

The Green Linnet

The newsletter for owners of Sites of Nature Conservation Interest



Dorset
Wildlife Trust

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Wonderful waxcaps!

Waxcaps are a group of often very colourful fungi which appear in grasslands in late summer through to early winter. Along with several other types of grassland fungi they comprise the CHEGD fungi which are valuable indicators of ancient pastures that have not been agriculturally improved

CHEGD is a shorthand name for the key groups of fungi involved: club and coral fungi (*Clavarioids*), waxcaps (the former *Hygrocybe* genus), pinkgills (*Entoloma* species), earthtongues (*Geoglossum* and related fungi) and crazed caps (*Dermoloma* and related fungi).

Many of these fungi are rare and declining globally due to the loss of these grassland habitats through ploughing or application of fertilisers. The UK has more valuable waxcap grasslands than any other European country meaning our sites make a very significant contribution to their conservation globally.

In autumn 2021 a survey of an existing grassland SNCI near



The pinkish-buff finger-like fruiting bodies of Smoky Spindles (*Clavaria fumosa*).



The common and eye-catching bright red Scarlet Waxcap (*Hygrocybe coccinea*).

Beaminstor found that it falls within the top ten grassland fungi sites in Dorset based on the number of waxcaps and other CHEGD fungi it supports. On the basis of just three visits, 39 species of CHEGD fungi were found including 8 species listed as vulnerable on the Global Fungal Red List.

Highlights included only the second Dorset record of the delicate Ivory Coral and a distinctive brick-red Terracotta Waxcap which is new to Dorset and currently being formally described at Kew.

Particularly excitingly, the survey revealed that two further fields qualified for SNCI selection based on their grassland fungi alone. These are fields that would be overlooked for their conservation importance based on flowering plants but the fungi survey showed that there is great value hidden beneath the soil!

Permanent pasture with undisturbed soils and good fungal communities

are hugely important stores of soil carbon. Although we enjoy seeing colourful fungi of all shapes and sizes pop out of the ground in the autumn, the real bulk of these fascinating organisms is below the surface, in the tangled networks of mycelium that thread through the soil.

This represents the first time that an SNCI has been selected or extended based on grassland fungi criteria and is a fantastic recognition of the value of the site, beyond just the plants and animals it supports. It is of great credit to the landowner and farm manager that the past and current management of the land is maintaining the health and integrity of the soils, resulting in a site of importance at a county level, and nationally for these fascinating fungi.

If you have seen colourful waxcap fungi on your grassland site and are interested in a survey to find out more, please get in touch: mwhyte@dorsetwildlifetrust.org.uk



Ivory Coral (*Ramariopsis kunzei*).



How the Farming in Protected Landscapes programme is helping our SNCIs thrive.

By Rachel Janes Dorset AONB Farming in Protected Landscapes Officer

Sites of Nature Conservation Interest (SNCIs) showcase the best of Dorset's biodiversity, alongside statutory designated sites such as Sites of Special Scientific Interest. Their management relies upon continued stewardship by conservation minded landowners. However, it can be quite difficult for individual land managers to access funding to help them maintain or enhance their SNCI sites, and that is where a collaboration with the Farming in Protected Landscapes (FiPL) Programme has proved very helpful.

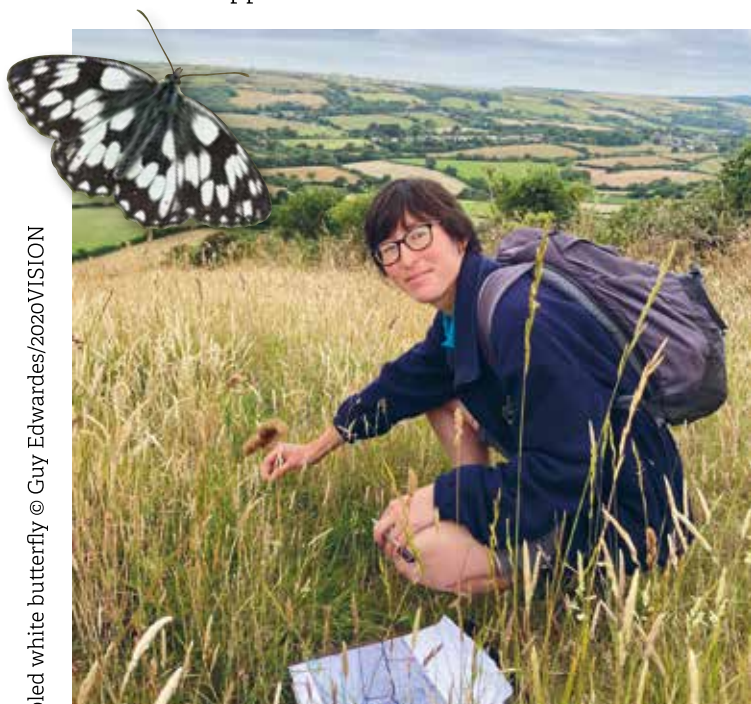
The FiPL programme provides funding to farmers and land managers (and others working with them) for projects that support nature recovery, mitigate the impacts of climate change, provide opportunities

for people to engage with the landscape and cultural heritage, or support nature-friendly, sustainable farm businesses. This national programme is part of Defra's Agricultural Transition Plan, and operates within all Protected Landscapes (National Parks and Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty), which locally are Dorset and Cranborne Chase AONBs, until 2024.

Dorset Wildlife Trust have been working with Dorset AONB, Farming and Wildlife Advisory Group South West (FWAG SW) and local landowners to support the contribution SNCIs make to the ecological network in Dorset. FiPL funding has already been allocated to support work at around 15 sites, including at the following 5 examples.

Five examples of Farming in Protected Landscapes funded SNCI projects

- 1 Nine Barrow Down, near Swanage, Purbeck** – new fencing to subdivide the SNCI and a new water supply has been funded to enable even better grazing of this high-quality chalk grassland which contains bee orchids, harebells and butterflies such as Lulworth skipper and marbled white.



Mariko Whyte at Knitson Farm/Nine Barrow Wood © Rachel Janes



Toby Hoad with Forwarder for Horse Logging © Toby Hoad

- 2 Langton West Wood, Langton Matravers, Purbeck** – the National Trust recently restarted a 5-year restoration of hazel coppice and ride widening in this very wet and sensitive woodland. They are working with Dorset Horselogging to extract some of the timber, to be used in coppice products and charcoal. Heavy machinery cannot be used in this woodland, as it would impact the woodland floor, and negatively affect the biodiversity of the woodland. FiPL has funded the purchase of a horse drawn timber forwarder that will minimize the impacts of operations.



Calcareous grassland, Henning Hill SNCI © Rachel Janes



Scrub encroaching on the grassland, Henning Hill SNCI © Rachel Janes

3 Henning Hill, near Melcombe Bingham – a grant here has helped the landowner work out how best to manage two SNCIs, Henning Hill and Coombe Hill, which are noted for lowland calcareous grassland priority habitat and also ‘Giants Grave’, a pillow

mound and a prehistoric field system. A management plan was produced which sets out the objectives and methodology for scrub and woodland management, making sure that both historic and ecological assets of the sites are protected.



A fence has allowed vegetation on one site to grow up, meaning that Duke of Burgundy butterflies can complete their life cycle Higher Hill SNCI © Rachel Janes



Swathes of scabious at Higher Hill SNCI © Rachel Janes

4 Higher Hill, Plush – a local expert discovered a large colony of Duke of Burgundy butterflies on the lower slopes of this site in 2020. Grazing is needed to maintain the optimum habitat for the Duke of Burgundy, and another rare butterfly species also present, the marsh fritillary. However, cattle access needed to be restricted during the spring and early

summer as both butterfly species are very sensitive to grazing at these times of year because of their lifecycle. A FiPL grant provided the farmer with financial support towards the costs of 1000m of stock fencing across the slope so that access could be restricted in the spring and summer, but they could access the whole site in the autumn.



Nicki and Nick Green with Sheep Handling System © Emma Russell

5 Delcombe Farm and Chitcombe Farm, near Ansty – Sheep need regular gathering to maintain high standards of animal welfare which can prove difficult and time-consuming on some of the smaller, but higher conservation value, sites. A FiPL grant awarded to the farmers contributed to the purchase of a mobile sheep handling system which means they now have the flexibility to graze multiple small sites including the Dorset Wildlife Trust reserve at Greenhill Down. Selective restoration grazing managed in this way can prevent scrub encroachment onto the priority grassland habitat.

Through projects like these, and the other 85 projects supported within Dorset’s protected landscapes, Farming in Protected Landscapes is helping landowners and managers better look after our unique wildlife. For more information about Farming in Protected Landscapes please contact Rachel Janes at Dorset AONB www.dorsetaonb.org.uk/resource/farming-in-protected-landscapes/ or Helena Darragh at Cranborne Chase AONB www.cranbornechase.org.uk/our-work/farmland-conservation-project/farming-in-protected-landscapes/

Defra Review of Environmental Land Management schemes

The recently announced review of Government farming policy has created great concern among farmers and environmental groups including the Wildlife Trusts.

Under the Agricultural Transition Plan, the Environmental Land Management scheme (ELMs) has been taking shape over the past two years with pilot schemes running around the country, including the Wareham Arc in Dorset, a collaborative Landscape Recovery project. ELMs acts on the principle of 'public money for public goods' and is intended to

be a move away from area-based payments, benefitting farmers and landowners who want to make more space for nature.

Dorset Wildlife Trust are concerned that funding for the more ambitious Landscape Recovery and Local Nature Recovery tiers could be removed or reduced in favour of the more basic Sustainable Farming Incentive elements, or the whole budget cut back. This would reduce the impact of the scheme and fail to reward the farmers that want to go furthest in environmental

action. This uncertainty makes things challenging as we and many farmers we work with have been spending the past few years preparing for these opportunities. However, we will continue supporting those we work with and to push for greater clarity and certainty for farmers and land managers.

If you want help or advice with agri-environment funding please get in touch with one of our advisors –

Emily Newton 07528 557685 or
Nick Gray 07824 438974

Additional funding may be available for your SNCI

Under Dorset Council's Dorset Biodiversity Appraisal Protocol, compensation funds are secured, when appropriate and as a last resort, for the residual loss of habitat from development.

Dorset Council want to ensure compensation funds deliver restored and new compensatory habitat as close as possible to where the loss has occurred and that they contribute to ecological networks, achieving the best outcomes for Dorset's natural environment. Even small areas of natural habitat, often those already designated as SNCIs can provide really important 'stepping-stones' for plant and animal species across the wider, farmed landscape. Management funds would need to demonstrate a positive benefit - for example, lost habitat restored, creation of new extensions to existing SNCIs or management of invasive species with supplementary planting.

For further information, availability of funds in your area or an informal chat about suitability of a project please contact **Mariko Whyte mwhyte@dorsetwildlifetrust.org.uk**.

Help us find harvest mice in Dorset

This October saw the start of the second year of the national harvest mouse survey, co-ordinated nationally by The Mammal Society. Harvest mice are the smallest UK mammal and are thought to be in decline in the UK but there is very little data available for this secretive species.

Dorset Wildlife Trust working with Dorset Mammal Group, want to build a picture of their distribution across the county. To do this we will be searching suitable habitats, including grassland, arable margins, reedbed and gardens across the county this winter (October to March).

If you would be interested in allowing access for a surveyor onto your land over the coming winter to help build that picture, we would love to hear from you.



Please contact
Steve Masters
on **smasters@dorsetwildlifetrust.org.uk**

Harvest mouse
© Amy Lewis

Dorset Wildlife Trust offer a wide range of consultancy services for owners and managers of existing SNCIs and for anyone else who wishes to improve biodiversity on their land. This support can range from wildlife surveys and fieldwork training to management advice and project development. Please contact **Hamish Murray hmurray@dorsetwildlifetrust.org.uk** if you would like more information or to arrange an initial site meeting.

For further information on SNCIs:

Mariko Whyte, Conservation Officer: mwhyte@dorsetwildlifetrust.org.uk or 01305 264620

For advice on Countryside Stewardship (DWT):

Nick Gray, West Dorset Conservation Officer: 07824 438974 or ngray@dorsetwildlifetrust.org.uk
Emily Newton, Landowner Liaison Officer: 07528557685 or enewton@dorsetwildlifetrust.org.uk

Forestry Commission:

Roly Boughton (Woodland Officer, West Dorset and Purbeck): roly.boughton@forestrycommission.gov.uk 07442 862772
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FWAGSW:

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SNCI Project
financially supported by

