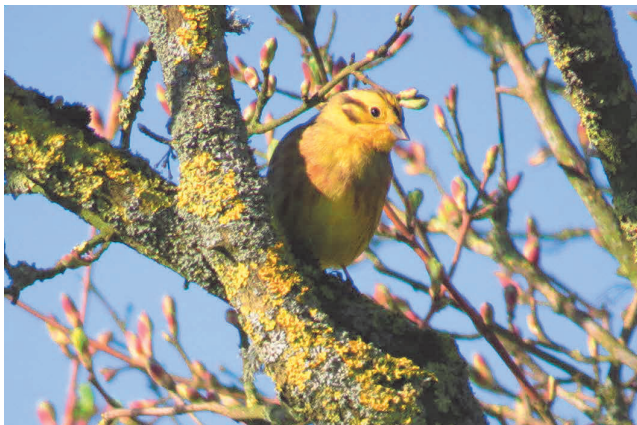


Surveys

5. Surveys were undertaken during the period between mid-April to the end of June. Each survey route (transect) was 1km in length and was selected as being suitable habitat for one or more of the target species. Surveys were conducted in a consistent manner at roughly 3-week intervals to ensure each transect was surveyed 3 times over the period when sightings of birds and breeding evidence would be most obvious.
6. To avoid conflict with landowners' interests or farming activities, all the transects were along public rights of way (unless permission was given for more open access on sections of a route).
7. Surveys will be repeated annually over at least a 5-year time frame to enable increases or any decline in numbers of the target species to be monitored. Potentially, changes could be linked to ELMS where appropriately adopted, or be explained by a lack of restoration projects, or other factors.

Analysis of 2022 Results

8. Following research and consultation it was concluded that BirdTrack would be the most appropriate IT system to record the selected farmland species. This online portal operates under BTO control, feeding into local and national records. Results were uploaded to BirdTrack following each of the 36 surveys undertaken along 12 transects. Tabulated results are attached. (BTO = British Trust for Ornithology)
9. The results were recorded and presented to enable easy comparison of densities of target species across variable areas of countryside on different farms, where there may be variations in habitat, planting/land use, and where some farming practices may be different.
10. Not surprisingly there are some notable differences between bird numbers identified on some routes compared to others. Observations from habitat surveys, from crop patterns and land use may help to explain some of these differences where they are significant.
11. In Brixton Deverill, there is significant difference in numbers of target species on Lower Pertwood Farm (particular Yellowhammer and Corn Bunting) compared to numbers on the opposite side of the valley on Woodcombe Farm, where no Corn Buntings were recorded, although Yellowhammer numbers were more typical.
12. In Monkton Deverill, no Corn Buntings were recorded on MD2 and no Yellowhammers on MD4, yet numbers of other birds on all the transects were observed in good numbers. The records of Yellowhammer and Skylark were surprisingly high on Keysley Farm.
13. In Kingston Deverill, Manor Farm had very high Skylark numbers, except on transect KD4, with the presence of Yellowhammer and Corn Bunting recorded on all other routes.



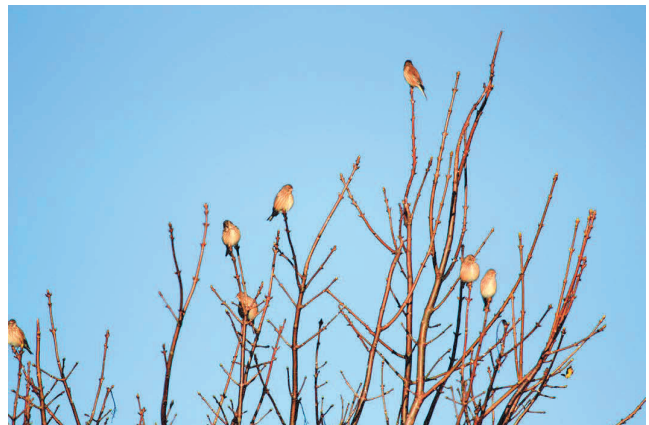
14. Further detailed analysis by those who undertook the surveys may lead to identifying some factors that could account for some significant differences and explain very high or very low numbers.

Conclusions

15. These initial surveys effectively provide a baseline. With further annual surveys conducted in a consistent manner, results will be able to indicate improvement or decline and relate those changes to circumstances at the time where these might be appropriate.
16. Results will be published on the Group website.

Future Surveys and Activities

17. Liaison with landowners/farmers about the 2022 results will hopefully provide feedback and inform future surveys. Similarly, it is intended to seek wider review and input from Group members and from external bodies such as the AONB management team and incorporate comments into further work.
18. Surveys along the same transects will start again in April 2023. A reappraisal of habitats will occur at the same time, particularly noting planting schemes and land use.



Transect/ Location	Yellowhammer				Corn Bunting				Skylark				Totals	Comment
	1	2	3	Total	1	2	3	Total	1	2	3	Total		
Visit	1	2	3	Total	1	2	3	Total	1	2	3	Total		
BD1 - Woodcombe Farm, Brixton Deverill	3	3	1	7	0	0	0	0	0	2	0	2		
BD2 - Woodcombe Farm, Brixton Deverill	2	2	1	5	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1		
													15	Low presence of arable nesting farmland birds
BD3 - Lwr Pertwood Farm, Brixton Deverill	7	1	6	14	4	2	2	8	1	1	4	6		
BD4 - Lwr Pertwood Farm, Brixton Deverill	4	1	2	7	10	5	5	20	3	0	3	6		
													62	High concentration of YH and CB
MD1 - Manor Farm, Monkton Deverill	13	6	4	23	4	2	4	10	7	2	0	9		
MD2 - Manor Farm, Kingston Deverill	4	2	4	10	0	0	0	0	4	1	0	5		
													57	Strong presence of Yellowhammer
MD3 - Keysley Farm, Monkton Deverill	2	2	1	5	5	2	2	9	6	4	1	11		
MD4 - Keysley Farm, Monkton Deverill	0	0	0	0	4	8	3	15	12	5	2	19		
													59	Very high for arable nesters, low for YH
KD1 - Manor Farm, Kingston Deverill	2	2	1	5	0	0	1	1	4	5	3	12		
KD2 - Manor Farm, Kingston Deverill	1	2	2	5	0	0	6	6	1	1	2	4		
													33	Good Skylark presence
KD3 - Manor Farm, Kingston Deverill	0	1	0	1	0	2	1	3	6	6	8	20		
KD4 - Manor Farm, Kingston Deverill	4	1	0	5	0	1	0	1	0	0	0	0		
													30	Very high but variable Skylark numbers

Pertwood Spring Garden The Gardeners Perspective



Article and photography by: Dan Marsh

At the time of writing this spring is coming and there there is a whole range of new colours and jobs to do around the gardens. The first signs we were approaching the longer days was the carpet of Snowdrops and then Crocuses coming up on the lawns. The vibrant colours hit you first and then the noise - the noise of the local Bee population busy gathering pollen to take back to their hives. The Crocuses then closely followed by the Daffodils.

When getting the garden ready for Spring, there is no right or wrong way, so make it fun, ideally with a team effort, and always seek help if you are unsure as there is always someone else who knows more than you. There are also many readily available gardening books, and plenty of articles on the internet (try Google). Lastly, always tidy up after yourself!



Figure 1: Snowdrops



Figure 2: Crocuses

You will always need a wide range of tools to help you get those tasks done so here is a list of essential items:

- Secateurs/Lopper/Saw
- Trowel & Weeder (favourite)
- Trug or two (one for good waste, one for contraband)
- Good gloves – “Gold Leaf” gauntlets/Tough Touch Gloves - Ladies
- Waterproof trousers
- Compost area/bin





Figure 3: Daffodils along the Scenic Drive

Here are some of the tasks to make the most of your garden:

Slug protection NOW – wool, eggshells, coffee grounds, organic pellets, beer traps... slug favourites: lupins, delphiniums, dahlias, hostas, beans.

Weeds steal food and water just when young plants need them most. It is easiest to get rid of weeds when they are small. Hoe off.

Any perennial weeds (ground elder, bindweed, couch grass) or tap root weeds (dandelion, docks) or persistents like creeping buttercup need digging out properly. If on a path, you could use Round Up. If working with a delicate space, use Round Up gel and perennial **weeds should**

not be added to the compost heap. They can easily live quietly in the compost bin and when the compost is added to your borders they can spring up creating you more work in having to hoe them out again. Now is also a good time to turn your composters. Here at Pertwood we have 3 compost bays in a row. We empty the right hand bay in the spring of the ready to go compost. Sieve your compost bay that is ready to get rid of larger sticks etc that have not broken down over the last year or so. Once sieved, turn the other two bays of compost over into the next available bay. This way we can produce good quality compost in the space of one year.



Figure 4: Pertwood compost bays, Bay 1 in the foreground ready to be turned into Bay 2, Bay 3 has already been sieved and put on the borders.



Figure 5: Bay 1 now emptied and turned over into Bay 2



Figure 6: Compost, sieved from Bay 3 and already topping up the raised borders, ready for growing Vegetables!

Mulch with well-rotted manure, compost or chippings around hedges and plants (sources: CPA horticulture, Mole Valley). Organic matter = happy border.

- suppress seeds that have not yet germinated
- traps winter moisture before temperatures rise
- As with fruit trees and hedges, mulch around any ornamental trees for the first three years of their life to suppress any weeds and to keep vital water in the soil so that the tree roots never dry out. Well rotted compost, spent mushroom compost, leaf mould or a mulch mat will all do the job.

Prune Buddleja davidii in the garden are excellent for the butterflies and March is the ideal time to prune them. Cut out old branches at ground level to allow new growth to come through, otherwise deadhead.

- **Cornus/dogwoods need coppicing:** March is the time to cut them down to size so that you get a stubby framework. Prune each stem to no more than 15 cms above the soil; will encourage brightly coloured, leafless stems for winter interest next year.
- Many people prefer to leave their **hybrid tea and floribunda roses** pruning until spring. So, if you think that the frosts are over, prune with SHARP secateurs or loppers so that you make good, clean cuts that heal quickly.
- Cut to an **outward facing bud** so that you encourage summer growth away from the centre.
- Modern bush roses tend to be grafted onto vigorous stock so do not be shy about giving your rose quite a **severe haircut**. It will redouble its efforts for you as a consequence.
- Create a bowl. **Thin out the centre** of the plant if it is looking too busy because the better the shape and the space within the plant, the better your display of flowers and the healthier the plant.
- **Never prune rambling roses** in spring because you will lose all of their flowers. You can prune climbing roses but mid-winter is better next time.
- Prune your yellow **winter jasmine** – Jasmine nudiflorum – once the flowers are over otherwise it becomes lanky and unruly. Cut out four D's (dead, diseased, displaced & damaged), spread the main branches over the area that you want covered and tie them in to wall supports to make your basic framework. Then on each main branch, shorten the sideshoots to 5cm from the main stem for a sunburst of flowers next winter. Feed and mulch with an organic fertiliser.
- **Summer flowering jasmine** requires a different tactic; here you have to be ruthless and **remove complete main stems**. Remove as many main stems as you feel necessary to keep the jasmine in its allotted space. Pruning the sideshoots just

results in a tangle of foliage making it difficult to see the flowers.

- Overgrown **honeysuckle** can be brought back under control in March. When a plant has become a complete tangle it is sometimes difficult to see what should come out, so wait for the buds to break and that way you can see which stems will flower and are worth keeping and which can be removed in good conscience. Generally honeysuckles should be pruned shortly after flowering just to keep them to their allotted space.
- Hydrangea petiolaris, the climbing hydrangea that is so useful to people with problematic north walls to cover, will still have its spent flowers. Remove these to allow the new buds to form and replace them.

Additionally cut back old/dead growth from your borders. This can present itself as woody sticks and you may well think the plant has died. This is not usually the case and a general cut back of this old growth can transform the appearance of a border, even when it is not flowering.



Figure 7: Water trough planters with last year's old growth which has died back.



Figure 8: The same trough with all old growth cut back, additional plants are also in the trough but cannot be seen yet as it is still a little early for them.

Feed

Plants require three main elements for good health:

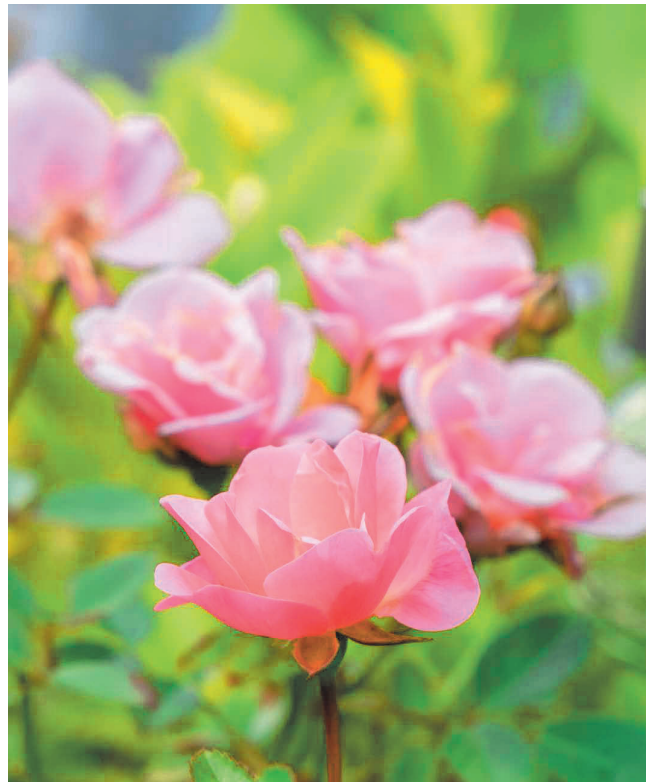
- Nitrogen (labelled on fertiliser packaging with an N) is for green, leafy growth.
- Phosphorus (P) is for healthy root and shoot growth.
- Potassium (K) or potash is for flowering, fruiting and general hardiness.

This is a good month to:

- Feed your fruit trees with a high potash feed. If granular make sure that you pull away any mulch, apply the fertiliser, water so that the fertiliser dissolves to become available to the plant, and then replace the mulch.
- Walk around and find all your roses and shrubs (laurels, viburnum, skimmias, syringas) and give each a good handful of pellets. Only exception is if you had noticed lots of black fly last year as evidence says they thrive when nitrogen is too high in the soil
- Feed wisteria
- March is a great planting month because roots grow so quickly when the soil is warming.

Roses

- March is the last (and best) month for planting bare root roses.



Soft Fruit

- Autumn fruiting raspberries cut right down to the ground & feeding them generously with a high potash fertiliser e.g. Levington® Tomorite - make sure that you look out for and protect any new shoots that may be appearing. You should only remove the canes that fruited last year. Take them out at ground level.
- If you have any lovely mini Victorian cloches or any large clear plastic containers place over a strawberry plant or two so that they fruit a little earlier. Strawberries should have been split out, links separated and thinned.

Bulbs

- Some daffodils may be going over towards the end of the month. Deadhead as many as you can so that all of the plant's energy goes back into the bulb ready to produce more flowers for next year
- You will still be able to plant snowdrops, aconites and bluebells in the green. Any winter flowering shrub or specimen tree will be enhanced by an under-planting of bulbs to draw attention to them. Try looking at focal points in your garden that do NOT have bulbs around them and imagine white, blue or yellow there.



Sweet Peas

- Any autumn sown can be planted out in nutrient rich soil towards the end of the month and keep them watered well. Or sow now in root trainers

Summer bulbs/tubers

Gladioli & dahlias – buy and start off under glass

Olive and Bay plus other potted plants

- Potted olive trees can come out of hiding and adorn terraces, front doors and vistas again. Keep them watered and a little Miracle Gro once a month will not go amiss.
- Your bays will need an annual feed and March is the best time to give them a shot of slow release fertiliser to welcome them into the warmer months.



Other Stuff

Including soils, lawns, ponds, terraces

- Chore Bore of the month. Clean your greenhouse & ventilate.
- Store your compost and growbags in the greenhouse so that they are nice and warm when you start using them.
- Plants that have been in your greenhouse over winter will have exhausted their compost so feed or repot them. You can succession sow lettuce, cabbage and cauliflower in March. Buy plug plants of tomatoes, cucumber etc. for a higher success rate. Choose a blight resistant straight such as Crimson Crush
- Grass – late spring is a good time to make your first cut of the season. Remember to raise the height of the mower and do a high cut first, just take the tops off the grass first to make it level, and then slowly



lower the mowing deck over subsequent cuts until you get it to your desired length. Remember, not too short as this will encourage the growth of moss as more light will be able to get through the grass to the soil below.

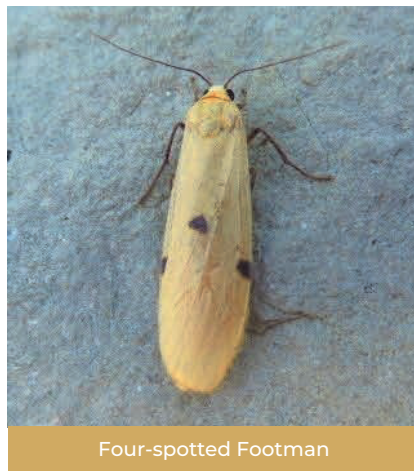
- Use hand cream and wear a sun hat!!
- Make notes in a journal for next March

Moth Recording at Lower Pertwood Farm

Article and photography by: R.H. Creighton

Being involved with bird ringing studies at Peewits Gorse has given me the unique opportunity to also investigate the moths in this area. For bird ringing purposes nets are erected the evening before operations are planned. This makes it convenient to position a 12v battery powered moth light at the site. The light has a sensor that turns the light on at dusk and off again at dawn. The moths are attracted to the light and swirl around until they fall through an opening into a darker area below, filled with egg boxes into which the moths crawl to shelter. Early the next morning, prior to the start of ringing operations, the moths are removed, identified, and then released. The moth trap is shown below in the habitat in which it is deployed.

An average of 7 trapping sessions have been carried out a year since 2016, starting in March and ceasing in October. The number of moths varies with weather conditions and time of year, with the largest catches being on warm, still nights and the best months being July and August. The largest catch to date was 136 moths of 31 species on 2nd June 2020. On this date no more than 72 Small Elephant Hawk Moths were taken from the trap. This moth is by no means common and generally is only encountered in ones and twos. The large



Four-spotted Footman

number captured was no doubt due to the presence in Peewits Gorse of large areas of Lady's Bedstraw, the food plant of the larvae, also the honeysuckle being in flower would have provided food for the newly emerged insects. Most common moths have a broad range of plants that are used as food for the larvae but some are very much more restricted, Lady's Bedstraw also provides food for the larva of Sandy, Green and Silver Ground Carpet moths, the Wild Roses that have been carefully preserved in the area are food plant for The Streamer and Shoulder stripe moths. Lichens found on tree trunks provide food for the 5 species of Footman that I have recorded. The uncommon Four spotted Footman recorded on 1st Sept 2022 is shown above. Another group of moths that are well represented in the catches are those that feed on hard grasses found in downland habitats. Mat and Sheeps Fescue are the most common grasses and the moth species associated with them at this site are Redish Light Arches, Antler Moth, Hedge Rustic Feathered Gothic and Straw Underwing.

A question often asked is, what is the difference between a butterfly and a moth? Moths fly at night

does not fit the bill as there are at least 15 British day flying moths, admittedly butterflies do not fly at night, may be the right way to put it. Butterflies have clubbed antennae is true, but so do one family of moths, the Burnets. I would be interested to know the definitive answer.

I always find it strange that according to my records I have recorded 26 species of butterflies on Lower Pertwood Farm, and to date 150 species of moths. Why the huge disparity? Whilst on the subject of disparity the photos below show a Clifden Nonpareil length 5.5 cm recorded on 18th Oct 2020 and a Kent Black Arches length 1 cm, recorded on 3rd Aug 2021.

As I finish this article on 7th March, the forecasted snow has just started to fall, but I am pleased to report I have already recorded my first moth of the year an aptly named Spring Usher.



Kent Black Arches



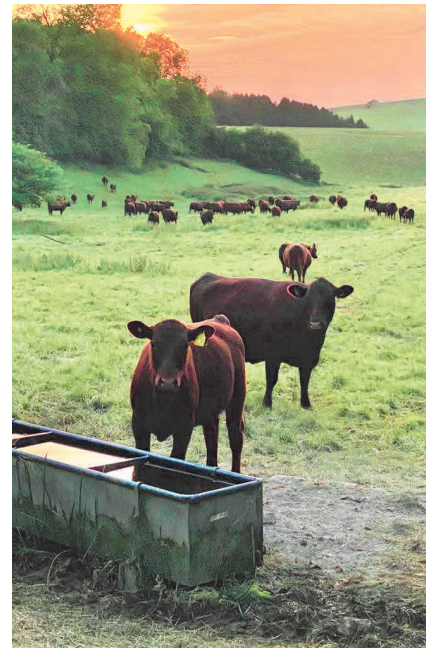
Clifden Nonpareil - Peewits Gorse

Road maintenance programme

This summer we continued with our very innovative road maintenance programme.

Our tracks are made up of crushed stone and other material. However, in order to soften it, we apply standard dairy muck to the road using our muck spreader. This has two benefits as it softens the road by filling in all the gaps in between the stones but, more importantly, it opens the door to grass growing down the centre of the road and around the edges. This dramatically reduces the potential for erosion of the road.

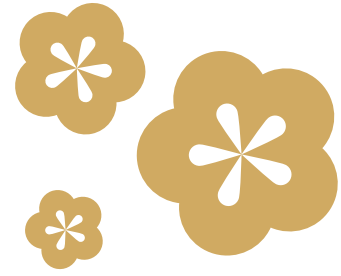
Pertwood believes in providing a habitat for as many creatures, big or small, seen or unseen, as possible. There is no reason why many invertebrates cannot take up residence in the middle of our roads as it provides them with food and cover.



Lower Pertwood Farm is a contented environment for livestock.

Summer Wildflowers

**Article and photography by:
Tom, The Cools Farm Organics Team**



I am really pleased to say how wonderful the wild flowers have been this summer at Lower Pertwood on the downs. Just a bit of careful grazing with sheep and cattle at the right times has allowed the flora and fauna to flourish this season. Below is a list of some of the species found throughout the downs:

- Oxeye Daisy
- Breckland Thyme
- Common Sainfoin
- Wood Betony
- Gipsy Rose Scabious
- Ladys Bedstraw
- Common Knapweed
- Yarrow
- Hawksbeard
- Bird's-Foot-Trefoil
- Ranunculus Acris
- Spiny Restharrow
- Rosebay Willowherb

That's just 13 species I could identify and there are many more out there I couldn't recognize. Many of these flowers are herbal and contain many natural anthelmintics properties meaning they are good for livestock when treating parasitic diseases. Perfect for a natural, regenerative organic

system. I am thrilled to be able to see these not just from a farming perspective but also a bit of a wild flower enthusiast myself. If you get a chance to walk across the downs when you return you may just be able to see the last few flowering as they go to seed. Sheep and cattle in the winter will knock the shedding seeds, eat and dung them across the downs and then finally tread them in. Ready to chit for next season.

We have had 3 sessions topping the thistles this summer, it seems to me that there is a reduced amount of thistles compared to last year as the grass has managed to get a foothold in growing to suppress them with this wet climate. The barn has proved to be very useful this summer, with Blood testing and our 6 monthly tb test last week. I am pleased to say we have successfully passed which is a relief. We are currently trying to make our last lot of winter fodder at Cools which is proving a bit of a struggle in all honesty. This patchy unsettled weather has caused little showers just enough to spoil the hay making process, however with a bit of sunshine this coming week I hope to get it baled and hauled into the sheds.

