



Welcome to the first Rewilding Roborough Fields newsletter

We will produce these every now and again when we think there are things our friends may be interested in.

Logo

And first thing to be said is what do you think of our fabulous logo? This was a true team effort. Annie drew the mouse, Stuart drew all the leaves, flowers and berries and Rachael did all the colouring by hand with her Granny's crayons. We love it!

Base-line survey



Clarkson and Woods who are the ecologists helping us with the Roborough project have carried out the base-line survey and are in the process of compiling the results. The news generally is good with lots of invertebrates and nice plants and some animals but not such a rich and valuable habitat that we cannot increase biodiversity and abundance massively. Once we have all the results back then this will help us work out what we need to keep and which areas we can improve on. The list will also allow us to monitor species and numbers over time so we can check on how we are doing.

Windmill

We are still waiting for Torridge council to let us know the results of our pre planning application for the 7m high windmill that we hope will move small amounts of water up from a borehole to keep our wetland pools topped up. It is true that ephemeral ponds are a very valuable habitat so we will have some of these but it would be good if all of our pools don't dry up every year so we need a bit of an extra water supply. If the council want a full planning application then we will have to make a decision about the windmill – we could do the same thing with solar panels and a pump but the windmill doesn't generate power, just lifts the water mechanically which would be pretty cool if we can get permission. We should also be able to build it ourselves which will be fun!



Habitat creation

The ideas for what we will actually do on the land keep evolving as we listen to various people giving us advice. The wetland in the east field will consist of as many small and medium sized pools as we can create. Dormice (see logo above!) apparently love brambles and a thick understory under trees and hedgerows, and we already have lots of this so we will keep it and increase the amounts.

In terms of the west field nearest the road then some new ideas have surfaced for the hedgerows and wildflower creation. Having watched the Knepp Estate's small landowner workshop it seems a good idea to create small islands of banks with hedgerow species and trees on them rather than straight lines of hedgerows. This mimics the "thorns are the mothers of the oak" mechanism whereby, in land with a healthy herbivore population, you get a mosaic of grazed areas with patches of thorn (hawthorn and blackthorn) that withstands the activities of the deer etc. These islands of thorn then shelter oak and other tree seedlings that grow up and get away to become trees. The Roborough Fields are not large enough to have resident big herbivores - at the Knepp recommended grazer density we would need about a quarter of a Tamworth pig and half a fallow deer! - but we can mimic the effect with our planting and management. This will then give us the very high densities of plants and animals that this type of habitat gives homes to.



The other idea that we will incorporate is to remove the turf to create the banks for our thorn and oak islands but maybe not seed quite a lot of the bare areas. Apparently we may still have a significant old seed bank that may produce lots of plants once the turf comes off. We may well trial this over the winter by taking of patches of turf to see what germinates. Removing the turf also removes a lot of the phosphorous, and nitrogen leaches out with rain pretty quickly so turf stripping will drop nutrient levels rapidly which is what we want for flower rich meadows. Thanks to David Smallshire for raising this as a possibility.

Nick and Annie plan to be down looking at the fields again in early September by which time the survey results and planning answer should be with us so we can make specific plans for the work this autumn and winter from there.

Lastly, thanks to all of you for your support and interest and ideas. We hope to meet all of you at the Roborough Fields one day in the near future.

Best regards,

Nick

<http://www.clarksonwoods.co.uk/>

<https://knepp.co.uk/home>