



Grazing Animals in the North

Wessex Downs

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1 Introduction

The North Wessex Downs is a dramatic landscape with scarp and dip slopes that reflect the underlying chalk soils. The area supports a number of SSSI and County Wildlife Sites that are designated as calcareous grassland habitats and have evolved as such through the grazing of livestock, particularly sheep. Calcareous grassland is a Biodiversity Action Plan habitat and a priority habitat for Oxfordshire. Traditionally grazed by sheep, cattle and rabbits these areas support a wide range of species including orchids, blue butterflies and skylarks. Today small isolated blocks of chalk grassland are mainly found on steep slopes and around archaeological sites. A number of these sites are losing their biodiversity due to a lack of appropriate management i.e. grazing animals. This project aims to help facilitate grazing of these important grassland sites by helping match land with stock.

Agriculture has recently gone through some significant changes with the CAP reform and the introduction of the Single Farm Payment. This has enabled farmers to look at their business in a new light and the future of livestock farming is uncertain. The new Higher Level Stewardship Scheme will be targeting chalk grassland maintenance, restoration and creation in this area and access to grazing animals will be key to successful management.

The purpose of the project is to develop a partnership approach to assist with all that is needed to restore and maintain grazing within the North Wessex Downs AONB on land that is of value to wildlife, archaeology, or has an intrinsic landscape value. The project will build on a number of initiatives already in place throughout the AONB and beyond, including the North Wessex Downs AONB's Downland Heritage Project and Downland Restoration Initiative.

2 Aim

The Grazing Animals in the North Wessex Downs Project aims to help restore areas of chalk grassland in the North Wessex Downs (with all the biodiversity, archaeological, landscape and cultural benefits) by sustainable land management. This will be achieved through the use of appropriate grazing stock.

3 Vision / Objectives

- Implement sustainable land management and help sustain the rural economy through linking graziers with land that requires grazing
- Facilitate the link between graziers and sites that need grazing through a website and existing advisory services.
- To develop a database and website containing collated information to be freely available to all.

4 Method

This project was a joint venture between Berks Bucks and Oxon FWAG, with their expertise in sustainable land management and Tony Prior, a sheep farmer within the AONB with experience of website design and management.

The idea was to gather as much information as possible on grazing animals and on grassland sites that need grazing and publish this information on a website and through a telephone hotline. Information was firstly collected through existing contacts and then further through advertising the service in local and national publications and encouraging people to register either through the website or telephone line.

4.1 Information gathering

Questionnaires were sent to all farmers involved with any of the three downland projects that are currently in progress throughout the AONB and to all BBO FWAG

members first. We used the main players in all the existing projects to help us make contact with the relevant farmers in all the project areas. We then sent them to 70 local conservation organisations including BBOWT, RSPB and The Northmoor Trust. The questionnaire asked for basic contact information, the condition of the grazing land available and details on stock numbers and distance they could be moved. About 600 questionnaires were sent out in total and 25 returned. Respondents were given the option to tick a box to say they did not want their details shown on the website. A copy of this questionnaire is shown in appendix 1. Phone calls were made to those people who did not return their questionnaires in order to try and get these details or find out why they did not want to pass on these details. Information from the questionnaires was passed on to Tony who inputted it into a database that was then accessed via the website: www.sheepkeep.co.uk A version of the questionnaire was uploaded on to the website and is used as a way of collecting the data straight through the website. This means that the project is self-servicing and if people needed assistance they can call the telephone helpline where someone can collect and input the necessary information.

4.2 The Sheepkeep website

The website was developed by Tony Prior and the idea was to provide a service that covered all aspects of grazing as well as collecting data on livestock and land. At first land or stock could be registered by emailing details to Tony, which would then be posted on the relevant section (i.e. stock available or land available.) Over time the site was developed so that instead of just listing this information, a searchable database was to find a suitable match.



SheepKeep

Matching available sheep to grass keep in the NWD AONB and helping all shepherds keep sheep



- [Home](#)
- [Search data](#)
- [Register FREE](#)
- [I need ...](#)
- [Contact](#)
- [Technical Data](#)
- [Breed Directory](#)
- [FAQ](#)

SheepKeep is a total resource centre to help all new and experienced shepherds and land-owners keep sheep.

Sheep need grass and grassland is best managed by sheep.

For the provision of [water](#), [fencing](#) and someone to [look over](#) them daily, sheep will give the highest environmental benefits, achieve the requirements of cross-compliance and fulfill the obligations for arable reversion schemes - and look good while they are doing it.

Sponsored by the North Wessex Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty [NWD AONB](#) and Farming and Wildlife Advisory Group [FWAG](#), this site is designed to help owners of grassland acquire sheep to graze their land.



The UK's leading Farming and Equestrian Supplies business



If you have undergrazed grassland or sheep available to be sent to keep:

[Register free here](#)

[Search for sheep or grazing](#)

Or phone us on 01993 886567



[H&C Pearce & Sons Thame](#)

The database can be searched by a number of different criteria including county, area, stock and season. Details pertinent to each individual entry, such as organic status, water and fencing are shown when individual records are viewed. It is then up to the individual to use the contact details provided to make contact with the match.

If a farmer had land available but it was currently being grazed through a successful partnership then the information was kept on the database but not made available until we were informed that the land had become available.

As well as this information links were provided to anything and everything to do with grazing and stock husbandry. This includes information on fencing, water supply, animal health, sheep breeds etc all provided through Frequently Asked Questions and links to other sites or companies that provided these services.



Matching available sheep to grass keep in the NWD AONB and helping all shepherds keep sheep



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- [FAQ](#)

Feed suppliers

[Sheep Feed](#)
[Blocks / liquids / supplements](#)
[Milk replacers](#)
[Hay and Straw](#)



- Sheep Feeds**
- **BOCM Pauls** - Leading UK feed manufacturer
 Website: 217.77.6.104/bocmpauls/main/homepage.jhtml
 - **Countrywide Farmers** - Sheep feed and all supplies
 Main office Earls Croome, Worcs. WR8 9DF
 Tel: 01386 757300
 Email: enquiries@countrywidefarmers.co.uk
 Website: www.countrywidefarmers.co.uk
 - **GH feed and Grain**
 Sheep feeds you can trust - ask your neighbour throughout Kent, Sussex and Surrey
 The Old Colliery, Wingham, Canterbury, Kent CT3 1LS
 Tel: 01227 723838
 - **Frank Wright** 01335 341102



- Blocks, liquids and supplements**
- **Dallas Keith Limited**, Blocks and liquids for sheep
 Bromag Industrial Estate, Witney, Oxon, OX29 0SR
 Tel: 01993 773061 Fax: 01993 771338
 Website: www.dallaskeith.co.uk
 - **Crystalyx** - High energy tub licks
 Caltech helpline: 016973 32592
 - **H&C Pearce at Thame**
 Salt licks, blocks and minerals.
<http://www.hcpearce.co.uk>

Sections on the website (as shown in the diagram above,) include;

Search data,
 Register free,
 I need...
 Contacts
 Technical data,
 Breed directory,
 FAQ,

4.3 Publicity

Once the searchable website was up and running we could concentrate our efforts on publicising the service and encouraging people to either call or go to www.sheepkeep.co.uk. We did this by writing a number of articles for journals, magazines, e-bulletins and parish news

services. We also produced a two-sided flyer advertising the service that was distributed to local vet services etc (Appendix 2). This flyer was also used as an advertisement and was sent to parish magazines to put in their publications. A list of publications and adverts is shown in appendix 3.

4.4 Sustaining the project – advertising

In order to try and keep the momentum of the project beyond its one year of funding we looked to commercial organisations to sponsor the website. Letters were sent to 100 organisations related to grazing and stock husbandry to offer advertising space. A range of deals was offered for a variety of prices;

- A sidebar advert on the home, search and registering pages, with a live link to your website £150/year.
- A logo on the home, search and registering pages, with a live link to your website £125/year.
- A sidebar advert on a specialist page, e.g. fencers, shearers, transport, with a live link to your website £100/year.
- A logo on a specialist page with a live link to your website £75/year.
- A simple live link to your website and email address or your contact details on a listing £20/year.
- A link from our email newsletter, which is sent to all interested parties £20/year.
- A 'sponsored by' logo on our advertising leaflets, to be distributed to vets, feed suppliers etc. £50/year.

Phone calls were made to all those who had been sent letters. So far we have three major sponsors and a number of reciprocal links. This is good advertising for the service and is useful for the smaller organisations that could not afford to pay. A list of organisations that were approached for sponsorship is shown in appendix 4.

This is a vital part of the project as it would be a real shame to lose the momentum of the project. The web-based nature of the project makes it relatively easy to maintain but there is still a fair amount of administration and costs that need to be accounted for:

The fee for the server for the website = £75 per year
Managing database and website = £20 per week
Answering phone calls = £1 680 per year

5 Results

The project has been very successful with many people interested in expanding and developing the concept. The website now has 1567 ha of land registered and 12580 animals. We have had 1246 individual visitors to the website since December 2006. Unfortunately we cannot monitor the number of matches we have had, as this information is not collected on-line. If we received further funding to expand the project we would look into the best way to collect this information from our contacts.

We have managed to collect over £200 so far in terms of advertising space on the website. This will cover us for the website costs and starts to cover the time put towards the project. Further sponsorship through advertising is actively being sought, through larger agricultural companies who will be more able to pay for advertising than the small local businesses contacted so far.

Targets:

- To make contact with 100 graziers within the AONB – *met (although not all have signed up to the service)*
- To help towards implementing UK BAP targets for chalk grassland – *cannot be monitored at this stage.*

- To help get chalk grassland back into favourable management - *cannot be monitored at this stage.*
- To make information on grazing available to those who own grassland – *target met. Website is a fantastic resource, full of useful information and local and regional contacts.*
- To highlight main barriers to grazing and where possible signpost to organizations that can help. – *as above.*
- To connect 10 graziers and landowners through the “sheepkeep” web-site. – *Cannot be monitored at this stage*
- To involve local communities in the link between farming and the AONB landscape.
- To raise awareness of the initiative through 20 parish councils – *target met – proved to be a very effective method of advertising the project.*
- To involve 5 local agricultural companies in the long-term sponsorship of the web-site – *3 secured so far, more being sought.*

6 Discussion

This grazing animal project has been very successful bearing in mind the relatively short time scale and funding. The website approach means that the project could easily be maintained on a relatively small budget but it would need some capital to continue. The service has the potential to grow and expand given the chance. Many other AONB's have been in touch with us to see how they may be able to become involved or run something similar. We are currently working with High Weld AONB to improve the website and database and tailor the services for it to be rolled out to their contacts. From this a package will be produced to sell to other AONB's to make this valuable service available nationwide.

7 Appendices

Appendix 1 – Questionnaire.
(See Next Page)

Appendix 2 – Flyer advertisement.

Galbraith Keevill & Gleeson
Melvin Stafford Veterinary Services
Mildenhall Veterinary Centre
O'Gorman Slater & Main
Valley Veterinary Group
Cedar Veterinary Group
Rowlands Castle Veterinary Clinic
Barbara Bennett
Larkmead Veterinary Group
The Drove Veterinary Hospital
Endell Veterinary Group
Estcourt House Veterinary Surgeons
Garston Veterinary Group
The George Veterinary Group
The Hale Veterinary Group
Walters McFadyen & Lloyd
Berkshire Young Farmers Club
Buckinghamshire Young Farmers Club
Oxfordshire Young Farmers Club
Thame Farmers Auction Mart. Ltd
The Cattle Market, Cirencester

Appendix 3 – List of adverts and publications.

Waltham St. Lawrence and Shurlock Row Parish Website
Up! On the North Wessex Downs Annual Newsguide and e-
bulletins
Hampshire Association of Town and Parish Councils – *50
councils contacted through this association*
Wiltshire Wildlife Trusts SSSI publication
NFU South East Update e-newsletter
Country and Landowner Association Magazine
Farmers Weekly
NSA Sheep Farmer Journal
FWAG Regional Bi-annual Magazine

Appendix 4 - List of companies and societies approached for sponsorship.

Badger Face Sheep	Bexminster Ltd
Beltex Sheep society	F M Burrows
Bemichon du Cher	J Crawford and Sons
Blackface sheep breeders association	Gardner
Black Welsh Mountains	John F Vincent and Son
Bluefaced Leicester	Rappa Fencing Ltd
Border Leicesters	Horizont UK Ltd
British Friesland	Bladfords Fencing Supplies Ltd
The Crossing Sire	Plasti Ltd
Cambridge	A + D Fencing Services
Charmoise Hill	AVS Fencing Supplies
Dorset Down	Downland Fencing Services
Ile de France	Embling Forestry and Fencing
Lleyn	Fenspave Contractors Ltd
Meatline	JT (Fencing) Services Ltd
North Country Cheviot	Matthews Land Group
North of England Mule	N.B. Fencing Services
Poll Dorset	Total Countryside Management Ltd
Rouge	Carter Jonas
Scotch Mule	AM Shearing Services
Shetland Sheep	Andy Barratt
Shropshire Sheep	Ken Bowler
Southdown Sheep Society	Steve Lloyd
Swaledale	Rob Morris
Teeswater	Ridwyn Price
Vendeen	R.T + A Whiteman
Country Land and Business Association	South Coast Shearing
Alligator	Geoff Curtis
Burgon and Ball	Bronzeoak Thermal Processing Ltd
DCH Farm Sales	Goodmans Longstable
TG Jeary Ltd	Wessex Incineration Co Ltd
Welsh Shearing Equipment Centre	Major Waste Services
Dalton ID Systems	Tellams Incineration
Ketchum	Lantra
Rithey Sheep Tags	Sparsholt College
Roxan ID	Tim Hall Livestock Haulage
Bateson	Parkes International Transport Ltd
Ifor Williams	Stanford Livestock International Ltd
Rolland Trailers	Hampshire Training Providers
BOCM Pauls	W+M Homer Shearing Equipment
GH Feed and Grain	Dorper Sheep Society
Frank Wright Ltd	Easy Care Sheep
Dallas Keith Limited	Wiltshire Hom
Crystalyx	Countrywide Farmers
JG Animal Health	McVeigh Parker
Rumenco	H C Pearce and Sons
UFAC - UK	National Sheep Association
Denhavit	Oxford Downs Sheep Breeders Association
Volac International	National Association of Agricultural Contractors
Abbots	Cotswold Sheep Society

