

# Conservation Grade Nature Friendly Farming Summer 2011

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## CHICKS GALORE ON CG FARMS!

The Conservation Grade Barn Owl research and conservation project is now well underway and chicks are being weighed, measured and ringed on the 50 CG farms that are taking part. The project is designed to assess the fledging rate of barn owl chicks on CG farms and will compare this to other publicly available data. We have been sent some great photos of Barn Owl chicks from CG nest boxes. Here are a few of them....



The three chicks above left hatched in the nest box at Peter Boyle's farm near Basingstoke, Hampshire. Home for the two chicks above right is a nest box at the Vitacress farm at Pinglestone, Hampshire.



Two chicks have hatched in a nest box at Ian Margett's Sheardown Farm in Hampshire, one of which is seen here on the left cuddling the game-keeper, Ken Siford, who was helping to ring the chicks.

Robert Law (right) had three chicks in one of his boxes at Thrift Farm in June, where, with Jordans Cereals, a group of national and regional media gathered to watch the weighing and ringing by Colin Shawyer of the Barn Owl Conservation Network.



Robert told CG, "I've never held a Barn Owl chick before, never mind three! It's a fantastic experience."

(Continued on page 3)

# THE NATURAL CHOICE: SECURING THE VALUE OF NATURE

There was something of a mixed response to the June launch of the highly anticipated government white paper titled *'The Natural Choice: Securing the Value of Nature'*, the first White Paper on the natural environment in 20 years.

The paper follows on from the recent work on the National Ecosystem Assessment (which put economic and financial values on British nature) and outlines the Government's vision for the future of landscapes and ecosystem services. It highlights that although we know the environment provides many irreplaceable and valuable services, we have been unsustainably exploiting its natural capital for many years - leading to severe biodiversity loss and degradation. Plans for action to halt and reverse the decline in biodiversity and ecosystem services are described in the paper.



Here are a few highlights:

- £7.5 million of funding will be made available to create 12 new **Nature Improvement Areas (NIAs)**, designed to help wildlife adapt to climate change. The idea behind this is to encourage conservation to take place in a 'joined-up' manner at a landscape scale and this initiative is aimed at transforming 12 rural and urban areas into bigger and more connected sites for wildlife. *(NB - Critics point out that the Lawton Review 'Making Space for Nature' estimated the cost of restoring damage already done to the natural environment at around £0.6 to £1.1 billion, so this is really a drop in the ocean in addressing this).*
- A one-off fund of £1 million will be made available in 2011/12 for **Local Nature Partnerships** to be set up. Members can be from Local Authorities, National Parks, local nature agencies and organisations, the Environment Agency, Natural England, the Forestry Commission and local landowners and businesses. The idea being to deliver more joined-up advice for local areas and support delivery of the Nature Improvement Areas. Local Nature Partnerships (LNPs) had to send in their applications by 31<sup>st</sup> July and Defra will respond by September 2011.
- The **Natural Capital Committee** has been set up. This is a new independent body which will report to the Government's economic affairs committee chaired by the Chancellor of the Exchequer, it will be part of the move to a green economy. It will put the value of nature at the heart of the Government's economic thinking, and advise about the best way of securing our natural assets for the future.
- Businesses will be expected to take greater action to protect the environment and a **business-led Task Force** will investigate potential ways to expand markets in which ecosystem service providers are paid by the users of the service. This initiative is also tasked with expanding UK business opportunities from new products and services which are good for both the economy and nature.
- Imminent reforms of the planning system will introduce **biodiversity offsetting** for developers to ensure we don't lose wildlife sites and make them better by making and improving other sites.

Conservation Grade welcomes the new white paper, as it places the value of nature at the centre of the choices Government must take and should help to enhance our environment, economic growth and personal wellbeing. We are particularly encouraged by the plans to join up conservation areas, something CG farmers have been doing for years.



## NEW MEMBERS JOIN THE GUILD

On 22<sup>nd</sup> June we held the second CG induction course of the year at Robert Law's Thrift Farm and took five new farmers through the requirements of CG membership. It was a blisteringly hot day and the habitats on the farm were looking tip top.



This is an exciting time for Conservation Grade as we continue to introduce new farmers to the scheme to grow additional milling wheat for Allied Mills and oats for Jordans.

Jon Birchill (far left) is the BBC Farmer of the Year and already grows quality wheats for bread making contracts at his farm near Hitchin ([www.rarebreed-beef-lamb-pork.co.uk/](http://www.rarebreed-beef-lamb-pork.co.uk/)). On joining CG Jon commented:

"I'm a big fan of Conservation Grade because it expects its farmers to work to specific ecological measures to meet the standard, giving very tangible outcomes in terms of increases in wildlife populations. Allied Mills becoming a licensee for Conservation Grade is a huge coup for the

scheme. All Allied Mills' customers now have the option to develop their own Nature Friendly Farming brand; as this expands it has the potential to create thousands more acres of wildlife habitats as more farmers are accepted into the Conservation Grade protocol to meet the demand.

As part of my post graduate degree I studied how agri-environment measures can be used to restructure a lowland farm to make it profitable, and I've found that by maximising yields on my best land and turning my poorer ground over to environmental schemes, such as the Conservation Grade habitats, I can increase profitability by £150,000 per year – that's £75 per acre across the whole farm! Focusing on pushing for higher yields on the best ground makes us more efficient, reducing inputs per tonne of crop produced; I project this will add up to savings of around 129,000 litres of diesel, 500 tonnes of potash and phosphate, and 375 tonnes of ammonium nitrate on my farm over the next 10 years – while keeping levels of food production high."

Those new members who joined Jon on the induction day were Ben Pledger from Hertfordshire; Martin Manning from Herefordshire; Keith Daly from Essex; and Karl Cass from Surrey. The next CG induction course is scheduled for October 2011.



(Continued from page 1) **CHICKS GALORE ON CG FARMS**

The Barn Owl Conservation Network are undertaking the monitoring of the chicks with CG and Colin Shawyer says that so far his team of licensed ringers have been impressed with the numbers of chicks that have hatched. They have been removing each chick temporarily from the nest box and ringing each one after recording their wingspans, weight and other key measurements. The chick

seen on the right with Colin weighed 365grams which is slightly heavier than it will weigh as an adult. Each ringer will return to the nest boxes, during the five or so weeks that the chicks remain in the nest, to monitor fledging success and check for any further broods.

The previous two harsh winters are known to have affected vole, shrew and field mouse populations and are thought to have impacted on Barn Owl numbers, although the major reason for the 70% decline in the owl populations since the 1930's has been due to loss of suitable habitats on farms.



## NEWS FROM CG LICENSEES



The **Steve's Leaves blog** mentions the success of the Steve's Leaves Salad Bar, which is run in partnership with the Cole Henley Restaurant Bar & Grill, and has been touring shows and events across the country. They have had some great days out already from the Devon County Show to the Royal Highland Show, taking in the British Grand Prix at Silverstone on the way!



Have you noticed Steve's Leaves on the shelf in Sainsbury's stores? Their distinctive pack design has just won first place in the prestigious Dieline Awards. Previous winners include Coca-Cola!

## WIN A JORDANS BREAKFAST HAMPER

Jordans have recently launched two new products...

**Honey & Nut Country Crisp**  
and  
**Super Nutty Granola**

...and are offering a hamper of these products in our summer competition. To be in with a chance of winning these delicious cereals send your answer to the following question to [liz.burman@conservationgrade.org](mailto:liz.burman@conservationgrade.org) by the 31st August 2011.

**What is the name of Bill Jordan's Norfolk nature reserve?**



## NEW CG SIGNS



**At long last!!** The NEW Conservation Grade signs are here. All CG members have received one sign with this issue of the newsletter. We'd be grateful if you could put it up in a prominent position, perhaps alongside a footpath or on a farm building.

We currently have a limited supply but we may be able to provide additional signs to those who would like them. Please contact Liz Burman ([liz.burman@conservationgrade.org](mailto:liz.burman@conservationgrade.org)).



# JORDANS SUMMER UPDATE

The County Shows are now well underway and have so far proved a tremendous success.

There are three shows left to visit this year:

**August 12<sup>th</sup> & 13<sup>th</sup>**  
at Shrewsbury Flower Show, Shrewsbury  
**August 16<sup>th</sup>-18<sup>th</sup>**  
at the Pembrokeshire Show, Pembrokeshire  
**September 9<sup>th</sup>-11<sup>th</sup>**  
at Jimmy Doherty's Harvest at Jimmy's, Suffolk



## A SELECTION OF RECENT PRESS ARTICLES ABOUT THE BARN OWL PROJECT

As mentioned on the front page, Jordans was instrumental in getting some good PR for the CG Barn Owl Project.

### The Daily Telegraph

#### NATURE NOTES

#### Wildlife-friendly farms fly to aid of barn owls

Dozens of farms are to take part in a scheme to measure whether wildlife-friendly farming helps barn owls. The project will look at the fledging rates of barn owl chicks on farms managed under the Conservation Grade scheme, in which farmers turn 10 per cent of their land into wildlife habitats in return for a premium price for their crop. The research is focusing on barn owls, which have declined in numbers since the 1930s, because they are at the top of the food chain.

### DAILY EXPRESS

will compare results with other surveys to find out whether more chicks fledge where there is good habitat. Conservation Grade estimates its farmers are managing 65,000 acres of wild flower meadows, hedgerows, grass margins, woodlands and wetlands. Tim Nevard, chief executive of Conservation Grade, said: "We're working with Jordans on Project Barn Owl to highlight the difference Conservation Grade farming can make to the intricate world of barn owls and other wildlife."



### Ten things you never knew about... owls

WILLIAM HARTSTON

Jordans Cereals are today launching their 'Adopt a Barn Owl' competition, as part of Conservation Grade's Project Barn Owl. For a chance to name and adopt a barn owl chick, see [www.jordanscereals.co.uk](http://www.jordanscereals.co.uk)

1. Florence Nightingale had a pet owl, which she called Athena.
2. An owl can hear a mouse 60 feet away.
3. The horned owl does not have horns. The bits that look like horns are tufts of feather.
4. Panamanian footballer Luis Moreno received death threats after he kicked an injured owl off the field in a game in Columbia. The owl later died.
5. Barn owls do not hoot, they screech.
6. According to an ancient Polish belief, girls who die unmarried turn into doves, while those who married turn into owls.
7. The owl monkey of Central and South America has very big eyes and sleeps during the day.
8. The soft-fringed edges of a barn owl's feathers allow it to fly silently, which is bad news for the mice, voles and shrews it preys on.
9. In Cameroon, the owl is known as 'the bird that makes you afraid'.
10. "He respects Owl, because you can't help respecting anybody who can spell TUESDAY, even if he doesn't spell it right" (AA Milne, The House At Pooh Corner).



## NEW HERBICIDE FOR BLACKGRASS CONTROL IN OATS

**Liberator** has recently received a **SOLA** (specific off label approval) for use in winter oats. This could be a useful inclusion to herbicide programmes where blackgrass control is difficult. Liberator, marketed by Bayer CropScience Limited, contains 100 g/l diflufenican and 400 g/l flufenacet and is widely used in winter wheat and barley in sequences with other herbicides as part of an anti-resistance strategy.



This new SOLA specifies a maximum rate for use in winter oats of 0.6 l/ha, with one application per crop permitted (before 31st December in the year of planting and before fifth tiller stage).

CG member James Pimblett (left), from Hertfordshire, already has some experience of Liberator on oats from field trials carried out by his agronomist, who tested Liberator (pre-emergence) in trials on the farm. James agrees that you will need to be careful as crop damage can occur, especially in the overlaps, as shown in some of the plots in this picture.

The SOLA document (NO. 1550/2011) can be downloaded from the CRD web site (<http://www.pesticides.gov.uk/databases.asp>)

And remember that whilst Specific Off Label Approvals (SOLAs) indicate legality they do not guarantee safety. The use of any SOLA is at growers own risk.

## HELP FOR THE BELEAGUERED BUMBLEBEE



**Five years ago** a Trust was set up with the purpose of halting the decline of bumblebee numbers through conservation and education. In the last 70 years two species of bumblebee have become extinct in the UK. We currently have 24 species of bumblebee in the UK. Two of these are on the point of extinction and a further 6 are recognised by UK BAP (UK Biodiversity Action Plan) as being of conservation concern.

The Bumblebee Conservation Trust ([www.bumblebeeconservation.org.uk](http://www.bumblebeeconservation.org.uk)) now has over 7,000 members, has Chris Packham as its president, and is conducting many and varied research projects on bumblebee habitat, health and conservation.

Two of their projects focus on increasing the habitats of the UK's two rarest bumblebees, the Shrill Carder and the Great Yellow, by raising awareness among landowners. Populations of the Shrill Carder bumblebee (*Bombus sylvarum*) are restricted to just a handful of sites in the south of England and Wales, while the Great Yellow bumblebee (*Bombus distinguendus*) is only found in the north and west of Scotland. Under their 'Bees for Everyone' Campaign, BBCT Conservation Officers will be conducting site visits to these 'hot spot' target areas.



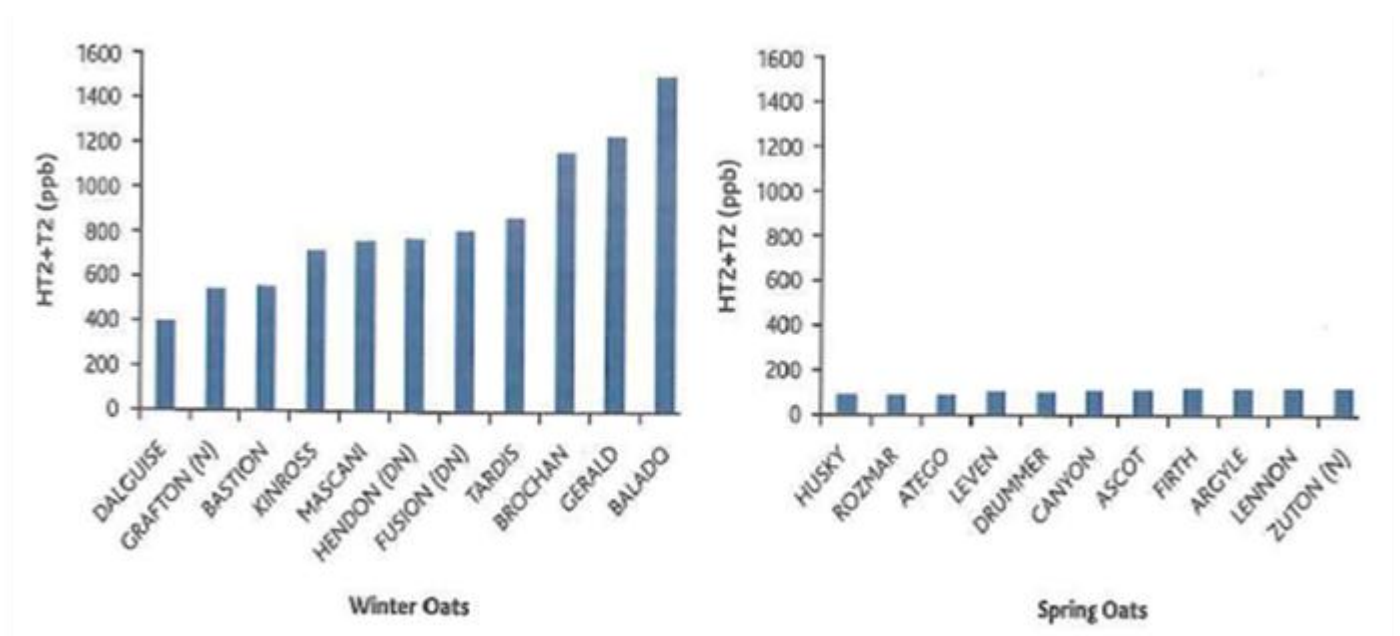
More on this and how Conservation Grade members may be able to help with BBCT studies to follow in future editions of the CG newsletter.



# MYCOTOXINS IN UK OATS - LIMITS MAY BE SET

You will be familiar with the European legislation (set in 2006) for three fusarium mycotoxins, namely deoxynivalenol (DON), zearalenone (ZON) and fumonisins. DON & ZON occur in small grain cereals, whereas fumonisins are only detected in maize.

In the UK, oats are the least susceptible cereal to the diseases that produce DON and ZON, so they are rarely a problem. However two other fusarium mycotoxins (known as HT2 and T2) were identified at high levels in oats during 2002-2008 (see figure 1).

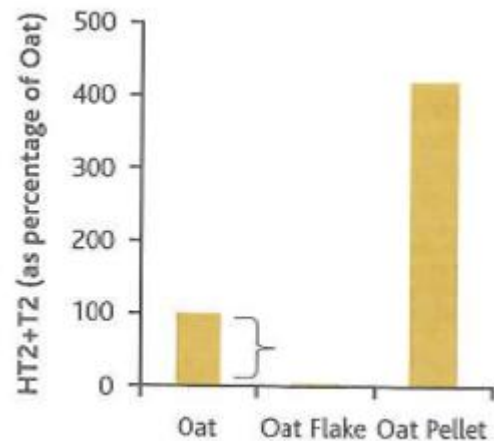


**Figure 1.** HT2 + T2 mycotoxin concentration in HGCA Recommended List trails (2009-2010). Source: HGCA

Currently there is no European legislation for these toxins, but the European Commission have been considering setting a combined limit of 500µg/kg for unprocessed oats. Levels of HT2 and T2 fluctuate between seasons, but on average, 26% of UK oats at harvest have exceeded this limit.

So is anything happening? Well, recently the European Commission requested the European Food Safety Authority for an opinion on the risks of HT2 and T2 toxins and, based on the conclusions of this opinion, legislation for these mycotoxins maybe set within the next year (2011-2012).

What this will mean for the UK oat industry will depend on where levels are set for unprocessed oats and oat products. A limit of 500µg/kg for unprocessed oats could have a large impact on choice of varieties, especially in favour of spring varieties, which have significantly lower levels of toxins (see figure 1 again).



The processing of cereals also plays a part, since processing can result in big reductions of mycotoxins in our diet. For example, all oats are de-hulled prior to processing for human consumption. The resultant oat flakes (which we eat) have around 95% less toxins, whereas the hulls (which are then pelleted and used for animal feed), have significantly more (see figure 2 left).

**Figure 2.** HT2 + T2 mycotoxin concentration in oat flakes and pellets as compared to the concentration in the original unprocessed oats. Source: HGCA





## PENSTHORPE UPDATE BY ED BRAMHAM-JONES

The Pensthorpe Estate at Fakenham in Norfolk is quite unique with its diverse array of habitats across both the farm and nature reserve. There are large areas of water in the reserve, created back in the 1970's when the site was quarried, in addition to the River Wensum, which is a chalk fed river designated both a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) and Special Area of Conservation (SAC).

This means that on most of the fields we have had to put buffer strips round them to stop runoff into water sources. Many of these areas we have put into wildflower margins and this year they have been full of wildlife.

One field that overlooks the Wensum Valley was converted from arable land to a wildflower mix about 7 years ago and the results are now incredible and this year has seen Bee Orchids spreading across the meadow. With the dry spring in Norfolk, the margins were quite late to flower, but are now full of Knapweed, Lady's Bedstraw, Wild Carrot and Musk Mallow.



These areas provide a fantastic nectar source for bees and butterflies, and so far this season we have recorded 17 species of butterfly, many using the wildflower areas and pollen and nectar mixes in the Conservation Grade trial plots.

One highlight was on the edge of the farm when a Purple Hairstreak (*Neozephyrus quercus*) was found on an area of oak trees, their favourite food source.



Purple Hairstreak Butterfly (*Neozephyrus quercus*)

The breeding year for waders has been particularly good, with Lapwing, Oystercatcher, Avocets and Little Ringed Plovers all successfully rearing many young. Skylark numbers were slightly down, maybe due to the meadows flowering later and not providing enough insects for youngsters. We are now up to 127 species being seen on the estate this year, with one sighting of a Honey Buzzard and good numbers of Turtle Doves being two highlights.



Honey Buzzard



## CG Habitat Assessment reveals rare Adonis Blue

The rare Adonis Blue butterfly was spotted during a recent CG habitat assessment on Vines Farm near Reading, Berks, farmed by CG member Roddy Young.

The beautiful Adonis Blue (*Polyommatus bellargus*) is a small rare butterfly of southern chalk downland and limestone grassland, where it flies low over short turf. The males have brilliant sky-blue wings, while the females are brown with a row of red spots with blue edges on the hind wing and are far less conspicuous. Unlike the Common Blue, the Adonis has dark veins in the white fringe to its wing margins. It is a resident of England and although it was previously classified as a 'Priority' conservation species on the UK BAP list because its range had been declining, it is now known to be recovering in some areas, so it was very pleasing to find it on a CG farm.



## Silver-washed Fritillary returns to Suffolk

A butterfly absent from Suffolk since the late 50's has made a remarkable recovery across East Anglia this year, moving in to a handful of secluded woods, as reported by CG member Steve Honeywood.

Rob Parker from Butterfly Conservation said: "It comes as a wonderful surprise to have the Silver-washed Fritillary back in Suffolk. It is a testament to local landowners and conservation charities who manage their woodlands for wildlife, that suitable habitat now exists."



The Silver-washed Fritillary became extinct in the county after the war as forest management practice changed and intensive farming cut links between woods. The charity Butterfly Conservation was delighted when records of the butterfly started coming in during the hot spell in July. It is believed that colonies established recently in Essex dispersed from their home woods after successful breeding there last year. The butterflies emerged early in July, and made their first appearance in two Suffolk woods on 20<sup>th</sup> July. To date, they have been reported and photographed from a total of 8 Suffolk localities, usually on thistle - their favourite source of nectar.

The beautiful orange butterfly is a denizen of open woodland clearings, and relies on dog violet as the food plant of its caterpillar. The recent sightings are thought to be the result of natural dispersal in search of fresh habitat.



Members of the Suffolk Branch of Butterfly Conservation have been working hard to conserve other rare species including the **White Admiral**, and it has often been in woods known to support White Admiral that the Silver-washed Fritillary has been sighted.

The White Admiral is a UK BAP species which is doing badly in England at large, but appears to be spreading in Suffolk and Steve Honeywood reports it has been breeding since a 1984 survey. It likes large, damp woods with plenty of honeysuckle (the larval host plant) and bramble (nectar for the adult).

If you would like to find out more about Butterfly Conservation and get involved in your area look at: [www.suffolkbutterflies.org.uk](http://www.suffolkbutterflies.org.uk) or contact the Membership Secretary on 01379 643665.





# THOMPSON'S TOPICAL CG TIPS

by Peter Thompson

## Managing margins and larger areas of grass

Areas of grass that go into winter too 'evenly' managed are missing a trick! Margins can be half cut providing a short sward next to an area of uncut rank grass – this immediately provides diversity. The cut area offers green new growth grass – ideal for grazing Brown Hare. On the other hand the uncut grass is an ideal over-wintering site for beneficial insects and will also provide cover for small mammals. In the late winter the dead tussocky grass will offer cover when many other areas to hide in have long gone, and as spring arrives the dead grass from the previous year's growth will be perfect for nesting game birds.



## Mustard

Don't forget that you can always sprinkle a little Mustard around on your stubbles that are going to be left over-winter. If done straight after the combine (or even 10 days before!) it will germinate quickly, grow rapidly, flower and in some years provide seed. This will provide extra cover for birds such as Grey Partridge, supply a late nectar source and maybe even a small seed source for finches and buntings in late winter.



*White-clawed Crayfish*

## Crayfish

Do you have native White-clawed Crayfish in the streams on your farm? The UK Crayfish website was launched back in May and brings together up-to-date information about the White-clawed Crayfish and its conservation in the UK. It also discusses the impact that non-native Crayfish species are having, and talks about methods of controlling them.

## Barn Owls

During one of the summer CG technical training up-date days we were asked if Barn Owls breed in their first year – nobody was totally sure, so here are the definitive facts! Barn owls can and do indeed breed in their first year. Pair bonding often starts early. Egg laying usually starts in April and the female normally lays around 5 or 6 eggs which she starts to incubate as soon as the first one is laid. Normally, after 31-32 days incubation, the eggs hatch in the order they were laid (at 2-3 day intervals). This is termed asynchronous hatching. Average recorded hatching success rates is usually around 3 to 4 but can be as high as 4.5 in a good year and the age difference between the oldest and youngest nestlings can be as much as three weeks! In years when food is abundant, it may be that all the chicks survive, but in a poor year only the strongest, largest chicks will reach



fledging, thus ensuring that hopefully at least one or two makes it. Food supply, mainly in the form of small mammals, is largely affected by habitat quality, prey density, the weather and the experience and behaviour of the individual adult owls.

## European Brown Hare Syndrome

This viral disease has been observed since 1980 in many European countries in Brown *Lepus europaeus* and Mountain Hares *Lepus timidus*. Most often dead hares are picked-up in the autumn months and have no obvious clinical signs. But occasionally you might come across a hare that looks un-coordinated or is suffering from a loss of balance. It may also lose fear of humans and dogs, run in circles and adopt abnormal postures. Just before death they may experience paralysis and convulsions. Death usually occurs within 5 to 24 hours after the onset of the clinical signs and is attributed to multiple organ failure. Affected hares rarely recover from this disease.



## Get the Chainsaw out this winter!

The vast majority of English woods are uniform, have little structural diversity and lack sunlight warmth and accordingly, wildlife.

This can easily be corrected over a number of years by opening up areas of the woodland by 'skylighting' – taking out enough of the canopy to allow the light to hit the woodland floor. Take out what you think will be sufficient and then double it! Come the summer, when the trees come into leaf, you will be pleased that you kept on removing more. Remember that in the past when woodland was harvested for timber, coppiced for steaks and hurdle making, Spars for thatching and the smoke from charcoal filled the air – only

about 10-12 standard trees per acre were allowed to grow. Woodland was incredibly 'open' compared to today's dark woods and because of this the forests resounded with bird song and butterflies were abundant.



*Common Blue Damselfly*

The chainsaw can also be put to good use around your ponds too – especially on the southern side, by cutting back overgrown trees and shrubs to allow the sunlight back onto part of the water area once again. Next summer, many species such as dragon and damselflies will thank you for your efforts as they bask in the sunshine!

## Woodland

The English Woodland Grant scheme is open for applications to create new woodland and carry out sustainable woodland management, particularly where it protects and enhances the woodland's environmental or social value. Grants include a woodland planning grant which pays £1000 towards a management plan for woodlands over 3ha. The woodland creation grant pays up to £1800/ha with top-ups in priority areas of £2000/ha and £300/ha per year for planting on Agricultural land.



# REGIONAL TECHNICAL UPDATES

## SUMMER 2011

Once again we had a fantastic round of regional updates on CG members' farms and were pleased that so many members were able to attend. Variable weather did not dampen our spirits as the following photos show....

### Vitacress - Mullens Farm, Wiltshire

Vitacress farm manager Andy Elworthy hosted the Southern region technical update in May and impressed CG members with his excellent range of CG habitats.

The 140ha farm grows outdoor baby leaf salads for the 'Steve's Leaves' CG brand and our mainly arable farmer members were very interested to see the salad crops being harvested.



It was a bit chilly in the cold store (below), and despite the initial reluctance to wear the food safety regulation headgear, vanity was soon set aside!

Vitacress farms have adapted their growing systems to accommodate the required Conservation Grade habitats and now have some fine examples of wildflower margins and wild bird seed mixes around the baby leaf salad crop production areas.



## Manor Farm, Buckinghamshire

The Central Region Technical Update was hosted by George and Elaine Morris at their 200ha farm in Hoggeston.

CG members were treated to one of the famous “Morris of Hoggeston” Farmhouse Breakfasts, which George and Elaine regularly put on for locals in aid of charity using their own home produced bacon & sausages and the finest local produce.



George took us round the farm on an open trailer and the first stop was to view the pollarded Black Poplar trees alongside the stream. These are fine examples of this rare tree which has been in decline for the past 200 years and Aylesbury Vale is one of its last remaining strongholds.



The recently established Pollen & Nectar wildflower margin was in its first season of full bloom and was providing a good buffer between the wheat crop and the neighbouring grazing pasture.



A new hedge had also been planted and was surviving extremely well despite the seasons drought, probably due to the chopped wood mulch which was spread just after planting - “quite labour intensive”, said George, “but well worth it”.





### Manor Farms, Hertfordshire

Matt Doggett hosted the Eastern Region Technical Update at his farm in Barley. The weather was terrible and the heavens opened just as we set off for the farm walk. After sheltering in the barn for half an hour with no sign of the rain stopping several attendees decided to call it a day. However a few waited a bit longer and were rewarded with a few dry moments, which allowed us to visit some of the farms terrific habitats. Especially of interest were the Annually Cultivated



Natural Regeneration margins, which work extremely well on this lighter chalky soil.

The 6 metre ACNR margin was cultivated in preparation for the crop of peas which went into the rest of the field. The resultant annual wildflowers, which have grown from the existing seedbank, included some rare poppies and fumitories, like the Rough Headed Poppy (*Papaver hybridum*) and the Few Flowered Fumitory (*Fumaria vaillantii*) as well as Night Flowering Catchfly (*Silene noctiflora*) which closes its flowers.



Rough Poppy (left), Common Poppy (right)



Common Poppy (left), Rough Poppy (right)

The Rough Poppy is much smaller than the Common Poppy, with deep crimson petals that overlap much less. The seed capsules are egg-shaped and covered in bristles.



Few Leaved Fumitory (left), Common Fumitory (right)



Night Flowering Catchfly

As suggested by both its common and Latin name, *Silene noctiflora* is a night flowering species adapted to pollination by night flying moths. It is similar in appearance to White Campion but covered with sticky hairs (hence the common name Catchfly).



## WILDFLOWER SUCCESS



**New CG member** Nick Ottewell (far left) manages the Vitacress farm business in Ramsgate, Kent. Last year he began establishing his required CG habitats and is particularly pleased with his first attempt at a new wildflower area. It was sown with a range of species including fine grasses (Crested Dogs Tail and fescues) together with Knapweed, Self-heal, Yarrow, Wild Carrot, Lady's Bedstraw, Ox-eye Daisy and more. The field was cut 3 times over the last year to keep the weeds (especially thistles) at bay, and now the flowers are in full bloom (especially the Yarrow and Wild Carrot).

Well done Nick and the team at Abbey Farm.

## NURTURING NATURE

**Every year the Nature of Farming Award** celebrates the enormous efforts made by UK farmers to protect the natural environment on their land. The award, which is funded by the EU+ Programme, is supported by the RSPB, the Telegraph, Plantlife and Butterfly Conservation.

Entrants are required to fill out a comprehensive form describing the wildlife-friendly practices that have been adopted on their holding, the environmental schemes they are in, any problems that have been encountered and how they have been resolved.

There were 300 entrants for this year's award and a panel of experts whittled the field down to eight regional finalists. After much deliberation four finalists were picked, one of which is CG member, Robert Law.

Robert Law's 1,500ha farm in Hertfordshire has been Conservation Grade accredited since the scheme's inception in 1985. It's a mixed sheep and arable holding, and Robert has planted several miles of hedges and new areas of woodland since he took over the land. The farm incorporates a chalk heath land SSSI which is home to a flourishing population of the rare Pasque Flower and Chalkhill Blue butterfly.



**Robert Law standing in one of his pollen and nectar habitats.** William Shaw



**Jon Capes feeding his cattle on a crisp winter's day.**

As the standard has been so high, a new Highly Commended category has been introduced to recognise those farmers who are doing great work for the benefit of wildlife but have just been pipped to the post by the finalists. Among eighteen honoured in this category is Jon Capes, a CG member who farms 500ha in Hampshire. Jon has been a CG member since 2008 and his farm has won several awards for conservation in the past. His knowledge of wildlife conservation is fantastic and he has some great example of CG habitats on his farm.

So congratulations to them both and good luck to Robert for the next stage! You can vote for Robert by visiting the RSPB website [www.rspb.org.uk/ourwork/farming/natureoffarming/](http://www.rspb.org.uk/ourwork/farming/natureoffarming/) by the 31st August 2011.

If you are interested in entering the 2012 Nature of Farming Award you can download a entry form from the RSPB website: [www.rspb.org.uk/ourwork/farming/natureoffarming/](http://www.rspb.org.uk/ourwork/farming/natureoffarming/)



## RECIPE CORNER

### QUICK AND EASY STONE BASE PIZZA

**Preparation:** 20mins **Cooking time:** 12-15mins for finished pizza

#### **Basic topping**

1 tbsp olive oil

1 clove garlic, crushed

400g passata

½ tsp sugar

1 tsp mixed dried herbs

100g cheddar cheese, grated

Heat the olive oil in a frying pan and gently fry the garlic until softened. Add the passata and sugar then cook for 5-7 minutes to reduce and thicken. Stir in the dried herbs and season to taste with salt and pepper.

#### **Scone base**

225g **Allinson Nature Friendly self-raising flour**

A pinch of salt

1 tsp baking powder

40g firm butter (or margarine), cut into small pieces

150ml milk

Mix the flour, salt and baking powder together in a bowl and rub in the butter using your fingertips until the mixture resembles fine breadcrumbs. Mix enough milk in to give a soft dough. Roll the dough out on a lightly floured surface to a ½ cm thickness. Place on a greased baking sheet or pizza tray and add the sauce and cheese. Bake at 220°C/fan oven 210°C/425°F/Gas Mark 7 for 12-15mins until the cheese has melted and the pizza base is a golden brown colour. Transfer to a board and cut into slices. Should serve 4 people!

Topping tips:

Replace ½ the cheddar cheese with feta cheese and add some **Steve's Leaves Super Hot Rocket** to the top of the pizza towards the end of the cooking time.

Add slices of pepperoni or ham before adding the cheese.

## ***DATES FOR YOUR DIARY!***

The next round of regional updates will take place in November and December:

**16th November**

Jon Capes' farm near Andover, Hampshire

**22nd November**

David Taylor's farm near Bicester, Oxfordshire

**6th December**

John & Celia Hare's farm near Saffron Walden, Essex

**If you have not yet reserved your place please call Liz on 01767 603637 or email [liz.burman@conservationgrade.org](mailto:liz.burman@conservationgrade.org). SEE YOU THERE!**

