

Culm Grassland
Natural Flood Management Project
Winter 2018



Devon
Wildlife Trust



It may be December now with cold mornings and drizzly days, but many of you have been telling us that your farm and woodlands have been quite different this year after the long, hot and very dry weather earlier in the summer.

On the Culm grassland and rush pastures the early, and prolonged, hot, dry spell meant hay and rush cutting was actually possible. Some of these fields have not been cut for years with high summer rainfall in preceeding years. Plants also seemed to set seed earlier than usual. For us, this enabled us to harvest plenty of wildflower seeds ready for our grassland creation projects this autumn. For some, the hot spell brought hardship with a lack of grazing and forage as the grasses burnt off or didn't flush up after hay cuts.

Interestingly, we also heard from landowners who saw, first hand, how their Culm grassland can hold back water as these wetter field stayed greener for longer, where other fields burnt off and turned brown. These areas were invaluable as a grazing compartment while others were too low in forage. As part of our project we are working to learn more about this ability of Culm grassland and rush pastures to hold onto water for longer and how it may help with wider flood management across farms and in the catchments across north Devon.

Contact Us! North Devon Culm Grassland Project Advisors

Telephone us on 01409 221823

or **click our name** to send us an email

[Tom Parsons](#) : [Shanti Smallwood](#) : [Laura Fairs](#)

Countryside Stewardship Applications

The deadline for getting into this scheme in 2019 closed back in August. This year we have worked with several farmers who have applied for the scheme, working to get their Culm grassland into secure management as well as hedgerows, other grassland, fencing, gates, hay cutting, grazing schemes and species-specific options. The farmers will find out in early 2019 if they have been successful.

Application packs should be available again in February 2019 for a 2020 start date. If you wish to apply to put your land into the scheme, or even if you'd just like to know what options are available to you we are able to assist as part of this project. We can help with grassland surveys, mapping advice, provide guidance on which options may suit your land and how best to carry them out. We can also support you with filling in the forms if you are unsure.

The schemes last for 5 years and the current word from the government is that they will honour any agreements after our exit from the European Union.

Please get in touch with us if you have Culm grassland on your farm and would like to understand more about whether this scheme might be suitable for you. ffairs@devonwildlifetrust.org or 01409 221823



An Update from our Ph.D Student Nicola Ellis

"It has been an interesting summer for my PhD. While the rest of the country turned slowly brown in the summer heat, Culm grassland sites remained green and full of life. This might be visual evidence of the water retention properties in Culm grassland soils I am investigating which reduce flood risk.



55 dipwells across 11 fields of Culm grassland and permanent pasture were installed over summer. The groundwater levels in these dipwells showed a quick recovery in Culm grassland sites in the autumn after a dry summer compared to permanent pasture sites. This is promising, as it shows the Culm grassland sites are capable of storing water year round. The dipwells will remain in place over winter to record heavy rainfall events and soil water response, alongside river gauges. For example, if Culm grassland sites are shown to store water above and

below ground during rain events, this will be shown by decreased river discharge, inferring reduced flood risk to the local area. I will be watching the equipment closely over winter to measure the exact role of Culm grassland in flood risk reduction."

Photo - Molinia caerulea tussocks at Dunsdon Nature Reserve (August 2018) showing green life, when the rest of the country began to turn brown with lack of rain.

Working on Culm Grassland?

We are lucky to have some large areas of Culm grassland in north Devon. Dunsdon nature reserve, Common Moor, Hatherleigh Moor all spring to mind.

However, for many landowners their piece of Culm grassland may be quite small, difficult to access and isolated away from other parts of their farm or land. Through our project we realised that sometimes what is really needed is a hit squad of people to help kick start some work on these small areas. One of our Advisors, Tom Parsons, now runs a monthly volunteer team carrying out scrub clearance, swaling, butterfly counts, seed harvesting and fencing work on sites in our Project area.



One of our landowners said "I hadn't realised how some of the trees had got away and were shading out the Culm grassland plants until Tom and I talked about it. It felt too much to tackle on my own but since Tom has bought his team out here and made a start it's given me the motivation to crack on with more. It's been incredible having the team here to clear some of the scrub, it made a big difference to my area of Culm."

We also recently asked some of our volunteer team why they come out in the rain and boggy ground to help!

"I always worked outside and on machinery and this keeps me active and gets me outside now I've retired."

"I'm trying to get a job in conservation and this gives me the hands on experience I need to add

to my CV."

"I love the scrub clearance because you get to have a huge bonfire - bigger than you could manage when working on your own!"

If you have some Culm grassland on your land and you feel you would like support from our volunteer team - or if you'd like to join them for a day of practical work, please do get in touch. 01409 221823 or tparsons@devonwildlifetrust.org



How to help rural hedgehogs: free guide for farmers

Hedgehogs in rural areas are in severe decline with numbers plummeting by half since the millennium. The People's Trust for Endangered Species (PTES) have produced a FREE illustrated guide offering advice to the farmers and other landowners on how to help rural hedgehogs and other wildlife thrive once again in the countryside.

The new guide offers clear and detailed advice, showing the different ways that the farming community and landowners can make their land more hedgehog-friendly, without compromising their day-to-day work. It includes advice on: hedgerow management; field margins; field sizes; ploughing regimes and the usefulness of scrub areas – all designed with hedgehogs and other wildlife in mind. Click the link below to see the guide (opens a separate page on your

computer)

<https://hedgehogstreet.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/05/Farmers-leaflet.pdf>



Changes to Direct Payments

In September DEFRA released a policy statement ([click here to read the full statement](#)) detailing the governments ambition for the future of food, farming and the environment. They want to use the opportunity of leaving the EU to transform how these sectors can enhance the environment and get a fair return for their yields.

Whilst this policy statement contains a lot of information (too much to summarise here!) so we thought it might be useful to highlight the section about changes to Direct Payments from next year onwards.

Directs payments will be phased out, starting by reducing payments in 2021 and progressively reducing payments until the last payments will be made for the 2027 scheme year. DEFRA say that this will give farmers sufficient time to adapt and prepare for the new environmental land management system, which will be piloted and rolled out during the transition.

In north Devon, DWT is working with colleagues from other Biosphere organisations and with Natural England to help try out some aspects of the potential new environmental land management scheme, through an initiative called the North Devon Pioneer. We hope to have more news about this soon.

[Here is a link with the timeline of changes to Direct Payments](#)



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We are sending you this information because you have an interest in our Culm Grassland Natural Flood Management Project or have attended an event, or received land management advice/support.

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