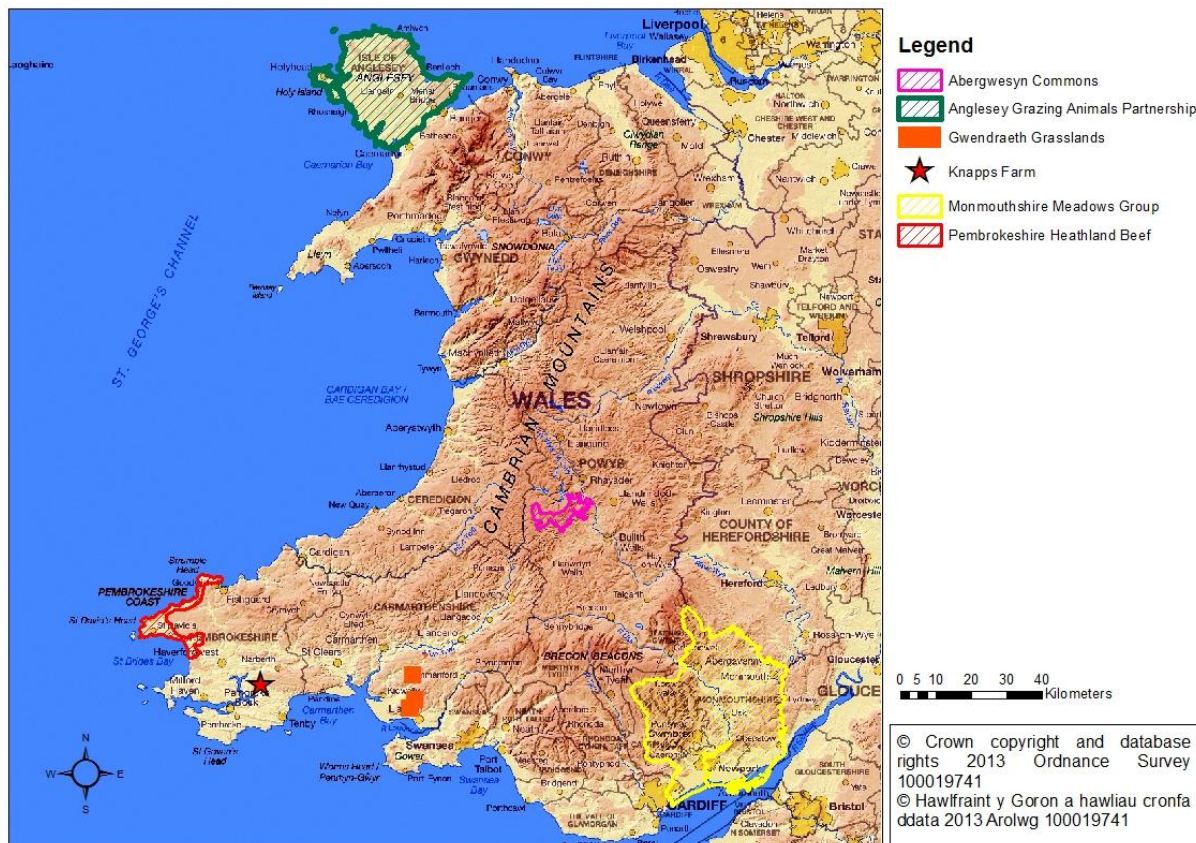


Summary Document

These six case-studies were compiled by Matt Sutton Ecology in early February, 2014. They are based on interviews with the lead officer or grazier, and/or end of project summaries.

Location Map of Conservation Grazing Projects studied



Challenges faced in delivering conservation grazing

In addition to recording project details, an attempt was made to capture information on key constraints impacting on grazing projects. Four of the projects were able to score a selection of potential constraints according to their perceived significance. Responses from two additional Pembrokeshire projects (the Marloes Coast Project and the author's farm at Wyndrush Pastures SSSI) were also incorporated.

Organic Certification

This was seen as a significant constraint, with an average score of 6/10 (from four respondents).

Three projects had held Organic status. All had received Welsh Government Organic Farming Scheme payments for conversion and maintenance over a 5-6 year period. All had recently withdrawn from the Organic Farming Scheme, and were no longer certified.

The National Trust had entered the Organic Scheme under the assumption that it would be straight-forward to comply with as their land was already being managed without inputs. They experienced an unexpected degree of complexity, as their cattle have been registered Organic, but their land is only partly so.

Similar difficulties had been experienced by the Marloes Coast Project, as only the coastal fields under conservation management had been entered into the scheme, not the arable land or second farm. This again created a relatively complicated situation, where Organic stock were not able to be fed the conserved forage from the second farm. There was little potential for forage conservation from the Organic habitat land in the project.

The issue of conserved forage was also the key reason for the withdrawal of Wyndrush Pastures, as the declining productivity of hay meadows under SSSI management created a need to buy in additional winter feed (to support the stock numbers required under a S15 management agreement). No derogations were available to purchase hay from nearby wildflower meadows, non-Organic but under a similar management agreement. This forced the purchase of poor-quality Organic rye-grass silage from a greater distance away, at greater financial and environmental expense. Clearly, the move away from a non-organic forage 'allowance' which had been in place, to a 100% Organic forage requirement, was counter-productive in these examples.

All of these three projects have been marketing beef, and all have found that the 'Organic' label is of less importance than the provision of meat which is local, high quality, 'wildlife-friendly' or from a farmer known to the customer. The Anglesey Grazing Animals Partnership has successfully used these angles in its marketing, in preference to Organic. With small land-holdings, Monmouthshire Meadows Group members are rarely certified Organic and no specific issues had been encountered. Their partners at Gwent Wildlife Trust have organic status and their own organic Hebridean sheep flock; they are able to source other livestock to graze their land when required. However, it is worth noting that one long-term Organic farmer had originally been advised to plough their unimproved meadows by their Soil Association advisor. This perhaps highlights a fundamental difference in approach between conservation management and Organic management, in that the former is often concerned with depleting soil nutrients to reduce grassland productivity, whilst the latter is generally concerned with building soil nutrients to maintain productivity.

Regulation

The regulatory environment is a bugbear of most farmers, and inspections an unwelcome addition to the workload. As a constraint, it scored just over 6/10, with all scores (from 4 respondents) between 5 and 7. Some interviewees commented on

the lack of margin for error in the system (eg. in relation to maintaining records of herd movements), where a single genuine mistake had resulted in a 5% penalty across all SFP and agri-environment claims.

The National Trust are in a uniquely vulnerable position with respect to this, maintaining a large and complex holding where reputational damage is a high risk, both in respect of public image and state-aid payments.

Related to this issue, the electronic identification of animals, whilst clearly laudable in its aims, can impact disproportionately on conservation graziers. The economic issues affecting hill ponies following the recent introduction of micro-chipping requirements is well documented elsewhere. Closer to home, we find that the ear-tagging of young cattle in their first few days of life can make them wary of us for some time afterwards. On challenging grazing sites where a stockperson needs good control of their animals, this is not the ideal starting position.

Public Access / Open Access Land

The perception of this as a constraint varied widely according to the nature of the sites being grazed by each project. Of those grazing areas of common land with statutory access, it was seen as a fairly significant issue. Overall, scores varied from 1-8, but averaged 4/10 from those projects with access land.

Knapps Farm had provided permissive access to the SSSI under the five years of their Tir Gofal Agreement. They were not aware of anyone having taken advantage of that access. They have welcomed visitors keen to look at their wildlife on the farm, for example naturalists studying dragonflies and butterflies, and 'twitchers' admiring a rare purple heron on their new ponds. No issues have been experienced.

The National Trust manage significant areas of common land with open access, both on the uplands of Abergwesyn Common and the coastal belt of Pembrokeshire. The NT tenant on the Marloes Coast Project grazes both statutory access land and permissive access land granted under a Tir Gofal Agreement. All interviewees recognised the pros and cons of public access. They welcomed the opportunity to showcase positive environmental work and the opportunities for resulting sales, but were mindful of the potential disturbance to grazing regimes and restrictions on grazing infrastructure. Grazing control on the Pembrokeshire commons, for example, has to be delivered via miles of temporary electric fencing, which involved a considerable outlay and an ongoing burden on staff resources.

Biosecurity

Biosecurity issues, most notably the requirements for pre-movement testing of cattle for bovine TB, were of moderate significance to projects sharing cattle between disparate sites. The difficulties of hiring bulls was also noted. Individual graziers tended to accept the inconvenience and felt it of low significance. Overall, scores ranged from 1-5, with an average of just over 3/10 from six respondents.

AGAP and Pembrokeshire Heathland Beef had, at the time of writing, been able to move cattle between holdings without automatically requiring a TB test. To date, cattle have not required a pre-movement TB test when moving within a Sole Occupancy Authority (SOA) where all the premises within the SOA are in the same TB risk area, i.e. subject to the same frequency of routine testing. However, this exemption will soon end and holdings will perhaps need to be linked to avoid an overly-frequent testing regime. NT in Pembrokeshire already class several of their sites as an 'amalgamated holding'.

AGAP has a double-handling pen, but relies on graziers providing their own crush as no mobile facility is available. NT in Pembrokeshire have a mobile crush, but have found it to be badly designed. Both projects would perhaps welcome improved static facilities on many of their sites, but are mindful of the costs and also aesthetic impacts. TB considerations also potentially necessitate another expensive infrastructure improvement. The single 'bank-top' fencing, installed on the advice of chough conservationists, would ideally be replaced with double fencing either side of the many boundary banks alongside NT's coastal properties in Pembrokeshire.

The only other biosecurity consideration noted was related to Johne's disease. A case in the herd at Wyndrush Pastures SSSI triggered a review of biosecurity here. It was not considered feasible or desirable to exclude all ponds, streams and wet areas from the grazing area in line with recommendations to counter this disease. A closed-herd policy was adopted instead.

Fallen Stock

Scores varied from 1-4, with an average of just over 3/10 (from 4 respondents). The impact of fallen stock legislation was felt principally by graziers of more remote sites. It may not always be possible to retrieve dead stock, for example from wetlands or from cliff sites. The graziers interviewed had lost few animals, and the (c. £120) cost of disposing an animal to a collection service was accepted as inevitable. Insurance claims for the animal were only occasionally made, with rising premiums a concern. WG is currently proposing support for an insurance premium associated with the risk of managing cattle on unenclosed land parcels. The financial impact is felt disproportionately by pony keepers, as the cost of disposal is often more than the value of the animal.

Physically Demanding Terrain

The difficulties in keeping stock in sites with limited or no vehicular access, rough terrain or unfenced cliff edges was noted by the two NT interviewees, where the constraint scores given were both 7/10. As well as the difficulties experienced by the NT staff in Pembrokeshire, they note that the perceived difficulty of such sites is off-putting to a large proportion of potential graziers.

Shortage of time / skills

This was noted by MMG as a significant issue (7/10). Other interviewees felt that they had acquired the skills to manage stock in conservation grazing scenarios, even if the time available to do so was always more pressured than they would have liked.

Size / fragmentation of sites

Again, MMG recognised this as a significant constraint, scoring it 7/10. NT in Pembrokeshire recognised the vulnerability of their disparate network of sites to the escalating price of diesel, and were already making strategic concessions to this. This would appear to be a looming challenge for all such grazing projects, and may prompt a re-evaluation as to how best to achieve grazing objectives. Attracting graziers from land adjacent to a site, using financial inducements where needed, will perhaps become a more viable model in the near future.

WG proposes a pilot to develop a Habitat network part farm scheme to target declining species and habitats that occur in isolated pockets. This could help to address this constraint, although would not be relevant to small landowners without active farmer status such as many of the MMG members.

Lack of infrastructure / machinery

MMG have found making hay on their network of small land-holdings to be an unattractive proposition to commercial contractors. Despite acquiring their own hay-making equipment, the logistical difficulties in maintaining this and deploying it around a wide network of sites in a short window of dry late summer weather have proved it to be a less than satisfactory solution.

Other projects, notably Pembrokeshire Heathland Beef, have acquired or have access to a wide range of equipment. Funding from sources such as the Ecosystem Resilience Fund have proved useful in this respect. The Gwendraeth Grasslands project utilised contractors to carry out mowing and fencing, and the low ground-pressure machinery available from specialist contractors proved largely successful on delivering the work. Tight control on timing and costs could not be achieved in this way though.

Difficulty sourcing suitable animals

This issue was felt most acutely by the Abergwesyn Commons, in so much as the National Trust as landowners had difficulties in sourcing graziers willing to use suitable cattle on the site.

Store cattle would often be the cattle of choice for the rough grazing land of conservation sites, and recent years have seen an upsurge in the price of stores. This price spike is often most keenly felt in the spring, when conservation graziers, like most farmers, will be wanting to expand their herds to accommodate summer growth. Conversely, prices are often relatively low in the autumn when those limited by a lack of suitable out-wintering land or cattle-sheds are wishing to sell. The consequence of this is to reduce the profitability of store-cattle enterprises,

particularly those following conservation projects involving summer grazing. This in turn affects the ability of graziers to source affordable stock. S15 management agreements, such as that held by Knapps Farm, may be able to reflect this in their payment calculations.

MMG sometimes have different issues sourcing suitable animals, in that many members are reliant on 'borrowing' animals as they lack the time, skills or land-holding needed to manage their own. Nearby farmers may not be willing or able to graze these sites with their own animals, and a lack of traditional native breeds suited to poorer quality forage may be an influencing factor here. MMG scored this issue 4/10.

This issue could also interact with the Organic Certification issues previously mentioned. Wyndrush Pastures was effectively forced to change from a store enterprise to a suckler-cow enterprise due to the apparent lack of Organic forward stores available locally in the spring. The Heathland Beef Project secured a supply of Organic Welsh Black stores from Dolgellau, but have recently made a similar transition to a breeding herd to buffer themselves from the high prices commanded by young stock.

The **30-month rule**, **live export rules** and **abbatoir legislation** were not seen as significant constraints. The latter could perhaps prove a challenge with respect to the plans for a new abbatoir facility on Anglesey.

Although not a question asked during interviews, the issue of 'problem' vegetation could be worthy of further consideration. The problems associated with bracken encroachment in an upland context are generally well understood, and WG is proposing targeted support to control continuous dominant bracken cover under a small grants scheme in the new Rural Development Plan 2014-20. Purple moor-grass (*Molinia caerulea*) is often an issue in the uplands, as the Abergwesyn case-study demonstrates, and 'graminoid-dominated peatlands' were the subject of an all-Wales NRW LIFE project bid.

Other species may be of at least local significance. At Wyndrush Pastures SSSI, the spread of soft rush (*Juncus effusus*) across previously dry fields is perhaps a consequence of recent wet summers and the late-cutting of hay. It creates problems for both quantity and quality of grazing and conserved forage, and may impact on wild meadow seed harvesting operations if not successfully checked. At Trehill Farm, Marloes, ragwort (*Senecio jacobaea*) proved to be an abundant component of the re-created heathlands, and influenced stocking decisions in the early years.

Conclusions Drawn

Many of the aforementioned issues are familiar to graziers across Wales, but to developing grazing projects there can be a confusing array of challenges to understand and counter. Over-arching bodies, such as PONT and the Grazing Animals Project, provide important communication channels for discussion, problem-

solving and networking, and hold useful archives of published information. The 'Nibblers' forum provided by the latter is a particularly useful source of advice and inspiration, and Welsh grazing projects have established an informal network through that. It will be important to link this with Knowledge Transfer within the new RDP to share experiences, challenges and lessons learnt and to inform necessary policy changes.

This brief study has hopefully demonstrated that, although some issues are common to grazing projects across Wales, every site has its own unique circumstances, ecology and set of challenges. Local graziers often have an accumulated store of knowledge which should be respected, and attempts to set tight controls on grazing from an ecological perspective should be resisted.

When establishing a grazing project across a network of sites, there are established models which do work. AGAP have closely followed the project model set out by Bill Grayson and the Grazing Animals Project to great effect. The National Trust in Pembrokeshire have followed a similar 'from field to plate' model, and are slowly turning the tide on years of neglect on the Pembrokeshire heaths. Monmouthshire Meadows Group have a rather different suite of sites, and their grass-roots initiative is an inspiring model demonstrating successful management of small sites in private ownership.

Grazing projects invariably lose money without financial support. All of the projects in these case-studies relied on funding, often significant amounts. However, despite being able to attract funding for an initial 2-3 year project, many projects require further or ongoing support which can be more difficult to attract. Continuation projects are rarely as attractive to grant-giving bodies, but 5-6 years is a much more reasonable time-scale in which to expect a grazing project to become self-sustaining.

Acknowledgements

We wish to thank those interviewees - Joe Daggett, Andrew Tuddenham and Helen Buckingham (NT), Hilary Kehoe (AGAP), Stephanie Tyler (Monmouthshire Meadows Group), Russell Hobson (Butterfly Conservation), Terry and Mary Clarke (Knapps Farm) and Pete Smithies (Trehill Farm) – who generously gave their time and thoughts, reports or photographs.

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Knapps Farm



Key Points

Knapps is a productive family dairy farm of 265 acres (plus 35 acres rented). 45 acres of the total (15%) is under conservation management, with a clear division between this and the productive acreage.

An area of purple moor grass pasture, formerly supporting a large population of the marsh fritillary butterfly, forms the core of Yerboston Tops SAC. A habitat re-creation project occupies a 'corridor' of non-designated land, initiated under Tir Gofal but now managed along with the SAC under a Section 15 management agreement with NRW.

Initial recovery management on the SAC involved a programme of flail mowing, fencing and other improvements to site infrastructure. Conservation grazing has subsequently been delivered by Welsh Mountain ponies and Hereford cattle. Key issues affecting the grazing are economic. Land management challenges are presented by problem plant species such as soft rush and ragwort. These are pronounced issues on the habitat re-creation land, and affect the perception of the project and hence its longer term viability. Welfare, husbandry and regulatory issues are not considered overly significant.

Management on the SAC has been highly effective at restoring the neglected habitat, but the marsh fritillary has declined to apparent extinction despite this.

Conservation management work has garnered a Royal Welsh Agri-Environment Award and UK Silver Lapwing Award.

Flexibility and good dialogue are seen as key to a good partnership with NRW through the Section 15 Agreement. This is in stark contrast to the farm's experiences of the prescriptive approach employed by Tir Gofal. The SSSI / SAC designation confers statutory protection, but effective management is only delivered as a result of the Section 15 Agreement. Re-created habitats lying outside the designated site are vulnerable to changing economic circumstances.

As income from agreements remain static whilst productivity drops, the incentive to retain land in conservation management is diminished. Some conservation work on the wider farm (retention of stubbles, fencing of streamside corridors) has been withdrawn following the Clarkes' early exit from Tir Gofal.

Strengths

Conservation work being implemented on intensive dairy farm.

Cattle on conservation grazing land can be integrated with productive system.

Availability of cattle, ponies and flail mower provide a range of options for vegetation management.

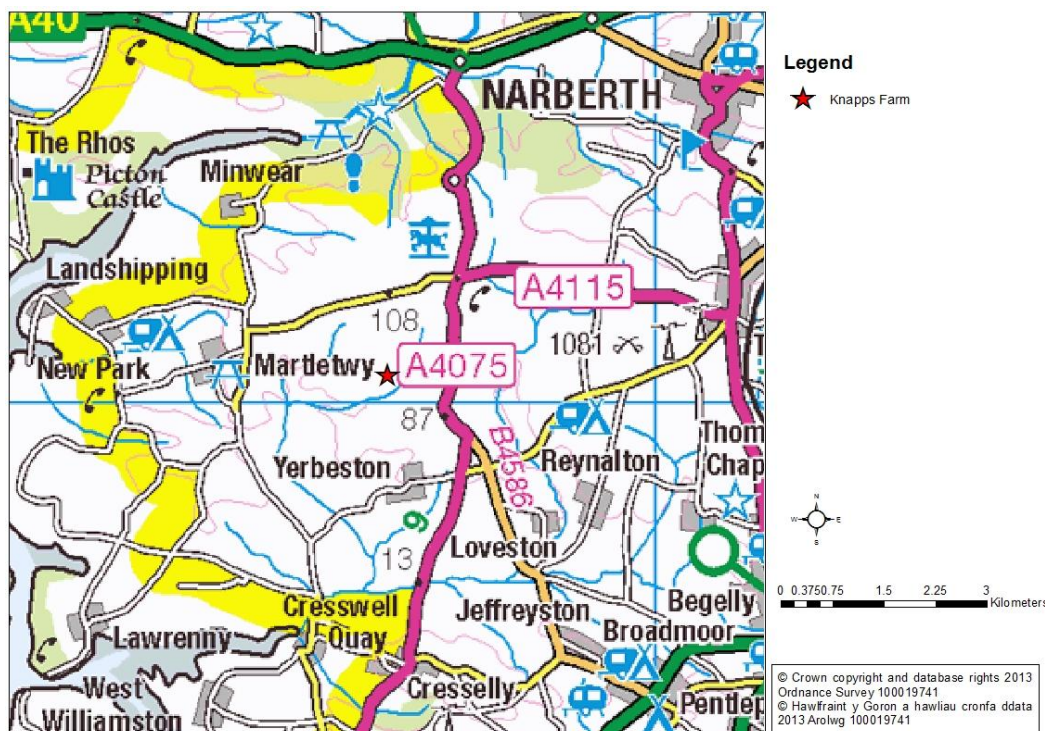
Strong partnership formed with CCW/ NRW.

Weaknesses

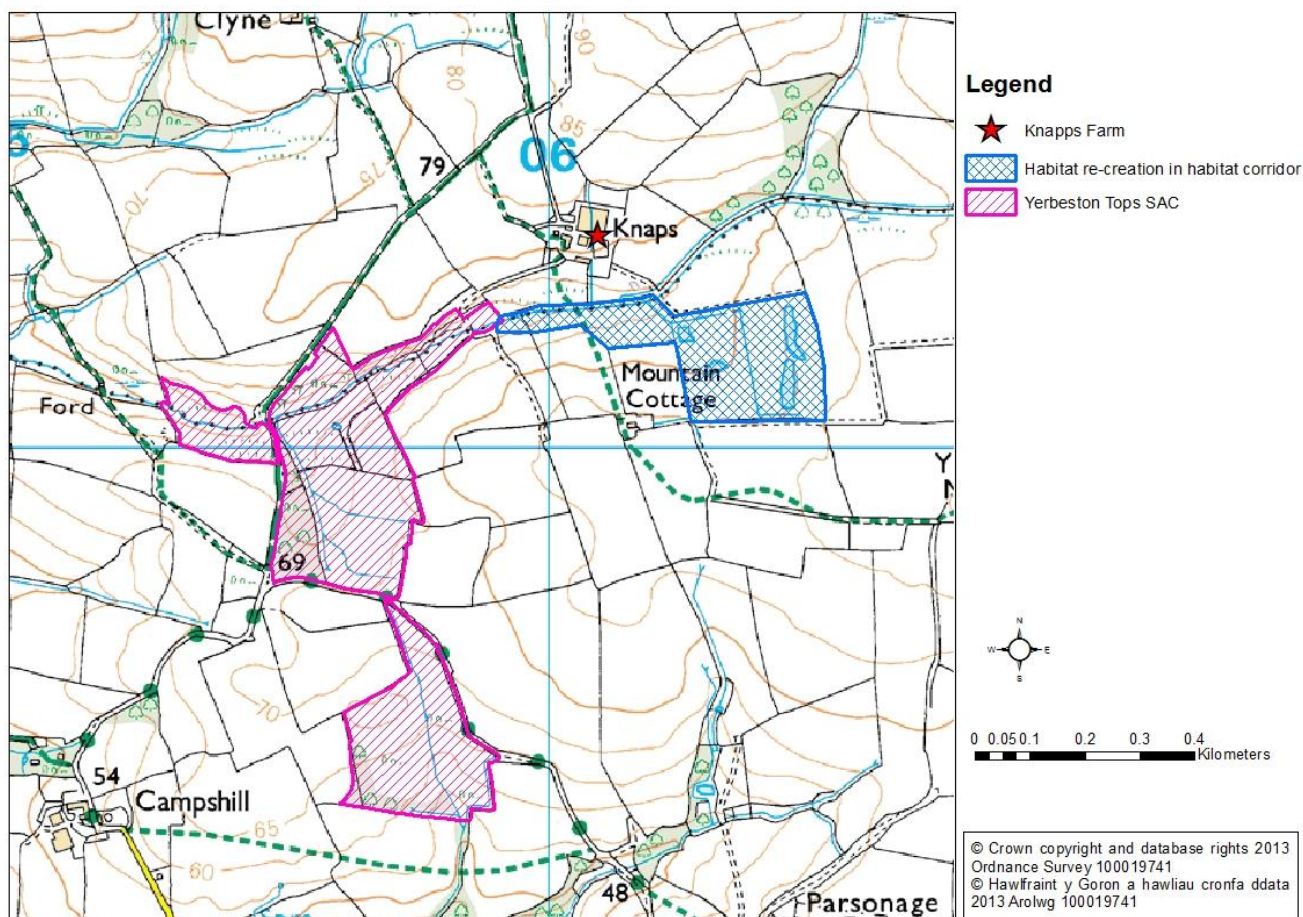
Pony grazing regime is loss-making.

Suitable winter grazing for ponies is not readily available.

Conservation is seen as a charitable aside from main focus of farm business.



Location of Knapps Farm



Location of SAC and habitat re-creation 'corridor'

Knapps Farm Outline

Terry and Mary Clarke and son Tom farm at Knapps, near Martletwy in south Pembrokeshire. The farm has grown from 96 acres in 1978 to a current total of 265 acres, as well as another 35 acres of land nearby rented for silage production. An additional full-time farm worker has recently been taken on.

220 acres of the home farm is intensively managed as improved grassland, providing silage or grazing land for their 126-strong herd of dairy Holsteins and Friesian / Holstein crosses and a smaller number of tack sheep in recent years. Corn was also grown until very recently. Land and stock are conventionally managed.

45 acres, or 15% of the farm, is in conservation management. This comprises two areas.

- The key interest is provided by a 20 acre area of unimproved marshy grassland in one corner of the farm, known as 'the Tops'. This was designated as part of Yerboston Moors SSSI, and as Yerboston Tops SAC in 2004. The purple moor-grass pasture here held, at the time of notification, one of the largest known populations of the marsh fritillary butterfly in Wales.
- A 25 acre 'corridor' of new wildlife habitat was subsequently created to the east of the SSSI. This comprises a mixture of new ponds, experimental marshy grassland re-creation, hay meadow restoration and new hedges.



Fertiliser for intensively managed improved grassland

Conservation Grazing

In their initial years at Knapps, the Clarkes kept pedigree Herefords, a few additional store cattle and a flock of Suffolk sheep. As the farm expanded to take on additional land (including the area now designated SSSI), they began to concentrate exclusively on dairying. The core farm business now comprises a 126-strong milking herd of predominantly Holstein cows, producing high average yields of 9700 litres per year. The farm is highly mechanized, and has achieved recognition within the dairy industry, for example winning a Royal Welsh Award for innovations in big bale silage technology.

Grazing on the Tops was, before SSSI designation, an ad hoc affair. The gate separating it from the adjoining improved land was occasionally opened, and part of the dairy herd might wander in. Following notification, a more targeted management regime was implemented in partnership with CCW. An initial programme of boundary fencing made the site fully stock-proof again. Cutting of over-mature purple moor grass tussocks made all parts of the site accessible and more attractive to grazing animals. This was carried out under CCW instruction using their recently purchased Ryetec flail-mower. A small herd of Hereford store cattle was purchased to graze the site in summer, when the purple moor grass would be most readily grazed and provide adequate feed value.

The number of Herefords grazed has fluctuated, but the preferred system currently comprises around 5 stores, going out at 14-15 months old and spending 3-4 months of the summer on the SAC. They grow a larger frame, but lose weight here, which can be a useful way of stopping them getting too fat. They then go into the sheds with the dairy herd in August or September to be finished. They are finished easily within 30 months on silage only. They are then sold, via a local dealer, to the Waitrose processing plant at Dovecote Park. Prices obtained have been good in the last couple of years. The grazing regime has needed to be flexible in line with seasonal variations and changing productivity. The current trend is towards set stocking, and fencing of smaller compartments to enable tighter control of grazing.



Hereford / Friesian cross cattle on the SSSI



Welsh Mountain ponies

Some additional grazing on the SSSI, usually in autumn or winter, is provided by a herd of Welsh Mountain ponies. The non-SSSI land in the wildlife 'corridor' is exclusively pony-grazed. Numbers reached a peak of 16, but have subsequently fallen as the land has become less productive and the value of ponies has plummeted. The current herd of 12 will be reduced to single figures this year. No particular grazing regime is involved, with a continual need for the stocking to be adjusted in the light of available grass and ground conditions. The ponies are kept in groups, with young stock, mares, and a stallion all kept separately. Ponies are sold privately or at the Fayre Oaks sale in Builth Wells.

Soft rush is a management challenge in the 'wildlife corridor', as large unpalatable tussocks become dominant in response to the wet summers and disturbed ground. These outcompete more desirable wetland plants, and reduce the forage area for grazing stock. The grazing is now supplemented by a regular rotational topping regime, and a heavy duty flail mower has been bought for this purpose. In contrast to the old tussocks, the fresh regrowth is grazed by the ponies. Topping of purple moor grass tussocks on the SAC has enhanced the sward structure, and encouraged cattle to graze the fresh growth.



Recovery management with CCW-owned Ryetec flail-mower

The Clarkes are mindful of the risk from poisonous plants, having lost a beef animal to suspected hemlock water dropwort ingestion. They have also experienced photo-sensitisation in animals, perhaps as a result of ingestion of an uncommon plant, wavy St. John's-wort. Much effort is expended on ragwort pulling.

Few other cattle husbandry or welfare problems have been experienced to date, although a diseased animal or a herd inspection called whilst the Herefords are grazing the SAC would necessitate a time consuming

recall of animals to the farmyard. The wildlife corridor would prove useful in this respect, as a route through silage fields can be avoided.

The chief issue relating to pony grazing on the site relates to preparation for sale, as Welsh Mountain ponies need removing from wet ground six months before sale to allow the tail hair or leg 'feather' to regrow. Sweet itch is occasionally a problem, and the prevalence of midges on the wet ground exacerbates this. The ponies are not routinely wormed, as rotational stocking reduces the worm burden. The cattle are wormed in the autumn before being housed.

Funding

Some initial management payments on the 'Tops' were made by The Habitat Scheme, but delays in processing of this scheme caused frustration and an adjoining piece of marshy grassland was improved at this time.

Following SSSI / SAC notification, a Section 15 management agreement was negotiated with CCW. This provided funding for grazing infrastructure as well as an annual payment to reflect the costs of delivering a tailored grazing regime. It included a recognition of the high costs of purchasing store cattle in spring, and the small profit obtained when selling them again at the end of the summer grazing period.

With this Agreement proving satisfactory to both parties, the new Tir Gofal scheme provided an opportunity to carry out conservation work on other parts of the farm. An enthusiastic Project Officer coupled to the Clarkes' desire to succeed in their conservation work as well as dairying, led to an ambitious programme of habitat re-creation work being delivered in a swathe of land through the centre of the farm.



Pond creation

The Tir Gofal agreement provided funding for pond digging, turf-scraping, spreading of seed-rich material cut from the SAC and raising water levels to create new marshy grassland, as well as associated hedge-bank creation and planting. The Clarkes withdrew from Tir Gofal at the five-year break clause, as they found the compliance-led, inflexible nature of the scheme at odds with the positive relationship with CCW staff which preceded it.

Some of the Tir Gofal work, including the streamside corridors, was undone on their exit from the scheme, but the Section 15 Agreement was able to expand to accommodate the habitat re-creation land. The Clarkes perceive Glastir as too complicated, and an excessive amount of intrusion for insignificant financial reward. However, some areas of new planting under the Better Woodlands for Wales Scheme have subsequently been transferred to Glastir Woodlands.

The farm receives Single Farm Payment, and there is a close match between the currently available forage area and the number of entitlements held. The conservation grazing land is required to activate the entitlements, and scrub management on the SAC is in large part driven by the need to maximise the forage area. Fortunately, this aim is broadly in keeping with the SAC management plan.

The few beef cattle do quite well, and are able to generate a break-even income without the support of the management agreement. However, they would not generate the revenue necessary to fund grazing infrastructure improvements and maintenance. They do not provide an income which utilises the land to its full economic potential and, without support or legislation, the better parts of the SSSI would inevitably be improved. Abandonment would be an alternative option.

The S15 management agreement is critical to the continuation of the habitat re-creation project on the non-SSSI land. The agricultural productivity has declined as the conservation interest has been enhanced. The ponies make a financial loss. The Clarkes are concerned that the S15 over the non-designated land may be withdrawn under the new organisation. They would then install drains again, and plough or plant with trees rather than continue management through Glastir.

Achievements

The SAC provides an exemplar of marshy grassland recovery management. In the ten years since designation, the cutting and grazing has resulted in a sward considerably more open and rich in key species such as devil's-bit scabious. Unfortunately, the marsh fritillary butterfly whose larvae feed on the scabious have not fared so well, and none have been seen for several years. The population crash was predicted by research which shows that a far larger area of suitable habitat is needed in the surrounding area than is currently available. Monitoring is carried out by NRW, and results are fed back to the Clarkes. Good dialogue ensures that adjustments to the management regime are made as a result.

The experimental marshy grassland re-creation work is showing positive signs, with the scabious successfully introduced to and spreading through areas where enriched topsoil was removed and drainage reversed. Soil disturbance has encouraged the growth of problematic species too, notably marsh ragwort and soft rush.



Scarce blue-tailed damselfly



Maturing pond

Ponds have matured and support waterfowl, aquatic plants and insects. The scarce blue-tailed damselfly colonised the young ponds, and continued trampling of the pond margins by stock enables it to persist.

Hay meadow reversion is in its infancy, and there are mixed signs. Yellow rattle is abundant, although perceived as a problem, lesser knapweed is spreading, and productive grasses have been replaced by species including couch and cock's-foot. Agricultural weed species such as docks are, however, flourishing under the winter-grazing regime.

New hedge-banks delimiting the wildlife corridor were created using the soil removed from the new marshy grassland areas. Hedges planted on these have established very well, and the technique pioneered here has been adopted by the Glastir scheme as an optional prescription. Groups of trees have been very successfully established using saplings transplanted from a nearby SSSI where they were encroaching on unimproved grassland.

Alongside the achievements for habitats and species, considerable good work has been done to improve understanding between farming and conservation. The farm has hosted visits by professional and public groups, such as the University of the Third Age.

The farm has been rewarded for this work by winning both the Royal Welsh Agri-Environment Award, and the UK Silver Lapwing Award.

Future Development and Lessons Learnt

Economics permitting, the Clarkes intend to continue their conservation work to the same award-winning standard. They see the pony numbers continuing to decline, but Hereford numbers rising slightly. More intensive rush management is envisaged.

Longer term, they've discussed with their son a switch away from dairy to a beef cattle regime across the whole farm. Climate change may introduce new issues, particularly prolonged wet winters which create problems in conserving enough forage to keep animals going through the year. Unusual seasonal conditions reinforce the need for agri-environment grazing prescriptions to be flexible.



Opening up of tussocky, neglected sward

References and Further Reading

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