

When thinking about the farm business we often think about what market opportunities there are, what grant and subsidy opportunities there are, how we can control cost and how we can realise the value of the natural assets we have.

The reality of all this monetisation and budgeting is that a pretty common starting place, and indeed an important one, when talking with new clients is to ask them what their aims and objectives for their land are. Is it to generate income, to be a tax efficient investment, to improve the condition for the next generation, to live a certain lifestyle and have a certain quality of life, or to enjoy their land? The quiet enjoyment of one's own land and property is talked about more than you might think, but it rarely finds its way into a report, a grant application, a planning application and let alone a budget! It is however an important, perhaps the most important, consideration when thinking about how to use your land. Obviously there are jobs that you would rather not be doing but I'm not sure I have met a farmer yet who carries on farming through gritted teeth, hating every minute of it.

So it is perhaps not surprising that the key question being asked of farmers by the GWCT at a recent conference was "What wildlife would you like to see on your farm?" It's important to realise that this is a significant departure from the usual approach of "stakeholder" NGOs; RSPB, GWCT, National Trust, Natural England et al setting out their objectives for the landscape/environment, aka your land. It's a question that is being pondered by Farmer Clusters all over the country as they set their own objectives for their local areas.

## FARMER CLUSTERS

Nationally there are now over sixty "Farmer Cluster" groups with over 1400 farmer members. These groups have been able to access funding from Natural England under the Countryside Stewardship Facilitation Fund to engage a "facilitator" to organise workshops and coordinate the group but the key to successful groups has been grass roots engagement, the "bottom-up"

# WHAT WILDLIFE WOULD YOU LIKE ON YOUR FARM?



approach. One of the groups commented that: "Re-connecting farmers with nature and improving their confidence in conservation farming has been our greatest success so far."

The world is your white-clawed crayfish. So if you could list, one, two or half a dozen species you would love to see on your farm what would they be? I know that most farmers when asked do have an opinion on this but it is rarely expressed in "workshops" with "stakeholders" who tend to be imparting the fruits of their considered research on the decline of this species, or the vulnerability of that species. However get chatting down the pub and it transpires that the most ardent advocate of pasture utilisation is passionate about the Duke of Burgundy butterfly, that the owner of the largest suckler herd in the area is a sucker for cow-slips, that the most innovative precision farmer leaves no stone unturned for the stone curlew. That's even before you ask them what their children and grandchildren love to see on the farm; adders, hedgehogs, bats.

## PLEASURE AND PRIDE

I know very well that the farmers default position is "I am TRYING to farm!". And that is as it should be, but next time you have the opportunity to let "stakeholders" know what you want for your land and your future, stop and pause for thought. I'm pretty certain that it goes beyond "I just want to farm" and there are things that I am also certain you will take pleasure and pride in during your farming day and it's absolutely no bad thing to share that with others.

Farmer Clusters in the South East – Upper Rother and Dudwell; Eastern South Downs; Winchester Downs; Selborne; North Downs Escarpment; Arun to Adur; Thames Farmers.

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