

Farming for A Living Landscape



Pastures New, Dorset Wildlife Trust

Making wildlife-rich grasslands work

Pastures New is a landscape initiative led by Dorset Wildlife Trust that takes practical action to halt and reverse the decline of wildlife habitats in west Dorset. The project has laid strong foundations for a wildlife-rich, resilient and ecologically functional landscape.

The work aims to protect and extend priority biodiversity habitat across a landscape identified as a Strategic Nature Area. The initial goal was to secure positive management for 2,765 ha of priority grassland habitat over a total project area of 25,509 ha. The majority so far has been chalk grassland and lowland meadows, sitting in a mosaic of woodland, hedgerows and other wildlife features.

“Without financial help, it would have been difficult to manage cattle grazing on this special corner of the farm.”

Kevin Wallbridge,
West Dorset Farmer

Delivery of agri-environment at a landscape scale

Working with Natural England, Dorset Wildlife Trust has facilitated the entry of 11 farms in the Beaminster area into a collective landscape-scale Higher Level Stewardship (HLS) agreement.

These farms represent vital core areas of habitat but none of them would have qualified for HLS funding individually. Creating a single HLS agreement, spanning several landowners, has ensured positive management of these core areas.

Under the joint HLS agreement, Pastures New has secured 109 ha of grassland management and restoration; 3.3 kilometres of hedgerow restoration and high quality management; management of a further 80 ha of grassland to benefit key target species; and management of traditional orchards and woodland. In addition to the collective agreement, a further 27 HLS and 38 Entry Level Stewardship agreements have been secured in the project area.

To date, Dorset Wildlife Trust's experienced advisors have provided free advice to more than 400 landowners, held 17 events and road shows and carried out 14 grassland management demonstrations in the project area.

The Trust has also provided more than £36,000 of capital funding to install fencing and water supplies and support the use of a Rytec cut and collect machine for both seed collection and scrub cutting.



Land management and habitat creation

The Trust's grazing brokerage has provided a practical way of managing grasslands across the project area by linking graziers to sites in need of grazing. Key pieces of machinery, such as the cut and collect machine, are shared in a similar way and have been used to restore some of our valuable grasslands.

The Trust's volunteer task force has put in over 1,000 days of work to help create and manage grassland sites. This has positively affected management or created grassland on over 4,000 ha across West Dorset. The Pastures New volunteers provide much-needed support in managing grasslands outside nature reserves and tasks, such as scrub control, could not have been achieved without their help.

Seed harvesting and grassland creation

The project has enabled the Trust to use its register of existing Local Wildlife Sites and, in certain circumstances, SSSIs to provide local sources for green hay and seed. In addition, the Trust has used a local contractor to brush harvest sites and dry out seed for sowing for other projects requiring more specialised techniques of restoration. To date the project has seeded 36 sites and created over 70 ha of new grassland.



Harvesting seed for habitat restoration

Hilfield Grassland Restoration Project

This 4 ha site was enhanced using green hay from a Trust nature reserve. The work was undertaken using a combination of volunteer help and machinery. The result is a flower-rich meadow that is cut for hay to provide winter forage. Aftercare management was initially carried out using neighbouring livestock, identified through a grazing brokerage scheme. But the restored field inspired the landowners to purchase and manage their own livestock.



Hilfield before...

Re-connecting people with nature

Pastures New has enabled local people to be involved in managing their landscape and to understand how wildlife, food and farming are fundamentally connected. The involvement of local communities, volunteers and particularly farmers, working in partnership has enabled the enhancement of habitats for wildlife and the production of food in ways that help manage and mitigate against the continuing pressures facing the countryside.



...and Hilfield after restoration

A Living Landscape is a recovery plan for nature championed by The Wildlife Trusts to help create a resilient and healthy environment rich in wildlife and provide ecological security for people. To find out what advice and support is available from a Wildlife Trust near you, visit wildlifetrusts.org/farming

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