

Welcome to the first edition of View from the Brue, the landowner newsletter of Somerset Wildlife Trust's Brue Valley Living Landscape Project. Somerset Wildlife Trust is an independent charity and has managed land in the Brue Valley since the 1960s. Like most conservation landowners we rely on the help of neighbouring farmers to manage our land and many of our reserves are cut for hay and grazed. Now through the Brue Valley Living Landscape Project we are working to create even stronger links between our nature reserves and the surrounding countryside.

In this twice yearly landowner's newsletter we plan to profile Brue Valley landowners, discuss land management issues and provide some clear information on the advice and grants available to landowners.

# The Brue Valley Living Landscape Project

Somerset Wildlife Trust launched the Brue Valley Living Landscape Project in January 2009. We aim to work with the farming and landowning community within the Brue Valley to help local wildlife thrive as part of a prosperous rural landscape.

Our first step is to find out where the existing good wildlife habitat is and our surveyors will be contacting all landowners in the Brue Valley to ask permission to survey their land.

## What the Project can do for you:

- As the Environmentally Sensitive Area (ESA) scheme comes to an end many of you will be considering a new grant application. Our survey map and report will help if you are considering an Entry Level Stewardship (ELS) or Higher Level Stewardship (HLS) application.

- Environmental Stewardship can seem a daunting scheme to apply for. We can offer free assistance with ELS and HLS application to a limited number of landowners in key positions, primarily in and around the Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs).
- There may be opportunities to add additional items into existing ESA agreements. Again we can offer help to landowners in key positions.

***Remember our advice is effectively free. We will charge for producing an application, but no more than the scheme will pay you for professional advice. Contact Hannah Gibbons (01823 652428 or [hannah.gibbons@somersetwildlife.org](mailto:hannah.gibbons@somersetwildlife.org)) or David Leach (01823 652405, [david.leach@somersetwildlife.org](mailto:david.leach@somersetwildlife.org)) for further information.***



# Farming and Wildlife Advisory Group

This year is the FWAG's (Farming and Wildlife Advisory Group) 40th anniversary. FWAG is a charity that was established in 1969 to promote and develop opportunities to combine viable farming with conservation. FWAG Somerset has been working in the county for 31 years. Over this period there have been significant changes in the support provided to farmers from government and throughout this time FWAG has been helping farmers to access the support available.

Recently FWAG has been involved in consulting ratepayers in the Brue valley SSSIs on the new water level management plan. This has given farmers a chance to be actively involved in the way water is managed on the moors in the future to improve the control of water levels in the ditches and manage flood waters more efficiently. The work has three purposes; identifying the key areas where there is potential to improve the habitat for wintering waders and wildfowl; working to ensure that water is off the fields in time for farmers to turn stock out onto the moor in the spring; identifying smaller areas where water levels can be kept higher in the spring months for breeding waders.

FWAG employs John Leece who is the raised water level area project officer which is a joint project with Natural England, Environment Agency and RSPB to provide farmers in the raised water level area with advice on managing their land within these areas.

Across the Brue valley FWAG helps farmers with applications for Environmental Stewardship (ELS and HLS) which have replaced the old Environmentally Sensitive Areas (ESAs) and Countryside Stewardship Schemes (CSS)



## View from the Brue visits Peppercorn Farm to learn about an unusual farm business.

Peppercorn Farmhouse stands on the Wedmore Ridge overlooking Tealham Moor. Charlie and Gill Ainge run the family farm's 200 acres with Charlie's father, who has farmed there since the 1960s.

Back in the late 1980s when returns from conventional dairy farming were low the Ainge family decided to convert their operation to produce goat's milk and it is this enterprise which still forms the backbone of the farm business. Charlie: "We sell all the milk on contract to a local cheese dairy where it's made into a soft cheese called Capricorn. We're one of nine farms producing the milk."

The Ainges gave up their beef livestock during the BSE crisis, but by 2004 they realised they had a problem: The goats were housed all year and fed on hay and silage so the sward was only getting sporadic grazing. They decided to get back into cattle. Charlie: "We bought the cattle originally as a management tool to improve the grassland so the goats had better feed and more of it." However, the Dexters that Charlie and Gill settled on presented another business opportunity. At the time Gill was working in local food marketing, with Taste of the West. She wanted to see if she could put the advice she offered to other food producers into practice. "We market the females as breeding stock, but we also market beef directly on a very small scale. We sell locally very much by word of mouth."



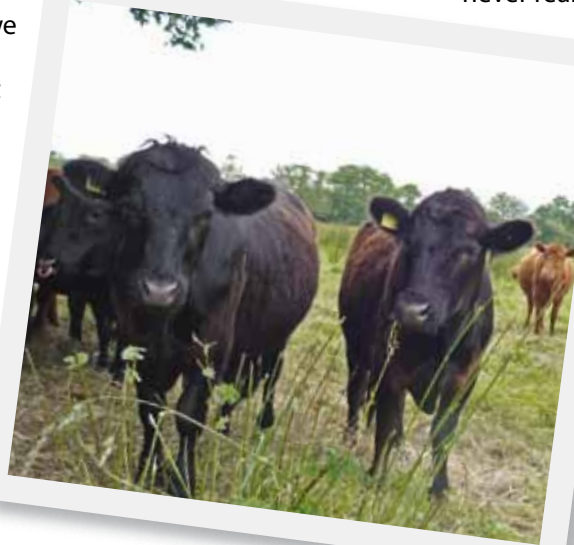
Charlie and Gill feel the small, hardy Dexters are ideal for the type of land they have. Gill: "They are very efficient converters of grass to beef. A lot of commercial farmers would laugh at Dexters and think we're absolutely crackers, but every business has to match to its assets – land, buildings – and we had to work out what suited our needs."

Charlie continues "we can finish them at a good grade without having to spend money on anything other than grass."

The Dexters seem to suit direct marketing. Gill: "We like animals that have a bit of attitude. Well, Dexters certainly have personality. You have to handle them well, but once they get used to you they're very easy. From a marketing point of view they sell well to people who like quirkier things." Charlie takes up the point: "With Dexters the joints are proportionally much smaller and the butcher is able to cut a joint that will feed a big family or a joint that will feed a couple."

So what are the selling points for Peppercorn Farm beef? Charlie and Gill are quite clear: The product is quality, grass fed and local. Gill feels that people who buy local food have an ideal in mind and a vision of the animal in the landscape. "I'm drafting a newsletter for our customers at the moment, which includes a section on wildlife. We get such a variety out there and that sort of thing is important to our customers".

Meanwhile the goats enjoy the hay and silage cut from the Levels pasture. Charlie explains: "We went through a phase of renting some hill land, putting in a grass rotation and really pushing things on. We had higher yields but we also spent more money on the vet. Now we're back on the herb rich hay from the Levels the goats never really have any mastitis



or kidding problems." They both feel that the mineral content of the herb rich hay is the key to their animals' health, but are worried that two wet years have flushed some of the minerals out of the soil. Soil samples have been sent for testing as a precaution.

Our lasting impression of Charlie and Gill is of a fine team, bringing together farming, marketing and business skills. The business they've developed allows them to manage difficult land in a way that is both profitable and good for wildlife. Finally we ask Charlie and Gill how they manage to balance the workload of a diversified business. Gill chuckles: "You mean as well as bringing up a toddler and running a consultancy?" Charlie explains "you see we both have consultancy businesses as well, just to fill up the small hours". So it seems that, whilst Peppercorn Farm is a little different, one thing remains the same: the farmer's long working week.

# Natural England



## Environmental Stewardship Scheme:

The Brue Valley encompasses an extensive area of low-lying wetland, along with many other habitats and features which are important for wildlife.

Environmental Stewardship was launched in 2005 and provides funding for landowners and land managers to undertake environmentally sensitive management of these important habitats and features.

The scheme has three elements:

- Entry Level Stewardship (ELS),
- Organic Entry Level Stewardship (OELS)
- Higher Level Stewardship (HLS).

**ELS/OELS** is a 'whole farm scheme' **open to all farmers** and land managers provided they can meet the requirements of the scheme.

A flat rate payment of **£30/ha/year for ELS and £60/ha/year for OELS** is available for simple environmental management.

There are a wide range of management

options to choose from, including hedgerow management, ditch maintenance, low input grassland, buffer strips and arable options to suit all farming types.

Provides a **guaranteed payment** every 6 months for **five years** with **minimal paperwork** and payments made automatically.

**HLS is a competitive scheme** and is only suitable for some landholdings. It delivers more targeted environmental benefits in **high-priority areas**. **10 year agreements** are available at higher payment rates for more complex types of management.

## Land Management Advisory Service:

Advice is available on Entry Level Stewardship, Organic Entry Level Stewardship, and Higher Level Stewardship to help you decide whether or not to apply and how to go about it. This includes moving into Environmental Stewardship from expiring Countryside Stewardship and Environmentally Sensitive Area (ESA) agreements.

Land management advice events such as farm walks, workshops, advice clinics and farm visits are being run throughout the County, to find out what events are being run in your area visit Natural England's website, [www.naturalengland.org.uk/regions/south\\_west/events](http://www.naturalengland.org.uk/regions/south_west/events).

For information and how to apply, contact Natural England Offices on **0300 060 1118**.

## Upcoming Event

27th July, The Queens Arms, Wraxall, BA4 6RQ 'Environmental Stewardship in Somerset' – attend a brief seminar for an introduction to Environmental Stewardship and/or drop in to our advice clinic for one-to-one advice/queries. For more information or to book a place call 0113 230 3753 quoting reference SWME172.



# Catchment Sensitive Farming (CSF)

The Catchment Sensitive Farming (CSF) initiative was initially rolled out in April 2006 and covers fifty priority catchments in England. The Initiative is delivered through a partnership between Defra, Natural England and the Environment Agency.

The main objective of the initiative is to address issues of diffuse water pollution from agriculture. CSF officers can provide advice on best practice land management which includes the use of fertilisers, manures and pesticides; the promotion of good soil structure to maximise infiltration of rainfall and minimise run-off and erosion; protecting watercourses from faecal contamination (e.g. with fencing where appropriate and livestock crossings),

and from sedimentation and pesticides (e.g. with buffer strips); reducing stocking density or grazing intensity; reverting to grassland etc.

This advice is available through free events and workshops and 1:1 visits with catchment officers and farm advisors. Also available is the provision of free soil and manure sampling; free manure and nutrient management planning and help with understanding and meeting requirements of the new NVZ rules.

The initiative also includes a Capital Grant Scheme (2009-10) with funding available to make relatively low-cost infrastructure investments to tackle pollution for example,

roofing over stock gathering areas, yard works for clean and dirty water separation and in field tracks for machinery and cattle movements. This year's application window is now closed but applications will be welcomed from April 2010.

For more information on the project and

grant scheme, events in your area or if you require a one-one visit, please contact your local Catchment Sensitive Farming Officer.

**Adrian Boots – Catchment Officer for the rivers Congresbury Yeo in North Somerset and Chew in BANES, and the river Brue in Somerset. Tel: 07920 548141**

## Useful contacts

**Environment Agency:** For enquiries telephone 08708 506506. Pollution or flooding incidents should be reported to the 24 hour helpline – 0800 807060

**Farming and Wildlife Advisory Group (FWAG):** Environmental and conservation advice to farmers – Adam Lockyear, 01823 355427, alockyear@somerset.gov.uk

**Levels Best:** A marketing group for local produce from the Somerset Levels and Moors. Contact via the website - [www.levelsbest.co.uk](http://www.levelsbest.co.uk), [info@levelsbest.co.uk](mailto:info@levelsbest.co.uk)

**Local Action for Rural Communities (LARC):** Capital grants to support the rural economy, rural communities and the environment. Contact Alex Sherman, 01458 251309, [asherman1@somerset.gov.uk](mailto:asherman1@somerset.gov.uk)

**Natural England:** Enquiries about Higher Level Stewardship should go to the local office in Taunton - 01823 285500, [somerset@naturalengland.org.uk](mailto:somerset@naturalengland.org.uk). Enquiries about Entry Level Stewardship should go to the Bristol Office - 0117 959 1000, [WestofEngland@naturalengland.org.uk](mailto:WestofEngland@naturalengland.org.uk). Catchment Sensitive Farming enquiries in the Brue catchment – Adrian Boots, 07920 548141

**Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB):** The RSPB may be able to help landowners around the Ham Wall Nature Reserve. Contact Richard Archer – 07766 726127, [richard.archer@rspb.org.uk](mailto:richard.archer@rspb.org.uk)

**Rural Development Programme for England (RDPE):** Advice and capital grants for farm diversification. Contact Alex Stevens at Somerset County Council – 01823 357081, [astevens@somerset.gov.uk](mailto:astevens@somerset.gov.uk)

**Somerset Landscape Scheme:** Small capital grants for restoring landscape features such as hedgerows and orchards. Contact Countryside Services at Somerset County Council - 01823 355563, [Countryside@somerset.gov.uk](mailto:Countryside@somerset.gov.uk)

**Somerset Wildlife Trust:** Free surveys of land in the Brue Valley – contact **Hannah Gibbons, 01823 652428, [hannah.gibbons@somersetwildlife.org](mailto:hannah.gibbons@somersetwildlife.org)**. Free advice and help with Environmental Stewardship applications in targeted parts of the Brue Valley – **David Leach, 01823 652405, [david.leach@somersetwildlife.org](mailto:david.leach@somersetwildlife.org)**.

**Somerset Drainage Board Consortium:** Contact Phil Brewin, 01278 789906, [pbrewin@somersetdb.co.uk](mailto:pbrewin@somersetdb.co.uk). Also see [www.somersetdrainageboards.gov.uk](http://www.somersetdrainageboards.gov.uk)

