



Rewilding Roborough Fields newsletter

Base-line Survey

We have received an extremely good report from **Clarkson & Woods Ecological Consultants** based on the survey carried out on July 9th by thirteen of their ecologists. They divided the fields into 4 quadrants for the ground flora, plus did bat, mammal, invertebrate and birds surveys. The main conclusions are:

- ⇒ The front field is agriculturally improved grassland and the back field is semi-improved.
- ⇒ 23 plant species were recorded in the front field and 44 in the back.
- ⇒ The hedgerows are all categorised as "Important" under the Hedgerow Regulations 1977 and contain a total of 24 woody (non-climbing) species.
- ⇒ 11 bat species were recorded and twenty species of bird. Further bird and invertebrate surveys are planned for spring.
- ⇒ Moderate invertebrate assemblage were present and bees were of relatively widespread and common species.
- ⇒ Five mammal species were found.

Suggestions for improvements include increasing the floral diversity, planting field trees, hedgerow planting, putting up bird boxes and conservation grazing. All of these will be taken up.

If anyone would like to see the full survey please email: roboroughfields@outlook.com and we will email it to you.

Windmill update

Alas, Torridge Council has said that we would need full planning permission for the small mechanical windmill we were hoping to put up. Their windmill category is for all types of windmills, i.e. even a wind turbine! - so we have decided it will have to be a solar panel which runs the pump to bring small amounts of water up from the bore hole. The solar panel will be supplied by Wayne Peters of Gecko Energy.

Bore hole

Trevor Cox visited the field with his divining rods, found the right location and marked the spot! He will be drilling the borehole this autumn.

Fences and Gates

A fence has been put up by **Alex Stanbury** to allow for access from the road. A wooden gate and a pedestrian gate into the fields have been put in - but we are going to get a double gate in order to make it easier for large machinery to gain access. Currently a farmer is baling the grass which needs wide access, and soon we will need to get a digger in to start the wetland work.





Visit to Roborough

Nick and Annie went down to Roborough at the end of September. They were joined at the weekend by two of the 'Roborough Team', Luis and Stephen as well as 'Friends of the Fields' Angeline and Colin.



Nick, Annie, Colin,
Angeline, Luis,
Stephen

Visit to Knepp

In September, Andrew (Ro' Team member) and Nick went for another visit to the Knepp Estate in Sussex. They had originally signed up for a 'safari' which had to be cancelled due to Covid, but the theoretical part was put on Zoom which they watched, and later they were invited down for a guided walk, which is what they did. The session was aimed at people with small amounts of land who are wanting to 'rewild'.

The main thing that Andrew and Nick took from the visit was that it is all about reinstating ecological processes, rather than aiming to achieve particular goals. Vegetation succession tends to move land from grassland via scrub to closed canopy woodland, while herbivore action works the other way. This is what gives Knepp its massive diversity. Knepp had well-established scrub and hedgerows in the southern sector before they introduced herbivores and the results have been very good. So we need to get some degree of established vegetation and then introduce herbivores. The hedgerows are already there but we need more flowering plants in the grassland and more scrub and standard trees. Once



these are established we will "bus in" herbivores for short periods (days or maybe a week). This mimics pulse grazing and is the best approximation to natural grazing that we can get in a small area.

Photos taken by Andrew Mounstephen at Knepp



So What's Next for Roborough Fields?

- ♦ Follow up with Trevor Cox and get the borehole done.
- ♦ Solar panel and pump installed.
- ♦ Get the double gate put in.
- ♦ Get stock fencing done in Field 2.
- ♦ Make a sign based on our lovely logo.

And then ...

A team to go down in early February for two weeks to:

- Use a 13T digger to dig ponds down the back half of Field 2.
- Use a digger to strip a small area of turf in Field 1 so that we can see what germinates in the spring i.e. what the existing seedbank contains. Hopefully there is enough seed so that we don't need to bring any in.
- Create some hard standing at the entrance.
- Put up the sign.
- Put up bird boxes in hedgerows (tits, nuthatches, starlings) and in the fields (barn owl, kestrel, little owl.)

In the long term ...

- ♦ Leave the front half of Field 2 and field margin (bramble etc.) to develop.
- ♦ Monitor/adjust the wetland.
- ♦ Manage the hedgerows.
- ♦ Strip turf from large area of Field 1 and create banks.
- ♦ Seed or leave cut areas.
- ♦ Plant scrub and tree species.
- ♦ Once meadows and trees/scrub are sufficiently established, then bring in the herbivores!
- ♦ Monitor the changes. Clarkson & Woods will do another survey in 3 years' time to compare.

Big Thank you! xxx

Many thanks to all of you, our 'Friends of the Fields', who have shown an interest in this project.



We are particularly grateful to those who have made a financial contribution towards it. We are now starting to spend those contributions. First, and most importantly, has been the base-line survey because this is how we can monitor the changes. The fencing is next, and then the bore hole and the solar panel have to be in place before we start the major digging work next year. Bird boxes, dormouse tubes, will follow. We are truly grateful to you all and hope that some of you will have a chance to visit the fields at some point. We will keep you updated with newsletters from time to time.

Best regards,

Nick

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

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