



Rewilding Roborough Fields Newsletter

Hi All

Just realised that our first newsletter went out in July 2020 and now we're in July 2021 (last day of) - exactly a year later. For those of you who have been on board from the start, you will appreciate the changes that have taken place in the fields. Annie and I were there briefly in June and then again in July and so we can report on the changes we have seen - and changes yet to come!

Jo and Paul continue to give us frequent updates and fabulous photos, one of which is included in this newsletter.



'Stuart's' pond (AB)

The two fields have changed dramatically since we did the main digging work in January/February. I hadn't appreciated just how fast things grow in Devon until I went down this time. The hawthorn and other shrubs we planted are 3' high already and the bare areas where we stripped the turf are already covered in docks, teasel, buttercup, thistles, and scarlet pimpernel, amongst others. We already have eight species of dragonfly and damselfly using the old pond and the new ones we have dug. A kingfisher has visited and a heron sails in frequently. The back field is home to a family of foxes and lots of rabbits and pheasants. We have had seven individual roe deer appearing on Jo and Paul's trail cameras and the cameras have also captured film of tawny owls, wood mice, a buzzard, mallard and a sandpiper.

The back field is now full of hemlock water dropwort, marsh thistles, birds foot trefoil and soft rush. It is a waist high riot of vegetation. The hedgerows are bursting out into the field and it is already a real haven for invertebrates and birds. Currently we don't really need to do anything to manage this field. At some point we will probably need to put some animals in to push back some of the vegetation and slow down succession but this should not be for some years. The seven new ponds are holding water well and are already being used by amphibians and dragonflies/damselflies to breed in.



Four spotted chaser dragonfly (PH)



Shetland sheep are coming!

In the front field the only real issue is the prevalence of the tall grass that is a result of the field being sown and fertilised for pasture. The Italian rye grass and Yorkshire fog are so vigorous and the soil so full of nutrients that very few plants are going to come in on their own to increase floral diversity. Because of the ruts we left during the work with the diggers, we can't get the field cut and baled, which would be a good way to drop nutrient levels and open up the grass - but we are very lucky to have access to an exciting alternative - Shetland sheep and Tamworth pigs. The very kind owners of a flock of Shetlands have agreed to bring us 20 or so



A Tamworth pig - smiling!

of their animals. These will graze out a lot of the grass at the base of the sward in particular. After the sheep have had a go, then the Tamworths can come in and root up the ground. Again, a very kind, helpful local farmer has offered to bring in three or so of his sows.



The plan is for the animals to decimate the vigorous grasses and create open ground into which we can then seed yellow rattle and other wildflowers to increase floral diversity. We can see how this works next summer and repeat/adjust as necessary. We will need to fence off our new hedgerow banks and ponds in the front field as the pigs in particular apparently have a tendency to level everything they come across! With any luck these organically reared animals will also encourage a range of insects we wouldn't otherwise see, including dung beetles perhaps.

The two fields have already changed dramatically as a result of being released from their recent history of grazing and cutting. In addition, the front field will have three different zones of vegetation soon - the areas where the turf was stripped, the long grass areas that the sheep and pigs will work on and some areas of long grass that are left alone. When added to the new banks, hedgerows and trees, this is going to give us masses of vegetation diversity.

Thanks again to all who have helped with the project so far and in particular to our two field guardians, Jo Everitt and Paul Hopkinson one of whose photos we have used in this newsletter.

Thanks also to team member, Andrew Mounstephen, who recently went over to the fields and did a great job of marking out where the new fencing should go and clearing round some of the young trees.



Best regards,

Nick and Annie

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

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

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