



Roborough Rewilders Newsletter

Registered Charity No. 1203077

www.roboroughrewilders.org

Summer Round-up

Shows and Fairs

It's been a summer of spreading the rewilding message for Roborough Rewilders and the mini marquee which we bought earlier in the year announced our presence at the Devon County Show (a 3-day event, mentioned in the previous newsletter); the North Devon Show, the Honiton Show, the Dunster Show (all four big agricultural shows), the Wiveliscombe Horticultural Fair, the Stawley Plant and Produce Fair and the South Molton Community Eco Fair.



A presence at these shows has proved to be very successful. Lots of people stopped by to ask for advice about how to increase biodiversity on their land, and a lot of contacts were made, some of which may result in work, and therefore funds for the charity.



Projects

Since the last newsletter Nick has carried out two new projects. The first was at Petroc College in Barnstaple and consisted of scraping turf and creating banks and paths to begin the development of an area that the students will use to study rewilding and habitat creation.

The second was a recreation of the Roborough Fields on an 85 acre site called Greenciff on the north Devon coast.

Soil Carbon

Nick recently attended an evening of presentations on soil carbon and nutrients. Various interesting facts were covered. For instance: that it takes 8 or 9 years for soil carbon levels to recover after just one ploughing event. Soil carbon is really important as it stores water and help soil retain nutrients. In droughts (like the one we had this summer) the yields of crops on high carbon soils hold up, whereas those on low carbon land collapse. Modern mechanised agriculture tends to drop soil carbon by compaction and the use of inorganic fertilisers.

Attending this meeting, and various experiences over the summer, led to Nick writing an article for a local newsletter which is reproduced below.

Resilience

During the night of Thursday 28th August it finally broke. Months of hot, dry weather with temperatures nearly hitting 30°C finally ended. Blessed, heavy rain and a damp, drizzly morning to follow - bliss! No more cracked soil, parched fields and blistering heat. And the drought broken, we will move on and prepare for the winter.

But, for a couple of weeks at the end of August, two of us were working at a beautiful place called Greenciff in North Devon. Eighty-five acres of land stretching back from the cliffs looking out towards Clovelly and Lundy Island. Absolutely idyllic with the sound of the surf breaking on the beach below.

We were digging ponds, scraping turf and creating banks to break up the flat fields of grass. The fields crackled as we moved over them. It felt like southern Spain or Portugal. The temperature hit 28° and we needed a lot of cold drinks to keep going. The digging revealed about 4" of top soil, then clay and stone subsoil; almost no organic matter and the soil turned to dust and blew away in the stiff, offshore winds. Sheep and cattle stood in brown, parched fields all around with almost no shade or food.

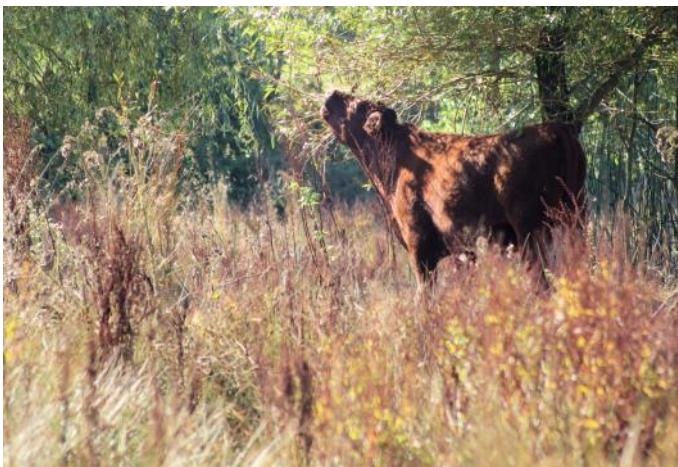
At the Dunster Show the week before, most of the livestock had to be removed from the show-ground at 3p.m. because the vets advised that they were at risk from the heat. 2025 looks like being the hottest UK summer since records began.



The Celts among us are not adapted to these conditions - freckles spread and skin burns; but the land is ill-adapted too. The soil in many of the fields is thin and heavily compacted. Hedges are cut short and field trees die out in the open. There is little shade and little organic matter to hold water. During our digging over seven days we found no more than a couple of earthworms. And once the rain does come, it often cascades off the hard, sloping ground and floods into our towns.

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Meanwhile, over at our rewilded site near Rotherham, nine Red Devon cattle browsed contentedly on willow and oak. They sat in the ponds when they were too hot or in the shade of the billowing hedgerows and trees. The ground there is soft and spongy, full of worms and moles. The grass is damp and green and when it rains the water sinks in and fills up the ephemeral ponds. The air is relatively cool and moist because of all the shade and vegetation and the increasing organic matter and root masses in the soil hold water through summer.



We need to grow food, and farming our land is the way to do it - not growing protein in labs or vegetables in hydroponic systems. But rainfall is increasing and temperatures are climbing. A bare landscape and cities full of concrete, tarmac and hard roofs are not going to cope. We need what they call "resilience" in our landscape. What this really means is loose soil full of organic matter and worms; field trees and lots of hedgerows providing shade and fodder for the livestock; more banks across slopes and less drainage. I have no idea how we can do this on a large scale. The supermarkets control our food industry, and agrochemical and farm machinery suppliers manipulate our food growers. All we can do is what we can on any land we control or have influence over.

Climate change is happening and it's happening now. We know what needs doing to curb the worst effects. We just have to get on and do it.

Nick Benge

Recommended reading: *Dirt to Soil* by Gabe Brown.

Ko-fi Updates

Please note that you have to **log in** to access our monthly updates about the fields via Ko-fi. (Top, right-hand corner where it says Register or Log-in.) Then you can access all the content and photos in between, and as well as, the quarterly newsletter.

Best wishes

Nick, Annie and the Trustees

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

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

<https://devonartist.co.uk/>