

Conservation Grade

Nature Friendly Farming

Winter 2011

INSIDE

- P2 CG Research Project
- P2 Deer, dear, dear...
- P3 More new members join the Guild
- P4 News from the licensees
- P6 Arable plants survey - Henbane
- P6 Chemical news
- P7 Farmer wins conservation award
- P7 Stewardship options and the CFE
- P8 Thompson's topical CG tips
- P10 Farming & Forestry Improvement Scheme
- P10 Academic success
- P11 Regional Updates
- P14 Habitat Assessment Quiz
- P16 Eagle Owl visits Vitacress Farm

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ENGLAND'S NEW BIODIVERSITY STRATEGY

Defra has recently launched its new England Biodiversity Strategy (EBS): **'Biodiversity 2020: a Strategy for England's Wildlife and Ecosystem Services'** as a response to international commitments agreed at last year's UN Convention on Biological Diversity.

Biodiversity 2020:
A strategy for England's wildlife
and ecosystem services



It sets out how it sees the quality of our environment on land and at sea being improved over the next ten years and provides a road map to halt the loss of biodiversity by 2020.

At the heart of the strategy is a drive to establish coherent ecological networks that benefits both wildlife and people. This is very much in keeping with the Conservation Grade philosophy where farmers create and manage wildlife habitats to effectively 'stitch' the fabric of our countryside back together.

The stated intention of the EBS is to provide better, bigger and more joined-up sites for nature, as recommended by the *Making Space for Nature* review (The Lawton

Report), to halt and reverse overall biodiversity loss.

Agriculture is identified as a key sector for specific action, along with forestry, planning authorities, water management and fisheries. In the agriculture sector, the aim is to improve the delivery of environmental outcomes from land management practices, whilst increasing food production by, for example, reviewing how we use advice; incentives; and the improvement of the delivery of agri-environment schemes. Through its growing relationship with Natural England, CG is well-placed to influence the outcomes of this process.

Defra will be developing and publishing a set of indicators to assess delivery of the EBS and it will be interesting to see how many of these will be agriculturally-based.

For more information: <http://www.defra.gov.uk/publications/2011/08/19/pb13583-biodiversity-strategy-2020/>

NEW CG RESEARCH PROJECT

THE EFFECTIVENESS OF AGRI-ENVIRONMENTAL MANAGEMENT FOR BIODIVERSITY AND ECOSYSTEM SERVICES IN THE WIDER COUNTRYSIDE

PHD project by Chloe Hardman, Centre for Agri-Environmental Research, University of Reading

As part of CG's ongoing investment in conservation research Chloe Hardman (right) will be spending the next four years comparing the biodiversity benefits of Conservation Grade farming with organic and conventional farming. After completing her first degree at Cambridge, Chloe has worked with the Durrell Institute and the RSPB researching agri-environment issues, before joining Reading's Centre for Agri-environment Research (CAER).



Her research project, which has been jointly worked-up by CG and CAER, will compare wildlife and ecosystem services on Conservation Grade farms with comparable organic and Entry Level Stewardship farms. Chloe will investigate how good different management practices are at delivering biodiversity, through groupings as such as farmland birds and insects, and also measuring ecosystem services, such as pollination. The research will ask these questions at large spatial scales, considering the whole farm and not just the individual habitats within them.

The research should also help us to understand why some Conservation Grade farms support more wildlife than others. It will look at attributes such as the surrounding landscape, the history of the farm, farmer attitudes and particular habitat features found on the farms such as hedgerows and wetlands.

Chloe, who will be working under the joint supervision of Professor Ken Norris and Dr Simon Potts, with input from the CG Technical Advisory Panel, says: "The project will run from 2011 to 2015 and will involve field surveys at a number of farms. This research is funded by a BBSRC studentship and Conservation Grade, and I am looking forward to working with the CG farmers and the CG team to make this research a real success".

Deer, dear, dear...

The potential for burgeoning deer populations to impact on some wildlife species has been of growing conservation concern for some time, and in a recently published study by the BTO, researchers have shown how excessive deer browsing can affect the distribution of some woodland birds.



In the study, eight coppice woodland plots in Bradfield Woods, Suffolk were cut to produce young regrowth (a favoured habitat for Nightingales). Deer were excluded, preventing browsing of the understorey habitat. By mapping territories and attaching radio-tags to Nightingales in the wood and tracking their movements, researchers were then able to look at the interaction between deer and Nightingales.

The study showed that nightingales spent most of their time in the tiny part of the study area from which deer had been excluded. The density of Nightingale territories in the deer-free areas was fifteen times greater than in the paired sample plots. The nightingales spent 69% of their time in the 6% of the woodland from which deer had been excluded.

Chas Holt, who carried out the research, said: "The study provides compelling evidence that increasing deer pressure can have a major effect on local Nightingale populations, and potentially those of other woodland species too".

(Continued on page 3)



(Continued from page 2) *Deer, dear, dear...*

Although deer have been a natural component of woodland ecology for millennia, recent increases in their populations plus the presence of exotic species such as Reeve's Muntjac can reduce the suitability of some types of woodland for Nightingales through browsing low vegetation. "When added to the other pressures being faced by migratory birds that winter in Africa, it is not surprising that the population levels of some species are falling" he said.



A complex understorey of plants such as brambles, honeysuckle and rose has been a traditional feature of man-made coppiced woodlands in southern England, providing nesting sites for secretive species such as Nightingales and insect-rich feeding habitats. As deer numbers have risen in coppiced woodlands, which are not naturally resilient to deer browsing, low-level vegetation and low shrubs have been differentially removed, leaving less habitat for Nightingales.

MORE NEW MEMBERS JOIN THE GUILD

We have been delighted to welcome an increasing number of new members to the Guild of Conservation Grade Producers, as the interest in growing Conservation Grade oats and wheat continues to spread.

On 5th October eleven new CG growers attended their Induction Course at Robert Law's Thrift Farm. Following a briefing on the requirements of membership, Rob Law gave them a guided tour of his CG habitats, including his winter bird food, complete with its skylark plots.



The new farmers who attended included Frazer Chamberlayne from Grantham, Chris Padfield from Gloucester, David Rhodes from Barnsley, Paul Brown from Kent, Colin Bridger & Stewart Palzeaird from VHB Herbs in Chichester, Mark Collier from Stafford, Joe Scott & Jon Hicks from Rugby and Adrian Taylor from Banbury. CG wishes them all a warm welcome.

Our next Induction Course will be held in January and we already have further new members who have signed up for that course.



Wild Bird Food strip with Skylark plots at Thrift Farm, Hertfordshire



NEWS FROM CG LICENSEES



NEW PRODUCT FROM STEVE'S LEAVES



Steve's Leaves® have just announced the introduction of a new product to the range: **A Thoroughly Magnificent Mix of Wasabi Rocket and Cooler Leaves.** Since becoming nationally

available Steve's Leaves have enjoyed an exciting first year, already having achieved two major awards.

Following the success of the current range which includes Nose Tinglingly Peppery Baby Watercress, Super Hot Rocket, A Stupidly Tasty Mix of Pea Shoots & Baby Leaves and A Ruddy Gorgeous Mix of Wild Red Rocket® & Milder Leaves demand has been high for the Steve's Leaves team to add to their repertoire. The Wasabi Rocket gets hotter as you eat it and is the perfect accompaniment to burgers and steaks. Steve's Leaves introduced this Wasabi Rocket & Cooler Leaves to the family in early September when it became available in both Sainsbury's and Waitrose.

For stockists and more information visit www.stevesleaves.co.uk

To follow Steve's Leaves on Facebook visit www.facebook.com/



ALLIED BAKERIES UPDATE

Allied Bakeries unveiled its exciting new look and marketing campaign for its Allinson brand in September. The rebrand includes the launch of a new loaf, the Allinson Brown Batch with the taste of Sourdough. As more and more growers are signing up to the Allied Mills CG contract and the supply chain grows, Conservation Grade certification has become a key strength of the brand, and something that Thomas Allinson would certainly have approved of.

Thomas Allinson himself was a pioneer of healthy eating and founder of the brand, and bringing it back to its roots is one of the cornerstones in revitalising the 120-year-old brand. Thomas Allinson has been reintroduced onto packs and in advertising to promote his beliefs in good nutrition and tap into consumer

demand for more wholesome, healthy, high quality bread, making the brand stand out in a competitive market.



Ellen Bailey, Allinson Brand Manager, explains "over the years much of the brand's heritage has been lost, resulting

in a lack of character and recognition among consumers. We've been inspired by the original packaging designs, advertising and trademarks from the Victorian era, and have brought them up to date for the 21st Century customer."

The relaunch and new product is supported by a strong marketing campaign including using press advertising and digital media, such as Facebook, to help build the brand and drive awareness, as well as partnering with the National Trust to launch a bread pudding that will be sold in National Trust cafes across the UK. So when you next take the family out on a National Trust visit, Ellen says "...make sure you buy one!"

**THOMAS ALLINSON
REBEL
MAVERICK
BAKER**

THE WHOLEMEAL PIONEER

Thomas Allinson was a true visionary. A man who firmly believed that 'Bread is not a luxury, but a necessity to every family'. So, with typical Victorian zeal, he bought his own flour mill to ensure the pure whole grain flour at the heart of an Allinson loaf. These days we take the benefits of wholemeal pretty much for granted, but this was not so in Thomas's time. He "You see what you eat" speeches were not the words of a baker or miller, but a revolutionary.

ALLINSON TODAY

Hoopla, Thomas succeeded in his crusade to bring wholemeal to the whole nation and, while much has changed since those days, his bread still contains the whole grain, still has no artificial preservatives and it still the testimony of a man who did, then, just as importantly, his spirit for healthy eating lives on in everything we make.

FROM THOMAS ALLINSON

A VERY MODERN VICTORIAN



'TAKE THE JORDANS 10% CHALLENGE' AND CREATE HOMES FOR WILDLIFE IN YOUR GARDEN

Jordans are calling everyone to 'TAKE THE JORDANS 10% CHALLENGE', just like the CG farmers that supply their cereals and help create more homes for wildlife across the UK in the next 12 months.

Jordans have enlisted the help of farmer and TV personality, **Jimmy Doherty**, to inspire consumers to take the '10% Challenge' and convert 10% of their outside space, however small, into a haven for wildlife.

The campaign, launched on 10th October 2011, has already attracted a lot of interest from the public.

In a video on the re-vamped Jordans website (www.jordanscereals.co.uk), Jimmy brings wildlife gardening to life and gives his top 10 tips for attracting wildlife into the gardens, including the best nectar rich plants to grow for bees and butterflies and how to create a rich habitat of trees and shrubs to attract birds.

Jimmy explains: "It isn't widely known that Jordans contributes to the management of around 50,000 acres of farmland in the UK. Our ambition is to get people to take the Jordans 10% challenge and follow this lead by creating homes for wildlife in their gardens."



Also available on the Jordans website is a blog from Jimmy so you can stay up to date with how the 10% Challenge is taking shape and a series of gardening tips from **Marnie Hall**, Gold winner at both the Chelsea and Hampton Court Flower Shows, along with some top competition prizes including the chance to win a garden makeover. Simply sign up to receive Jordans newsletter to enter. There are a variety of runners up prizes too including homes for bird, bees and butterflies.

KINGS SUPPORTING CONSERVATION GRADE - 10% DISCOUNT ON SEED MIXES



We're delighted that Kings Game Cover and Conservation Crops are to continue their initiative to support Conservation Grade growers. They are offering a 10% discount against their RRP for all orders placed with Kings for conservation and game cover products. Kings crops manager Richard Barnes says "This applies to both standard products and special mixtures which we are pleased to advise on and formulate for your ELS and HLS requirements".

To order a copy of their latest seed catalogue please call 0800 587 9797. When contacting Kings please state 'CG2011' and have your CG membership number available to claim your 10% discount.

Kings have been working closely with Conservation Grade for the last two years and have provided the various seed mixtures for the wild flower and wild bird seed trials at all four CG trial sites across the country. For ongoing dedicated technical support please do not hesitate to contact the Richard and the Kings Technical Team on 0800 587 9797.



IMPORTANT ARABLE PLANTS SURVEY - HENBANE

We are always keen to hear of conservation successes on CG members' farms, so we were especially pleased when Andover member Jon Capes (right) sent us details of a recent arable plant survey carried out on his farm. The survey was part of the Important Arable Plant Areas (IAPA) programme*, a system designed to identify a network of the key botanical sites across Europe and to aid delivery of Target 5 of the Global Strategy for Plant Conservation.



The general definition of an Important Plant Area (IPA), of which IAPAs are a subset, is a natural or semi-natural site exhibiting exceptional botanical richness and/or supporting an outstanding assemblage of rare, threatened and/or endemic plant species and/or vegetation of high botanical value.

The survey classified Jon's farm as being an IAPA site of 'County Importance' since it has a wide variety of 'locally important' arable plants and even some with 'threatened' status, including Henbane (*Hyoscyamus niger*).



Henbane (left) is a historically interesting species. Its medicinal uses date from remote ages; it was well known to the Ancients, being particularly commended by Dioscorides (first century A.D.), who used it 'to procure sleep and allay pains, internally and externally', though Pliny declared it to be 'of the nature of wine and therefore offensive to the understanding.' There is frequent mention made of it in Anglo-Saxon works on medicine of the eleventh century, but later it fell into disuse and was omitted from the London Pharmacopoeia of 1746 and 1788, and only restored in 1809, its re-introduction being chiefly due to experiments and recommendations by Baron Storch, who gave it in the form of an extract, in cases of epilepsy and other nervous and convulsive diseases. It is supposed that this is the herb referred to by Shakespeare in *Hamlet*...

*Sleeping within mine orchard,
My custom always of the afternoon
Upon my secure hour thy uncle stole,
With juice of cursed hebenon in a vial,
And in the porches of mine ear did pour
The leprous distillment.*

We wonder if Jon has found any suitable alternative uses down in darkest Hampshire?

The plants identified in the IAPA survey on Jon's farm were:

COMMON NAME	SCIENTIFIC NAME	IAPA SCORE	IAPA STATUS
Henbane	<i>Hyoscyamus niger</i>	7	Threatened—Vulnerable
Dwarf Spurge	<i>Euphorbia exigua</i>	6	New threatened
Dense-flowered Fumitory	<i>Fumaria densiflora</i>	3	Local concern
Grey Field-speedwell	<i>Veronica polita</i>	2	Local concern
Sharp-leaved Fluellen	<i>Kickxia elatine</i>	2	Local concern
Henbit Dead-nettle	<i>Lamium amplexicaule</i>	1	Local concern

*For further information on the IAPA surveys: <http://www.arableplants.org.uk/Arable-IAPA.html#IAPA>

CHEMICAL NEWS - Asulam

- Following a recent EU review, the herbicide *Asulam* failed to receive approval for use beyond 2012.
- This change may affect any CSS, ESA or HLS agreements that include bracken management based on the use of the *Asulam* – for example uplands and some lowland heath.
- United Phosphorus has confirmed that they will continue to support the re-registration of *Asulox*.
- In the meantime Natural England is working on possible short term emergency authorisations, but there is no guarantee that this will result in alternatives coming forward quickly.



GLoucestershire CG Farmer Wins Conservation Award



Congratulations to CG member, Mark Tufnell, who has achieved 1st place in the Conservation Class of the Gloucestershire Root, Fruit & Grain Society competition. Mark farms 1800 acres in the Cotswolds AONB and is passionate about conservation. The Judges were impressed by the extra mile that Mark has gone to look after the wildlife on the farm, alongside running an efficient and professional arable enterprise, noting that Mark has long been a champion of the Grey Partridge, chairing the GWCTs Cotswold Grey Partridge Group for a number of years. By creating year-round habitat such as nesting sites and insect-rich areas for chicks, utilising Conservation Grade habitats, Mark has managed to substantially increase the Grey

Partridge population on the Estate.

The Gloucestershire Root, Fruit & Grain Society was formed in 1863 when two farmers visiting Gloucester market came to blows over who could grow the best crops. A peacemaker suggested that examples of the crops should be brought to Gloucester where an independent judge would pronounce the winner. Interest was such that it became an annual event with more and more classes being added over the years.



UPTAKE OF STEWARDSHIP OPTIONS AND THE CFE



The official uptake figures for the end of July 2011 have provided the disappointing news that very little has changed in terms of the percentage uptake of the various options in stewardship schemes compared to figures published for June 2009.

With the exception of the now defunct management plans, the top ten most popular options in ELS have remained the same. Interestingly, the percentage of agreements containing the preferred options in the Campaign for the Farmed Environment has remained stable or fallen since 2009; although acreage of two measures has increased over these two years (field corner management by 14% and wild bird seed mixture by 61%). Other CFE measures have declined in acreage: nectar flower mixtures (-3%), beetle banks (-26%), skylark plots (-30%), uncropped cultivated margins (-57%), cereals for wholecrop silage (-38%), unfertilised cereal headlands (-53%) and unharvested cereal headlands (-79%)

At the recent CG Regional Technical Updates, Natural England advisor Harold Makant told growers that it would seem that the Campaign for the Farmed Environment (CFE) will miss its targets for June 2012. A major aim of the CFE was to double the uptake of in-field options to 79,342ha, however, as of 1st October 2011 there were only 72,994ha of these options recorded in stewardship schemes (52,317 ha in ELS and 20,677ha in HLS).

You could still help the CFE picture if any of your CG habitats are not recorded in ELS/HLS or CSS, by contacting the Campaign for the Farmed Environment at <http://www.cfeonline.org.uk> where you can register the areas of your in-field options to help meet the campaign's targets.





THOMPSON'S TOPICAL CG TIPS

by Peter Thompson

Bumble Bees

Bumblebees are fundamental to our ecosystem. Hundreds of species of wildflower, fruits such as raspberries, strawberries and tomatoes and vegetables such as runner beans are dependent on them for pollination. The total value of pollination in the UK exceeds £400 million. However, over the last 70 years there has been a dramatic decrease in their population, with two species becoming totally extinct and six of the remaining 24 species now listed as UK Biodiversity Action Plan (UK BAP) priority species.

In the UK, the flower-rich grasslands on which bumblebees depend have reduced by 97% since the 1940s. This is primarily a result of a move to more intensive forms of agriculture after the Second World War, resulting in the loss of hay meadows and clover leys.



Meanwhile changes in domestic gardens, with a preference for decking and mown lawns, has also meant fewer flowers for the bees. This loss of habitat has led to fragmentation, with species surviving in isolated areas such as military land, grassland nature reserves and coastal grasslands. This isolation results in genetic isolation and drift, which raises the potential of further extinctions.



Following support from the Heritage Lottery Fund, the Bumblebee Conservation Trust plans to begin a three-year conservation project. Working with landowners, farmers, the public and schools across the

UK, the project will raise awareness of these important pollinators and help inform people on how best to protect them. Flower-rich habitat will be provided where it is needed most to reconnect the small isolated populations while an extensive awareness-raising programme, including an interactive website, community talks, learning packs

for children, and a national wildlife self-assessment garden scheme, will be rolled out across the country.

Sharing biodiversity data

The National Biodiversity Network (NBN) is a national collaboration of organisations which are all committed to sharing biodiversity data and making it publicly available. The organisations involved range from the government agencies, research organisations, local record centres, conservation charities and local and national recording groups. The NBN Gateway is the internet portal that allows anyone to access much of this information. In April this year, version 4 of the NBN Gateway was released, with an exciting new Interactive Mapping Tool. This enables fast map tile generation and new ways of visualising the data, such as the species density of a species designation (e.g. a Habitats Directive Species) and views these against a backdrop of BAP priority habitats or known site boundaries. This allows easy identification of hot spots of protected species within a chosen area.

You can also map single datasets, providing a quick way to explore the species density per recorded square and compare dataset coverage. Left clicking on a square brings up details of the species recorded and datasets used - it also allows access to records (where permitted) for feedback and study. Version 4 also allows the mapping of a single species, it is now possible to perform targeted searches for data!

There are also a number of backdrops against which species and habitat data can be plotted, including road maps and aerial photographs, which are great for viewing records recorded to 6 figure grid references. Further developments are planned over the coming months!

One of the new functions of the Interactive Mapping Tool is that it also contains a facility to set up maps by URL. These URLs allow you to link to the mapping tool with certain information prefilled on the map, and zoomed to the right location. This will allow you to provide links to the tool from web pages and documentation, and even embed the tool in your websites.



You can find out more about the Get Map URL facility on the NBN website: www.nbn.org.uk/Useful-things/Document-Library/Easy-maps-tool.aspx

On the NBN web-site you can find out all about the Network and search the NBN Gateway. You can also sign up to receive the NBN e-newsletter so that you are kept up to date with the latest news and developments from across the Network.

Ryegrass seed for birds

The RSPB and NIAB jointly researched the possibilities of leaving an area of Rye grass un-harvested to see if certain farmland birds would use the seed. Here is an abstract from their paper.

The project managed silage fields to provide abundant seed as a conservation measure for wintering birds. Buntings strongly selected ryegrass plots, where they fed predominantly on ryegrass seed and maintained body weights similar to those on high quality arable wintering habitats. Bunting usage of seeded plots was positively related to *Lolium* seedhead density, peaking at October seedhead densities above 400 seedheads/m². Perennial ryegrass *Lolium perenne* swards could only provide one early silage crop (cut by mid-late May), while Italian ryegrass *Lolium multiflorum* was able to provide two silage cuts and a large seed crop. Mats of lodged seedheads ensured the continuity of seed provision, resulting in high bird usage during late winter, when most seed has been depleted from existing wild bird seed measures. The estimated cost of the measure was comparable to small-plot measures in current English agri-environment schemes.

A rotational seeded ryegrass measure could constitute an effective, affordable and widely applicable conservation measure for seed-eating farmland birds in grassland-dominated farmland across NW Europe.

Nature Improvement Areas (NIAs)

Following Sir John Lawton's report and DEFRA's white paper on the countryside, the Government asked for groups to submit applications for areas to become NIAs. 76 applications were submitted – now thinned out to 20 – including 2 “farmer” led ones – Hampshire Farmers Linking Landscapes & the Marlborough Downs. The Hampshire bid is

headed up by Nick Rowsell, Conservation Grade farmer and now Nuffield Scholar. By January, having submitted plans/budgets etc, the final 12 areas will be chosen – to start work in April 2012 with a budget of £200,000 per year for 3 years. This does not sound a lot of money, however, collateral funders such as the Forestry Commission and Environment Agency have been told to look very favourably on funding projects within the NIA's. So, watch this space to see if Nick is successful – we should know in January.

Tree & shrub planting

If you have over 1 hectare (2.5 acres) of land that you would like to plant, the Woodland Trust may be able to help you. You can read about their woodland creation scheme for landowners on their website at www.woodlandtrust.org.uk/MOREwoods. The Forestry commission also offers grants too.

If you are planting an area up with trees this winter, just remember a few little things before you get under way!



Most grant aided schemes allow 10% of the area to remain unplanted – we would strongly recommend that you follow this – in years to come you will see how important these

open areas are to wildlife within the wood.

We would always include shrubs within the woodland planting. So often people say, “it was great for the first few years – but then the canopy closed over and now it is very bare in the bottom”! At this stage it is difficult to add shrubs, but plant them at the beginning and many shrubs will not mind some shading once they are established.

If you are in a wide, open landscape – should you be planting trees at all? Often a badly placed wood can have a major impact on a landscape – changing both the character of the area, and also influencing what species continue to use the area. Maybe just planting shrubs and one or two small trees such as Crab apple will give you what you want without impacting on the ‘openness’ of the Countryside.



NEW £20 MILLION FARMING & FORESTRY IMPROVEMENT SCHEME

Defra has launched its new Farming and Forestry Improvement Scheme (FFIS) to help farming, forestry and horticultural businesses in England to become more efficient at using resources. The scheme aims to help make businesses more profitable and resilient whilst reducing the impact of farming on the environment.

There is £20 million available under FFIS until December 2013. The grant rate is up to 40% in non upland areas, and up to 50% in upland areas and the maximum grant allowable per project is £25,000. The minimum grant is £2,500. The scheme will fund new profit-boosting green schemes that:

- save energy and reduce carbon emissions;
- reduce dependence on artificial fertilizers through better use of manures;
- improve soil quality;
- improve animal health and welfare;
- save and recycle water; and
- promote woodland management by processing timber more efficiently.

Projects must fall within one of the following focus areas:

- **Nutrient Management** - eligible items include slurry injectors, mechanical slurry separation systems and Global Positioning Systems.
- **Energy Efficiency** - eligible items include heat exchangers, gel coolers and ice builders.
- **Water Resource Management** - eligible items include pipework specifically to intercept and divert roof water to a storage facility, rainwater harvesting equipment.
- **Animal Health and Welfare** - projects which bring about significant improvements in farm animal health and welfare.
- **Forestry** - eligible items include timber processors, forwarders, forestry trailers, tractors mounted forestry grabs.

For further details (<http://www.defra.gov.uk/publications/2011/11/10/pb13678-ffis-guidance/>). Round one opened on the 16 November 2011 and the **deadline for receipt of applications is 17 January 2012**.

ACADEMIC SUCCESS FOR CG FARMER



Conservation Grade grower and CG Technical Advisory Panel member Phil Jarvis has completed a Master of Science Degree at Harper Adams. Phil said "I was delighted and surprised to graduate with a distinction". His degree took three years to complete and Phil had to combine his study with his job as Head of Farming for the GWCT Allerton Project.

Phil's dissertation looked at the yield variation between headlands and how this affects the crop yield foregone when choosing where to place environmental stewardship 'in-field' options. "It has been a rewarding a challenge, increasing my understanding of the importance of the balance between the natural and farmed environment" he said.



REGIONAL TECHNICAL UPDATES

WINTER 2011

What a great round of Regional Update meetings we have had this winter! The combination of high turnouts, good speakers, decent weather and excellent food made for three enjoyable and informative days...



SOUTHERN REGION - HAMPSHIRE

Jon and Sarah Capes hosted the Southern region update on a murky day in mid November. Jon farms 1235 acres near Andover. The farm has been CG-accredited for some years and is also in HLS, with around 15% of the arable area managed for environmental targets.

The farm includes 93 acres of traditional woodland as well as 50km of hedgerows which have been substantially restored in a long term restoration plan started in 1996, including planting over 250 new trees (mainly oaks).

Our first stop on the farm walk was to view one of the many barn owl boxes, perfectly located facing south east on an old oak tree, in a well established tussocky grass meadow. The box Jon is pointing to in the picture (right) was monitored this year for the CG barn owl project and recorded 3 chicks.



Next stop was a very large field corner (left) which has been squared off alongside a row of telegraph poles. Here Jon has four CG habitats sandwiched between the hedge and the crop, firstly a 6 metre tussocky grass strip alongside the hedge, then a 6 metre legume-based pollen & nectar strip, next to a 6 metre perennial wildflower strip which had recently been topped, and then a block of winter bird food (below left).

Finally we visited a field corner (below middle and right) which was established some years ago with a perennial wildflower mix. The grasses had become quite dominant in recent years, but Jon has been managing them with a regime of cutting and spraying with a graminicide, the wild flowers are now beginning to flourish again.



CENTRAL REGION - OXFORDSHIRE

David Taylor hosted the Central region update on a surprisingly mild day in mid November. Around 15 CG members enjoyed a superb home cooked lunch provided by David's wife Philippa, ably assisted by 'sous-chef' Phoebe.



The farm was about 400 acres when David first joined CG, but has now grown to around 600 acres. One end of the farm has a limestone brash soil, while the other end is heavy clay.



David showed us a block of his winter bird food (left) which had been sown in mid May this year after the very dry spring.

The field corner had been sown the year before with a 2 year mix but severe snow in December decimated everything, so David re-sowed this year. He used a mix (from Brights Seeds) containing kale, fodder radish, quinoa, sunflowers and some phacelia. On the day of our visit there was still evidence of insects foraging because it was so mild, and as we arrived a huge flock of Linnets flew out and into the neighbouring oak trees.

Next stop was beside a wet ditch (right) which some years ago had been buffered on either side with a grass mix. David explained that the brambles had encroached so he had consistently cut the area back, which has eventually allowed a range of naturalised wildflowers to begin developing. Now these margins are a great source of pollen & nectar and also home to good numbers of field voles, which has proven ideal for a breeding pair of barn owls who regularly nest in the box on the oak tree in the adjacent field. This year the box was monitored as part of the CG Barn Owl Project and the pair successfully fledged 2 chicks.



Finally we walked over a legume based pollen & nectar area (left), which has been established for 4 years and is still providing good flower numbers, although the consensus was that the grasses have started to become dominant and should now be treated with a graminicide.



EASTERN REGION - ESSEX

John & Celia Hare's farm was the location for the Eastern region technical update where they hosted 20 CG members in the 'Anderson shelter' (aka Johns shooting lodge!).



In 1995 the farm was planted up with over 800 metres of new hedgerow by Celia's father and Celia is now diligently managing them into the desirable 'A' shape.



Three years ago John planted 6 acres of new woodland (left) to square off an awkward area of a wet field which had a significant blackgrass problem. 1100 trees per ha went in, together with a variety of shrubs, and around 95% have been successful.

A small 2 acre field (right) was the next stop on the tour, where John explained that the field had previously been set aside, and more recently an ELS field corner. Over time the natural regeneration has not only created a very good Barn

Owl foraging area but numerous wild flowers like knapweed have appeared and in summer numerous skipper butterflies were seen foraging. The grass is in need of some control to encourage the wildflowers and the consensus was that a spring spray with a graminicide would be a benefit.



The farm also has a medieval moat (left) which was last cleared out in the dry summer of '76. The edges had become very overgrown, so the trees were recently coppiced around 3 sides and wildflowers planted on the central island.

The neighbouring 15 acre field used to be meadow land many years ago but had been cultivated unsuccessfully in recent years. The decision was taken to re-wild it and John has planted the whole area with unguarded trees but with a large deer fence around the edge. The trees have struggled in the last 2 seasons due to snow and extreme weather, but survival rates are still good. The hope is they will soon look as good as the 100 oak trees planted in 2000 on the aptly named 'Millennium Drive'.

Our thanks go to the hosts of these three events:

Jon & Sarah Capes, David & Philippa Taylor, and John & Celia Hare



HABITAT ASSESSMENT REVIEW - QUIZ!

At the recent round of CG Regional Technical Updates, we asked Peter Thompson to give CG members a brief review of some of the points of interest that had come up during the habitat assessments of CG farms.

Rather than just list the various points, we thought it would be a good idea to feed them back by way of a quiz, just for some fun. It certainly got everyone racking their brains to try and remember what they had been told during their habitat assessments. So, just for the record (and for your future reference) those key points are reproduced here:



Question 1: Are you allowed to use fertilizer on ELS Wild Bird Seed mixes without a derogation?

Answer: YES you are! But how much nitrogen are you allowed to use?

Answer: As much as you wish as long as you follow wider farm regulations such as Nitrate Vulnerable Zone rules, etc.



Question 2: In an ELS Wild Bird Seed mix, are you allowed to simply spray Kale for Flea Beetle?

Answer: NO you are not. You need a BASIS qualified agronomist to give you permission before hand.



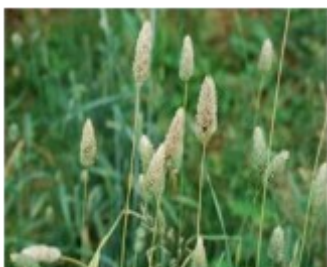
Question 3: Can CG farmers treat Flea Beetle with any pyrethroid?

Answer: NO, only 'taufluvinate' (e.g. Mavrik) is permitted if spraying takes place between March 31st and harvest. During these times all other pyrethroids are banned.



Question 4: What is this plant and are you allowed it in an ELS Wild Bird Seed mix?

Answer: It is **American (Canadian) Sweet Clover** and you are NOT currently allowed to use it in a mix. It can smother other species in the mix if to high a seed rate is used.



Question 5: What is this plant?

Answer: It is one of the Bristle Grasses (*Setaria spp*). It is very similar to Barnyard Grass (*Echinochloa crus-galli*) and also Fox-tail Millet. It is invasive and seems to be appearing in more bird seed mixes.

If your bird food mix stays in the same location you need to control it using stale seed bed techniques, or consider splitting the crop types in the mix, and spraying the tolerant ones with a graminicide.





Question 6: *How many plants must be sown in an ELS Nectar Flower mix?*

Answer: You must sow at least four nectar-rich plants (e.g. red clover, alsike clover, birdsfoot trefoil, sainfoin, musk mallow, common knapweed). No single species make up more than 50% of the mix.



Question 7: *Are Borage or Phacelia allowed in a Nectar Flower mix ?*

Answer: **YES** they are technically allowed, but they are annuals, which means they won't produce flowers if you cut them in year one.



Question 8: *According to the CG Protocol, do you have to have BOTH legume mixes and wildflower mixes?*

Answer: **NO** - under the CG Protocol the 4% Pollen & Nectar requirement can come solely from wildflower habitat but it is preferable to have both wildflower and legume habitats. Legumes have a much shorter flowering window than the wildflower mixes, but are important for many species of pollinating insects.



Question 9: *Are you allowed to spray grasses out of nectar mixes with a graminicide?*

Answer: **NO**, not without a derogation from DEFRA, ideally supported by an 'expert'! However, the rules have changed recently so you can now spray your 'conservation crops' with any products that include on their label "green cover" as a specified crop. (NB. if in any doubt give us a ring).



Question 10: *Are floristically enhanced margins funded under ELS?*

Answer: **NO**, currently they are only funded under HLS.



Question 10: *What is the widest a grass buffer strip can be in ELS?*

Answer: 12 metres.



Question 11: *What direction should a Barn Owl box face?*

Answer: They should face in an easterly direction to protect the chicks from the worst of the weather and keep the box cooler in the Summer.





EAGLE OWL VISITS VITACRESS FARM IN PORTUGAL



The magnificent Eagle Owl is becoming a frequent visitor to Vitacress farms in Portugal.

“This Eagle Owl (Bufo Real in Portuguese) was recently sighted on our CG-accredited Boa Vista farm. Although the species was first recorded on the farm in 2006, it has been seen a lot more recently and we’re pretty sure that this is because of the significant increases in wildlife on the farm as a result of CG accreditation,” says Luis Mequita Dias, MD of Vitacress, Portugal.

This is encouraging news and we will have further reports about the habitats on these farms in future issues of the CG Newsletter.

*Conservation Grade
wishes you a
Merry Christmas
and
Happy New Year*

