



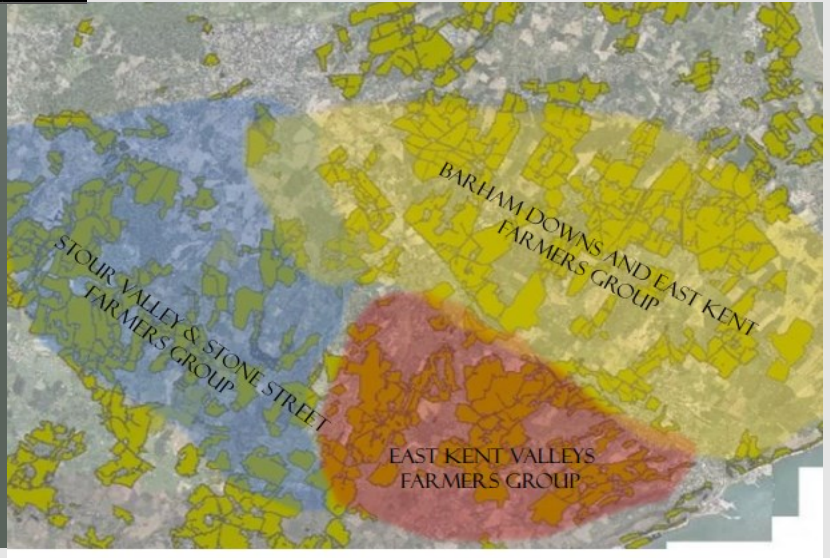
In 2023 we introduced our 'East Kent Downs Landscape Recovery Project'

[www.eastkentdownsfarmers.co.uk](http://www.eastkentdownsfarmers.co.uk)

The project represents the combined work of your three farmer groups. With over 100 farmers and landowners enrolled, the wildlife of east kent is benefitting hugely from all your work !

## The East Kent Downs Landscape Recovery Project

Farmers delivering wildlife-rich landscapes hand in hand with food production



# Winter Newsletter 2023/24

## Summer 2023 Farmer group meetings

Early August saw a great turn out for our green hay spreading demonstration morning, kindly hosted by Katrina and Roland at Hearts Delight Farm near Kingston. With the machinery and expert help from Stuart Jakeman (Elmsted Court Farm) and Andy Wicken (Wicken Contracting Services) we discussed and demonstrated the different techniques for spreading wildflower-rich hay. Deborah Barker from Pasture for Life and members of the Kent Downs AONB and FWAG teams also joined us. Grant funding for the flail collector machine had come from the Kent Downs AONB Farming in Protected Landscape (FIPL) grant scheme.



## Summer 2023 Farmer group meetings

We held a meeting at the Black Robin pub in September to explore opportunities for winter crop and cover crop grazing. Emma Loder -Symonds showcased the work of Nonington Farms in looking at the response of crop yields to winter grazing - it is hoped that their trials work funded through Southern Water funding, with the assistance of FWAG South East will help generate interest in a wider uptake of this.

One outcome of the meeting was to form a network of graziers and arable farms where 'matchmaking' of grazing services could be advertised and this prompted the formation of our recently formed East Kent Downs Farmers 'Whatsapp' group. The chat group is there to help all of your day to day work as a forum for exchanging information, equipment and grazing opportunities. Its good to see it has come in useful for sharing information on the Blue Tongue outbreak.

## Spring 2024 Farmer Group meetings - We are currently organising meetings/farm walks for the coming season. Details to follow

### Awards Galore

It was great to see your work picking up a raft of awards in 2023.

The Barham Downs Farmer group were recognised for their environmental work in the Canterbury Climate Action Partnership Awards, picking up first place in the Partnership Category and First place as overall winner. A big thanks to Katrina and Roland from Hearts Delight Farm who impressed the judges with their stunning hay meadows as a showcase for the work of all your farms.



Many congratulations to award winning LEAF farm, Nonington Farms, for winning the Farmers Weekly 'Environmental Champion 2023' Award for their impressive long term commitment to delivering sustainable farming, putting nature at the heart of their regenerative approach .....

.....And a richly deserved award for 'Oink and Udder' who picked up the 'Kent Fresh Meat Product of the Year' award at the Taste of Kent Awards, championing high animal welfare as part of their pasture-fed farming approach....



.....And fantastic recognition for young farmer Jack Scott in winning the BBC Countryfile 'Young Countryside Champion', for his impressive enterprise growing nutritious vegetables in harmony with the environment, working closely with his supply chains and customers to provide the perfect crop.

# News from the Groups : Barham Downs and East Kent arable group

## Barham Downs Film

We have recently produced a short film showcasing the work of the Barham Downs farmer group. It features the wildflower grassland creation work and the wildlife friendly farming approaches that, together, are reaping great rewards for the wildlife in the area.

Watch the film here : <https://www.youtube.com/watch?>



## Moths galore

Amongst the many new species that are colonising the Barham Downs grasslands are some very rare moths. 'Bright Wave' moth has for many years only been found on a handful of sites on the east Kent coast where its larvae feed on plants of the trefoil family. Last year we noticed these moths turning up on the Barham Downs grassland but it was only this year that, working with Butterfly Conservation, the identity of the moth was confirmed and, with the help of a few volunteers we counted over 1000 moths! These grasslands are now supporting the biggest colony of this moth in the whole of the UK.



**Small Blue Success:** The Barham Downs small blues had another bountiful year with abundant numbers throughout the flight season and, very excitingly, the translocation project that we undertook to reintroduce the butterfly to Norfolk, reported a second generation of the butterfly, meaning that the Barham Downs 'blues' are now founding a new population of small blues - the first in Norfolk for over 200 years !



Resource	Area (ha)	2% optimum target area for 7000ha	2% optimum target area for 3000ha	number of farms delivering
Spring/summer insect-rich areas :				
Nectar plots, wildflower plots/margins, cultivated annual plant plots/margins	197.68			14
Herbal leys/ legume fallows	75.75			6
Wildflower rich grasslands	147.81			9
Total =	420.74ha	150ha	100ha	
4 / 6 metre grass margins	49.94			9

**Farmland Birds** are thriving on the arable areas. Survey work undertaken by ornithologists Peter Findley and Sarah Fawcett shone a spot light on the importance of your east Kent arable farms for yellowhammers and linnets with many being recorded in the winter using the winter bird food areas and stubbles on Nonington Farms. The Adisham area continues to support good numbers of corn bunting with at least 8 pairs of corn bunting recorded this year on Fiona and Guy's farm at Adisham Court. The birds are clearly benefitting from all of the bird seed plots, strips and insect-rich headlands that you are all providing through your schemes in this wider east Kent area.

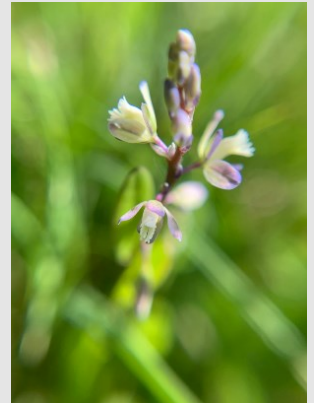


New schemes : Duskin Farm and Lower Garrington Farm renewed their Higher Tier schemes and Sunnyside Farm in the Pett Bottom valley came into a new scheme this year.

## News from the Groups: **Stour Valley and Stone Street Farmer Group**

### 'Kentish milkwort' reintroduction

Thanks to Godmersham Estate and Bilting Grange Farms in the Stour valley near Wye, one of Kent's rarest plants has had a big helping hand. Godmersham Estate is home to one of just 3 colonies of this chalk grassland 'specialist' plant in the county, and through the work of the Species Recovery Trust was able to provide seed last year to help propagate new seedlings at the Millennium Seed bank at Wakehurst Place. This year the young seedling plants were carefully collected and driven back to east Kent they were planted on a chalk grassland creation site less than a mile from the Godmersham colony. The new site is one of a suite of new grasslands that form a corridor of chalk grasslands below Kings Wood and part of some impressive stewardship scheme areas established and managed by Rob Maylam at Bilting Grange Farm. The 'new' grassland site has the perfect conditions for Kentish milkwort which prefers a very open sward with a lot of chalky soil showing. The new plants will be carefully monitored in future years in the hope that they will create a new colony of this very rare species.



**Butterfly news** : Duke of Burgundy and other early summer butterflies such as dingy skipper, wall brown and green hairstreak had another good season despite a chilly start to May. Black veined moth had a record season with the moth turning up on new sites and to everyone's total surprise it was confirmed as breeding on an area of grassland that had none of the sward characteristics that was thought to be critical for 'egg-laying habitat' - shows how little we know of some of these rare species !! We found six belted clearwing moth and grizzled skipper butterfly on grasslands around near Crundale, the first record for these species in the area for many years. Adonis Blue was recorded on a new site near Bilting. We hosted visits for specialists/scientists from Butterfly Conservation, keen to look at the success of your work for the Black veined moth.

**New site for rare orchid** : It was with great surprise and delight that we discovered one of the county's scarcer plants ; 'Green winged orchid' on an arable reversion grassland belonging to Kingsmill Down Farm near Elmsted. The seed is likely to have been blown on the wind from a chalk downland bank belonging to Dean Farm a mile or so away but with the sensitive grazing undertaken by Elmsted Court Farm it is hoped that the new plants will now begin to form a long term colony. A combined success for all three farms!

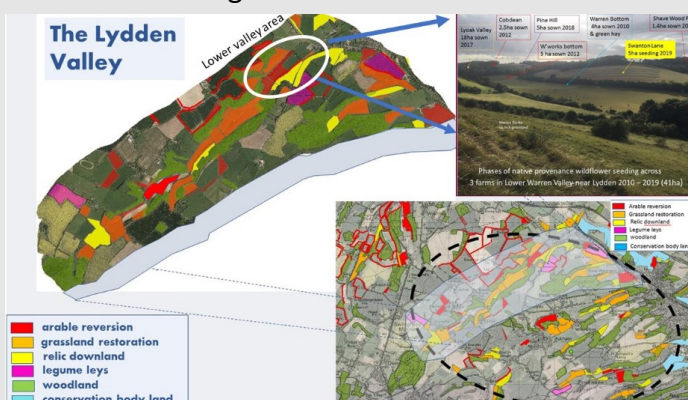
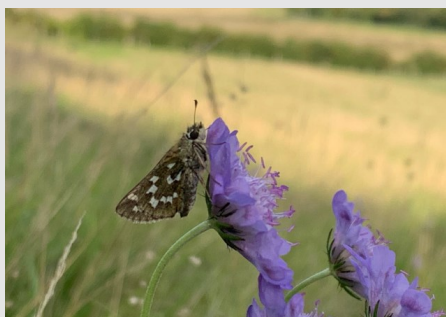


**New schemes** : Grandacre Farm, Stelling Minnis Common, South Hill/Penstock Farm, Partridge Farm, Crundale Estate, Upper Mystole Park Farm, Pent Farms, all renewed their schemes and we welcomed High Chimney Farms into a new scheme.

## News from the Groups: **East Kent Valleys Farmer Group**

### New site for Silver spotted skipper

This autumn we found a new colony of silver spotted skipper and small blue , appearing on two new grasslands created over last 15 years in the lower Lydden valley, part of a 4 mile seamless network of new sp. rich/diverse grasslands. The new colony is a great testament to the work you all do, and shows how rare species can return in a relatively short time scale when the right habitats are created!



### Marjoram makeover



The end of the seed harvesting season was marked by a bountiful harvest and transfer of wild marjoram seeds to a number of new wild-flower grassland creation sites. Thanks to the help and generosity of Wolverton Farm in the Alkham valley, who's marjoram-filled meadows provided the perfect donor site, a cut and collect operation enabled large quantities of marjoram seed to be spread on grassland restoration sites in the surrounding area. A fragrant, late flowering chalk downland plant, its loved by insects, bees and butterflies alike.



### Pigs and compost - a match made in 'Shelvin'

Matchmaking farms and graziers has taken on a new meaning at Shelvin Farm where Rupert's composting/soil health trials have found an ideal compost turning 'machine' in the form of trotters and snouts. Rather than use machinery to turn the windrows of compost, the services of nature's own 'turners' in the form of rare breed Large Black pigs belonging to Chloe and David of Oink and Udder are being explored in this east kent 'ground breaking'(quite literally!) experiment! We look forward to seeing how it develops!



We renewed schemes at Chilton Farm, Great Shuttlesfield Farm, Tappington Hall Farm, Boyington Court Farm, Wolverton Farm and set up new schemes at Breach Farm, Denton Court, Upper Park Gate Farm and Newlands Farm.

# Refresh of Agricultural Transition Plan

Defra have announced a series of updates to the Agricultural Transition Plan. These include :

- Increasing payment rates for new and existing SFI, SFI Pilot and CS agreements. These will apply from 1st January 2024 for CS agreements and from the start of the current agreement year for SFI. This will include the addition of some new scheme options and the expansion of options available under SFI. This will include actions for agroforestry and precision farming. I have summarised the payment rate changes in the attached documents.
- (HLS payment rates will not be upgraded and Defra are advising agreement holders to look at the new CS schemes).
- From summer 2024, applications for a Countryside Stewardship agreement can be made at any time during the year and agreement holders will be able to amend their agreements once a year.
- To bring SFI and CS together under a single online portal – the ‘combined offer’. To expand access to the Higher Tier schemes. The application window for the ‘new’ SFI options/actions will be opened in the summer. Farms wishing to apply for the ‘original/2023’ SFI actions/options can continue to make applications now.
- New rounds of the Landscape Recovery scheme and the Farming Equipment and Technology Fund.
- A new fund called the Farming Innovation Programme ‘Accelerating Development of Practices and Technologies (ADOPT)’. It will aim to support farmers on their test and trial journey with new technologies and techniques on farm to increase efficiency and potentially reduce labour costs.
- Continuation of the Capital Grant Schemes (hedge planting, fencing etc)

**We are still awaiting some more detail on the changes but once we have these I will be arranging a meeting in the coming months to update you all.**



Local Nature Recovery Strategies have been created under the 2021 Environment Act and are a system of spatial strategies for nature and environmental improvement that will underpin England’s Nature Recovery Network. Over the next 18 months, Kent County Council, as Responsible Authority, is collaboratively developing the Strategy for Kent and Medway. The project is seeking to seek input/feedback/ideas to inform the strategy from a wide audience from businesses to farmers, members of the public, community groups and parish councils.

The project is hosting a number of online briefing sessions and workshops for farmers. A workshop to establish priorities for east Kent is being held on 30th January in Chilham village hall 10.00am to 4.00pm . If you wish to attend or input then register here ; <https://www.makingspacefornaturekent.org.uk/events/workshop-to-establish-priorities-stour-catchment-area/>

For more information visit <https://www.makingspacefornaturekent.org.uk/>