



BRECKLAND FARMERS WILDLIFE NETWORK

Enhancing Biodiversity in the Brecks

February News 2024

We are thrilled to be able to share with members the news that we have secured 3 years worth of grant funding from the Esmée Fairbairn Foundation. This funding allows us to build capacity into the team which has been reliant on stringent funding for the Landscape Recovery project (LR). Whilst we once again bid farewell to Cathy Mumford who stepped up between August and January to take some pressure off the LR team, we are pleased to welcome Emma Tovell into the team who will be providing a supporting role to Pip, Lucy and Richard, allowing them to have more time to focus on the wider BFWN work. As always, please do get in touch if you have any thoughts or suggestions for BFWN work going forward.

Top Seasonal Tips on Cultivated Margin Management

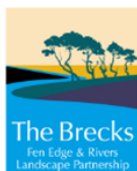
Disappointingly cultivated margins are still not included in SFI. As multiple schemes can be layered on the same land (providing there is no double funding), we would urge people to retain their cultivated margins delivered through other agreements e.g. CS.

- Any margins not cultivated in the autumn or during February should be cultivated as soon as possible.
- Cultivations should aim to produce a firm, fine, level seed-bed.
- Cloddy, uneven seed-beds result in fewer desirable arable plants, and more hard-to-control weeds such as ragwort and thistles.

If you have any questions about cultivated margin management please get in touch at team@bfwn.org.uk where we will seek answers from our local experts.



Landscape Recovery update



Landscape Recovery

We are nearing the end of our first year of working on the Landscape Recovery project, which has been bewildering in its complexity and 'newness'. We have to remember that nothing similar has been attempted before, hence there are far more questions than answers.

The result of our 'co-designed' agreement has the potential to create an extraordinary uplift in the biodiversity of the Brecks, and to be financially advantageous for farmers involved.

Finds from invertebrate surveys carried out on cultivated margins as part of the project have provided a reminder of just how astonishing our Breckland farmland is for biodiversity. Through our LR project we hope to enable species such as those listed below to move more readily through the landscape, establishing new and thriving populations.



"Significant finds" - Comments from Steve Lane who undertook the species ID work

- *Psylliodes sophiae* - flixweed flea beetle - nationally rare
This beetle is only found in the Brecks, and this is the first record in 8 years.
- *Harpalus griseus* - ground beetle
This is a rarity, originally thought to occur as a migrant, but now evidently established in a few pockets of England, the Breckland district being one of them.
- *Saprinus virescens* - clown beetle - nationally rare
A great surprise. This is a rare beetle, usually found preying on larvae of the leaf beetle *Gastrophysa polygoni*, under prostrate mats of knotgrass. Its presence in two of the samples is particularly exciting.
- *Cryptophagus schmidtii* - beetle - nationally rare
Numbers of this species in the samples were unprecedented - these are likely to be the highest numbers ever recorded in Britain of this rare and little-understood species.
- *Arocephalus languidus* - leafhopper - status not yet evaluated
The surveys have produced a 3rd British locality for this unremarkable (in appearance) leafhopper.

Eurasian Curlew - please contact Harry Ewing now if you would like to take part in his project for the 2024 nesting season.

The aim of the project is to boost curlew breeding productivity by deploying electric fences around nests to exclude foxes. Fence deployment will take place between March and June 2024 and Harry and his team would like to work alongside members of the BWFN to protect as many curlew nests as possible. Fences will be 20x20m, four-strand, electric and will be supplied and erected by the project team.

Harry Ewing (BTO Research Ecologist)

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Biodiversity Net Gain

Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) became a legal requirement for developers from 12th February 2024 and is a potential long-term income stream for farmers and land managers. When planning permission is granted for a development it will contain a condition that the developer must provide a biodiversity net gain of at least 10%. Usually this will be delivered within the development boundary, where this is not possible it can be secured off-site. It is this off-site gain that provides the opportunity for farmers who may choose to offer some of their land for habitat improvements that can count towards a developer's BNG.

Is it right for Brecks farmers?

Everyone will have their own business considerations to guide their decision about whether to tie up land for the purposes of BNG, but our understanding of the new regime and its relationship to our Landscape Recovery project is as follows:

- BNG involves a minimum time commitment of 30 years from when the BNG is delivered - and this may not be for some years after a contract is agreed with a BNG consultant, meaning it could easily be longer. Landscape Recovery agreements must be a minimum of 20 years, with regular review periods built in.
- Early indications are that the metric which determines the habitat to be created favours less distinctive habitats than those we are aiming to create and restore across the Brecks, and therefore is unlikely to lead to the biodiversity uplift that we are aiming for with Landscape Recovery.
- There is no guarantee that the demand for BNG in and around the Brecks will be sufficient to utilise land made available by farmers and land managers. The Landscape Recovery project will be looking at BNG as a potential funding source, but we are unconvinced that it will be a significant element and are focusing our efforts on a blended package of public and private funding, with corporate investors as a primary focus.

Breckland Farmers Wildlife Network Contact Details

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