

DARTMOOR HILL FARM PROJECT

SPRING 2024

# newsletter

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**Dartmoor  
HILL FARM  
PROJECT**



## **Dartmoor Hosts the English National Sheepdog Trial**

**A PREVIEW OF WHATS TO COME IN AUGUST**

## **The Fursdon Review**

**DAVID FURSDON'S REFLECTIONS ON DARTMOOR**

## **Healthy Livestock**

**FOCUS ON LOUPING ILL, TICK BORNE DISEASE  
AND DUNG BEETLES**

## **Landscape Recovery**

**A SUMMARY OF DARTMOORS THREE PILOT SCHEMES**

PHOTO: LISA SOAR

## A WORD FROM THE CHAIR

### It never rains...but it pours?

After the wettest six months in thirty years I am beginning to think we may need to re-model our farm enterprise. Whilst livestock has been the backbone of Bowden I have a feeling that paddy fields and long grain rice might be the new kids on the block! On a serious note, it does seem we are experiencing wetter, milder winters with a notable absence of sunshine and vitamin D.

Adapting to climate change requires careful planning and a willingness to look forward and embrace new opportunities. Inspired by others we have been embarking on a number of projects. This has included planting up hedges, slowing down water and utilising the suns energy to supplement our electricity needs. Whilst these changes may appear small they are being replicated by many businesses across Dartmoor and reflect a gradual change in support mechanisms and grant aid. As the British Cycling team found, small incremental gains make a discernible difference and provides that competitive edge essential in todays turbulent environment. Whilst I am not advocating a pair of Lycra shorts I do recognise the need to adapt and modify our farmscape to respond to the challenges we now face.

Our newsletter is full of articles in a similar vein from the 'Fursdon Review' to commons governance and emerging new schemes. Whilst change can be unsettling it can reinvigorate a business where there is a willingness to adapt and embrace the new world

Hope the lambing and calving goes well.

*Russell Ashford - Chair, DHFP*



Russell, Sandy and grandchild Evie

## Final Year - Farming in Protected Landscapes

The Farming in Protected Landscapes (FiPL) programme is now entering its final year, finishing in March 2025. The programme is available for those within the Dartmoor National Park and is open for all farmers and land managers, including groups and commons. The programme funds projects meeting broad outcomes under Climate, Environment, People and Place. Grants range from 40-100% dependant on the outcomes and commercial benefit. In particular, those considering projects which are innovative, collaborative or provide knowledge exchange are encouraged to apply. Full details can be found on the Dartmoor National Park website under the Farming in Protected Landscapes link. [www.dartmoor.gov.uk/living-and-working/farming/farming-in-protected-landscapes](http://www.dartmoor.gov.uk/living-and-working/farming/farming-in-protected-landscapes). The FiPL team will be at the Two Bridges Hotel from 9am-5pm on 29 May, and will be available to discuss your ideas or answer questions at this free drop in session.

*"The application process was amazingly easy with such enthusiastic help from the FiPL team, who went above and beyond what we expected. We have exciting times ahead working with Liverpool University seeing the results of Liverfluke research."* Justine Colton – Tor Royal Farm

**Frenchbeer Farm received a FiPL grant for the purchase and subscription of No Fence Collars, to assist with grazing management.**

"I was interested in using No Fence collars to improve grazing on our Newtakes, particularly around Wistmans Wood, where physical fencing is both impractical and unsightly, as well as restricting public access to the woods. The application was straightforward, and the team were very helpful, particularly in suggesting items to add to my application to make sure I was getting the best value for money and an application suitable to achieve my goal. The No Fence collars proved themselves very useful throughout the first season of use, successfully keeping stock out of the woods as well as providing additional benefits, especially in knowing the location of animals when there is poor visibility. The ability to slowly bring the virtual fence towards the gate over a period of time has saved a significant amount of time which would have previously been spent gathering animals when bringing them in and we know we have not missed any."



# Tackling Tick Borne Challenges

In this article **Beth Wells** a Principal Research Scientist at the **Moredun Research Institute** provides an update on efforts to develop a new Louping Ill vaccine for sheep.



## A TICK 'TIME BOMB'

Due to milder winters tick activity is now reported all year round in the UK. As a consequence, tick borne diseases (TBD) are on the increase. Ticks have a three-year life cycle with each stage requiring only one blood meal (one host). This makes it possible for ticks to transmit diseases to their host during nymph and adult stages, or for some pathogens through eggs and larvae.

The most common tick in the British Isles is *Ixodes ricinus*, the sheep tick, which is the vector for: Louping ill, tick borne fever, babesiosis (redwater fever), tick pyaemia, Lyme Disease (*Borrelia*) and more recently tick-borne encephalitis (TBEV). *Ixodes ricinus* can be infected and transmit more than one pathogen at the same time, explaining the variations seen in clinical signs and response to treatment in affected animals.

## LOUPING ILL (LI) - AN ECONOMICALLY IMPORTANT AND ACUTE TICK TRANSMITTED VIRAL DISEASE

LI affects the central nervous system and is principally found in sheep and red grouse but also occasionally causing disease in humans, cattle, horses, goats, dogs, pigs, (red and roe) deer, llamas and alpacas. When a tick injects louping ill virus (LIV) into a sheep, from 6 to 19 days later, some of the animals may show clinical signs. In areas where the disease is constantly present, many animals develop only mild infections with only a few progressing towards neurological signs. After this, the antibody response in the host eliminates the virus from the bloodstream and provides strong immunity for up to around six months, or longer if the sheep is naturally challenged with LIV again. Young lambs are protected by antibodies via maternal colostrum, providing solid protection for up to three months, as long as the



Adult tick PHOTO: ERIK KARITS/PIXABAY

## Louping Ill – Dartmoor Update

Regrettably this virus is spreading on Dartmoor and we have provided Moredun with case studies covering ponies, sheepdogs, sheep and cattle. If you have been affected and would be willing to share your story, please contact us at [hfp@dartmoor.gov.uk](mailto:hfp@dartmoor.gov.uk).

lamb receives enough colostrum at birth and the ewe has either been vaccinated or previously been naturally infected.

Diagnosis is important and surveillance indicates that LI is increasing in areas of the UK where ticks are prevalent. Moredun have developed an effective, new generation vaccine to protect sheep against Louping Ill and the vaccine is currently undergoing scrutiny with the Veterinary Medicines Directorate for Limited Marketing Authorisation. A potential commercial partner has been identified and are dedicated to getting this vaccine to the marketplace as quickly as possible.

The most effective control strategies should be part of flock management health plans and sustainable tick control should include a combination of environmental and animal management. For further information, please visit

[www.moredun.org.uk/research/diseases/ticks-tickborne-diseases](http://www.moredun.org.uk/research/diseases/ticks-tickborne-diseases) or contact Dr Beth Wells [beth.wells@moredun.ac.uk](mailto:beth.wells@moredun.ac.uk) ■

## Dungalicious! Healthy Livestock Project Case Study

Funded by Our Upland Commons we have recently completed a fascinating study involving graziers on Harford and Ugborough common and Holne Moor. Working with entomologist Clive Turner we surveyed the commons (2 + control site) and associated in-bye three times in 2023 using an innovative field methodology. This looked at 7500 litres of dung and identified 86,000 beetles with a total of 35 different species including new records for Dartmoor.



The study established the mean number of dung beetles per livestock type with sheep topping the charts at 358 per litre. Species preference for dung type was also explored alongside the vital role performed by three species grazing for this taxa. Each farms vet med use was captured and used to inform results in the field. The full report can be found on our website [www.dartmoorhillfarmproject.co.uk](http://www.dartmoorhillfarmproject.co.uk) and we hope to extend this work in 2024.



Our Common Cause:  
Our Upland Commons

**STOP PRESS: HFP Tick Event with Moredun: 31 July 2024 – please see Events on back page**



**The second Dartmoor Test & Trial aimed to test the practical development of payment by results (PBR) on common land by designing and trialling a model with commons graziers across Dartmoor. It aimed to understand the barriers and opportunities to improve delivery, including necessary governance. It carried out extensive literature reviews of PBR; analysis of Dartmoor's farming systems, economics, governance and management with regular engagement and input from more than 70 active farmers / commoners and key stakeholders. This led to two specialist farmer/owner panels focussed on PBR and Governance.**

Financial analysis of FBS data illustrated the economic fragility of Dartmoor farms; which have led to system and management changes resulting in a reduction in grazing livestock numbers and a shift to concentrate farm income on enterprises less dependent on the moor. This had led to fragility of commons management and the knowledge and culture that supports it.

PBR was found to offer potential benefits to achieve effective commons management on Dartmoor, but with key relevant features included, such as linked advice and training to encourage commoner learning; 'capital works' or 'management actions' funding (on top of a PBR payment/ha); and a governance approach that enables trust and regular communication.

The process of farmer engagement and discussion enabled a robust PBR approach, with broad support for a new scheme offering a more transparent and results-focused approach to generate public benefits on Dartmoor. Ideas were refined by learning from the Foundation for Common Land (FCL) test and trial to develop the SFI on common land, along with a Commons Association survey. Trials were completed on 3 clusters of commons (embracing six individual commons).

### Summary recommendations

Commoners and owners favour stronger advice and support as well as clearly delineated funding for specific, targeted management through 'Management Action Plans' ('MAP's), working alongside a regular PBR review and reward system. There are widespread calls for the approach to be led by a body which is independent of Natural England with adequate resource to ensure sustained advice and ongoing dialogue with commoners and owners. Therefore, broad support and enthusiasm to take forward a PBR-style scheme for Dartmoor commons, based upon three elements:

- A per-hectare annual payment linked to a scoring system that reflects how a common is delivering a range of public goods.
- A 'MAP' comprising an agreed 3-year rolling programme of specific management work to address issues identified through the PBR survey and scoring.
- A professional team of co-ordinators, facilitators and advisers who ensure the quality of assessments and oversee efficient and effective delivery. Also a technical team to support commoners, assist commons secretaries and provide assurance for external bodies.

It is feasible to plan a total package spending no more than previous HLS + BPS on Dartmoor commons, focusing a higher share of total payment on the active rights holders and owners. The new scheme would link payments closely to regular active management, monitoring and feedback. To cover costs, ensure viability and sufficient incentive to join, average scores should result in payments around £225/ha (at 2024 prices), across Dartmoor commons as a whole.

The level of farmer engagement and support gave confidence that it could proceed to a pilot, aiming for this to become a 'special project' under the CS+ scheme, within the next 2-3 years working with Defra, current board members and stakeholders, to develop the precise specification. The pilot should fund a PBR package on at least 6 commons in 2024-2026, with a view to leading to integration into CS+ from 2026 onwards if successful.

A management team for the special project will enable savings in admin and delivery within RPA and NE, providing significant added-value in respect of scheme outcomes. PBR itself could operate via automated payments and 'MAP's could follow standard CS capital works procedures within RPA.

It was recommended the RPA should also work to improve in-house capability to ensure informed management of ELM collective agreements; helping eliminate current issues of misunderstanding, disincentive and error that have arisen, to instead recognise the complexity of collective-entity situations. The RPA (continuing to liaise with FCL and this project) should establish a core of expertise, tailored procedures and communication materials to enable effective delivery of ELM collective agreements. ■

NB: The final summary report will be made available on the DHFP website once available.

# Dartmoor reflections: David Fursdon in conversation

**David Fursdon** was the Chair for the Independent Review of Protected Site Management on Dartmoor commissioned by the Secretary of State for Defra. The panel made a series of recommendations to the Minister Steve Barclay who responded positively in his April statement which can be viewed in full via the Hill Farm Project website. Over the next two years a Land Use Sub-Group will guide the implementation of a range of actions to address the issues highlighted in the 'Fursdon Review'.



David Fursdon

David kindly agreed to reflect on the panels work and their immersive experience on Dartmoor.

## **Do you have any observations on how to re-build relationships between key parties on Dartmoor?**

Human nature likes to be appreciated for what we do and being a hill shepherd is a really hard thing to do in all weathers. I came across people who were doing really impressive things as part of our engagement on Dartmoor. As Lord-Lieutenant for Devon I spend my time thanking people and I come across lots of individuals below the radar who probably deserve more recognition. Farmers are no different and most people think they are tough and don't need to be thanked but actually someone needs to. Ultimately this whole thing will go much better if people step up and think about it from the others person's perspective as well as their own.

## **One of your recommendations is that Dartmoor's governance should be reinforced by the creation of a Land-Use Management Group (LUMG). How do you see this evolving?**

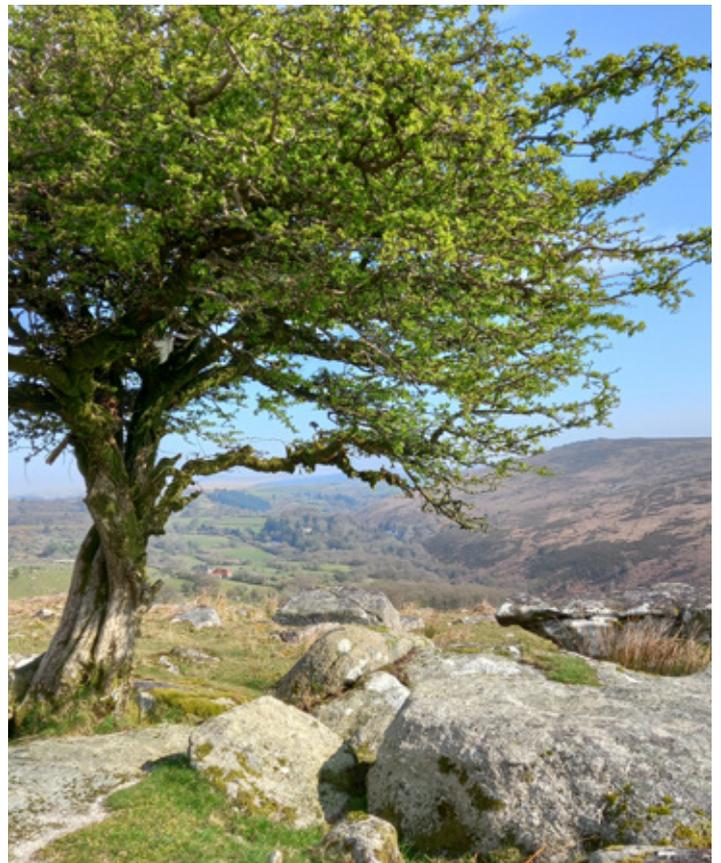
How you put the LUMG together is an interesting one and I have been thinking hard about how we do that whilst bringing some freshness to the table. I think an Independent Chair is important to facilitate the re-establishment of cordial relationships. In essence this group forms a space for the interested parties to work together and to find a constructive and collegiate way forward. I would hope that in the Government response there is a focus on that and a timeline. Point scoring has been a feature of the recent past and it worked to some extent. An example of seeing things from different perspectives is Historic England thinking that NE are focussing on SSSIs and not their needs. For all these people there needs to be a new bond and a bit of a stick from Government alongside the carrots to engender a new spirit of trust and collaboration.

## **What do you feel is required to move the Panel's recommendations forward?**

The answer is leadership from all the parties to put right what's gone wrong. Ultimately if those involved are not prepared to find a solution then someone will do it to them. We need visionary leadership aiming to work for an outcome for Dartmoor and not just the individual. We

haven't been prescriptive about how things should be done but have given suggestions and a clear thought process to help the process. It needs local people to get on and do things and I am encouraged to see that's happening. I hope we can keep the pressure up on Defra not to dodge the difficult stuff. This includes the SSSI's which I feel is pretty important. We have done our job with the Review it now requires people to show enlightenment and a bit of ambition to move it forward. ■

A link to the full Review and latest updates can be accessed on the DHFP website.



The view from Combestone Tor

# Top dogs and shepherds go out in the mid-day sun – English National 2024

This summer Dartmoor will host the English National Sheepdog Trials for the first time. Over 150 elite dogs and handlers will compete with just 15 (+ reserve) destined to represent their country at the next International Sheepdog trials. Moorlands Farm near Princetown is the stunning venue for a great showcase of upland sheep farming in the south west.

## AN OVERVIEW OF THE INTERNATIONAL SHEEP DOG SOCIETY

Sheepdog trials and the Border Collie have a long tradition in Britain dating back to the 1870s. The origins of today's working dogs is attributed to Adam Telfer of Northumberland who bred and trained 'Old Hemp' considered to be the 'father' of the breed. The north east of England and the Scottish borders were pioneers of sheepdog societies. These soon spread to other parts of the UK and the International Sheep Dog Society (ISDS) was formed in Lothian in 1906 hosting its first event with dogs from both side of the Scottish border. Competition between the two nations continued until 1922 when Wales joined, hosting the International the same year at Criccieth. It wasn't until 40 years later that Northern Ireland and Eire joined, making Ireland the fourth member nation. Since 2004 a further seven Associate nations have also been affiliated to the ISDS including Brazil, the Netherlands and even the Faroe Islands.

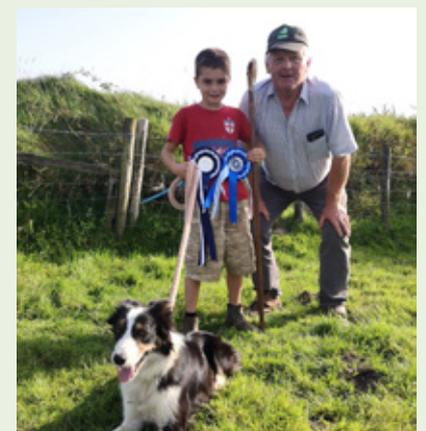
Sheepdog trials have always been a popular spectator event with over 200,000 people attending the International in Hyde Park in 1949. The popular television series *One Man and his Dog* brought trialling to a world wide audience providing a showcase for British shepherds and upland farming in particular. Today it continues to draw crowds and the four-day event on Dartmoor is expected to welcome between six and ten thousand spectators. The local ISDS Organising Committee are also providing a small country fair and entertainment with 'tug of war' on Friday evening and live music on Saturday night plus a bar!



Novice Handlers and Judges – DHFP Event 2023



Nick Ashman and Kenny Watson



Seth with Jed Watson at the HFP Novice Handler Training

## WOSZZON – DO 'COME BY'!

The programme starts with the Braces (x9) and the singles follow on (150). Top 2 brace and top 15 singles will make up the next English National Team

- **Thursday 8 August** – (12 noon – 6pm) – Braces (9 Pairs)
- **Friday 9 August** – (7am – 7pm) – Singles (50 Singles)
- **Saturday 10 August** (7am – 7pm) – Singles (50 Singles)
- **Sunday 11 August (7am – 7pm)** – Singles (50) plus 3 top dogs compete for overall champion followed by the Grand Presentation

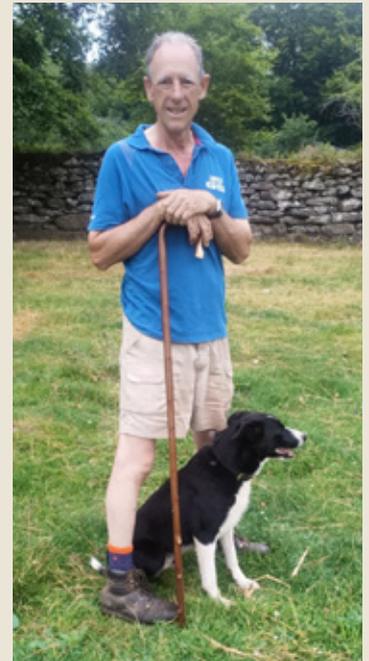
Adults £10 entry / day with under 16s free

## NOVICE DOGS NOVICE HANDLERS – HFP SHEEPDOG TRAINING

The Dartmoor Hill Farm Project has run Novice Sheepdog Training since 2017, using the famous Watson brothers from Postbridge. Both Jed and Kenny have been working dogs since they could walk and their father was a keen trialer in his day. Together they provide a blend of practical and competitive knowledge getting the most out of a working dog and providing clear and direct tuition. A number of participants have gone onto the ‘Novice Trial’ level which is the first step on the rung to the National! See Events page for course details for 2024.

### PROFILE: NICK FELL

“We have a small farm at Merrivale with a flock of Scotch sheep and some cattle. Since retirement I have had time to invest in a useful dog as opposed to a motorbike and lots of shouting! We got ‘Boss’ from a local farm at the advanced age of 7 months old and he quickly settled in. Once we had obedience instilled we joined the Hill Farm Project course. Kenny soon got to work on us (as opposed to Boss!) and we followed up with a second course a few months later and made good progress. It was then suggested we enter the Whitchurch trial and as our confidence grew we competed in the winter nursery trials, meeting some lovely people and winning the Aggregate Cup for New Handlers. Our journey continues as I am learning to whistle and we now have Tommy one of a litter sired by Boss. I would encourage anyone with a love of dogs, sheep and Dartmoor to take up the challenge and to leave the quad and your waving hands behind!”



Nick Fell with Boss

### A WORD FROM THE HOSTS – LAYLAND AND GILL BRANFIELD – MOORLANDS FARM

“Gill and I moved to Moorlands in October 1987 following spells on Exmoor and Cumbria. It was while in the north of England that my passion for trialling developed running dogs, judging and becoming a lifelong member of the International Sheep Dog Society.

“I always dreamt that one day we would host the National, so it is a dream come true! The trial involves a lot of preparation to adjust our farming calendar and accommodate the event. Our cows are calving early, and we plan to cut some of the fields in July a month ahead of our normal cycle. In total we have allocated 145 acres of Prince Hall to the National so space for livestock will be at a premium! Ultimately it will showcase Dartmoor’s agricultural community and provide a real test of the best dogs and handlers England has to offer.”

\*Read the full interview with Layland on our website [www.dartmoorhillfarmproject.co.uk](http://www.dartmoorhillfarmproject.co.uk)



Layland Branfield of Moorlands Farm

## NATIONAL FACTS & FIGURES

Sheep required:

**600**

Competitors:

**159**

Competition hours:

**42**

Perfect Trial score:

**220**

Course length in yards:

**400**

Number of judges:

**2**

Sheep per Single Run:

**5**

Sheep per Brace:

**10**

Maximum time to complete course in minutes:

**20**

## THIS TRIAL NEEDS YOU!

The local ISDS Organising Committee are looking for volunteers, trade stands (Country Fair) and sponsorship to help fund the National. There is a lot to do so all ‘hands’ welcomed! Please email with your enquiry to [englishnational2024@gmail.com](mailto:englishnational2024@gmail.com)



# Farm for The Future

**A further five events took place across the winter months under our recent round of Farm for the Future, delivered in partnership with the Royal Countryside Fund. Expanded with new farmers joining the programme, along with continued support for existing contacts, the overall numbers taking part have now reached more than 150 individual farm businesses across Dartmoor.**

The main objective is to help understand key points emerging around the changes in policy, illustrate in real terms the pros and cons of alternatives offered by emerging schemes and how to practically take advantage of these in a typical Dartmoor farming business. We strive to keep these events practical and relevant, with guest speakers who can provide insight and experience. Recently these included an Agricultural Valuer, AHDB, local Vets and a Renewable Energy provider.

With a lot of interest in the proposed combined Countryside Stewardship (CS) and Sustainable Farming Incentive (SFI) we ran two events that tried to keep up with the newly released information and clarify current options and were joined in January by speakers from Defra and RPA.

Farmer feedback this year has been positive and supportive and we will consult with farmers heading into the third and final full year of Farm for the Future to ensure events meet expectations and remain relevant, hopefully with a fuller picture of scheme details. These are designed to feed into and work in parallel to our wider list of complementary events (see the DHFP events diary for details).

A few comments from our farmers:

*“Thanks for a very informative and enjoyable set of meetings and updates, which also give a good opportunity to network, and often to see other farms”*



**Never too young or old to learn something new; all generations have been involved in our events.**

*“It’s been good to hear about some of the (SFI) options to start thinking about what we might want to do at this stage, and better to talk about it practically on a farm than try to take it all in from a webinar.”*

*“Thank you for organising the Animal Health & Welfare Pathway meeting - I found it very helpful and we are now looking at next steps for us.”*

*“Very grateful for the help and awareness created.”*

*“Thank you for all your work and help this year, the problem is finding the time to consider all the information and support that is on offer...!”*

*“Great to see a mixture of people in the room and from different generations, to help share knowledge which is really valuable.”*

*“The worked examples were very useful – helpful to use more of these so people can understand how all these options fit together.”*

The programme is due to continue in the autumn, but any farmer who was in receipt of BPS is eligible and may contact us if interested to take part [hfp@dartmoor.gov.uk](mailto:hfp@dartmoor.gov.uk) ■



**Keeping workshops practical, thanks to our host farms this year.**

# New kid on the block?

## Landscape Recovery on Dartmoor

**Landscape Recovery (LR) is the Government's most ambitious and creative offer under the new Environmental Land Management (ELM) scheme. It's aimed at larger scale collaborative outcomes with 20 year agreements reflecting the time required to deliver change. Still in its pilot stage there were 22 projects approved in round 1 (focus: species recovery & river restoration) and a further 34 in round 2 (focus: net zero, protected sites, and wildlife-rich habitat). Successful applicants have up to 2 years through a funded development phase to design and scope their proposals. Defra will then evaluate the plan before deciding if they wish to invest in the delivery phase.**

The distinguishing features of LR projects is that they are large scale with long term public funding, bespoke agreements and the use of a mix of public and private sector finance. Defra see this tier of ELM as a place to 'innovate' and the challenge is to identify 'what, how, where and when' and importantly what it should cost?

Dartmoor has three LR initiatives which includes the East Dartmoor project awarded in 2022 and the Central Dartmoor and Walkham bids in 2023. The projects intend to work closely together to share ideas, avoid duplication and maximise opportunities for the participating businesses. Collectively they cover around 25% of the National Park area.

### Central Dartmoor Landscape Recovery (Circa 23,000 HA)

The Forest of Dartmoor is part of a Central Dartmoor Landscape Recovery (CDLR) proposal developed by the Central Dartmoor Farm Cluster in partnership with the Duchy of Cornwall. Its farmer led and focussed with an inclusive steering group which includes representatives of The Duchy of Cornwall, Devon Wildlife Trust and the Dartmoor National Park Authority.

The aim of CDLR is to develop workable solutions to deliver environmental improvements and other public goods across the moor strengthening the economic viability and resilience of the farms. During the early stages the group will bring together farmers, landowners, conservationists and people who share their interest and love for Dartmoor. The aim is to agree a clear and detailed vision that balances the various interests to show how each bit of land might look in 20, 30, 50 years' time. Participating farms will undertake a farm business audit which will provide advice to model the long-term financial outlook for various scenarios (e.g. business as usual, intensifying and Landscape Recovery). The project will also explore ways to maintain levels of food production, improve animal health and add value to produce. A key part of the LR offer will be designing an effective monitoring and evaluation framework for any future scheme delivery.

An aspiration of CDLR is to extend the project area to cover more commons and their home farms so that other Dartmoor farmers have a similar opportunity. You can find out more on the website - [www.dartmoorfarmcluster.uk/landscape-recovery](http://www.dartmoorfarmcluster.uk/landscape-recovery)

### The Walkham (Circa 3,000 HA)

The Walkham Landscape Recovery project is based on a valley catchment system and incorporates land draining into the river Walkham. As well as a number of commons the bid includes over 20 different farm businesses and key landowners such as the Duchy of Cornwall and Maristow Estate. The proposal was facilitated by Dartmoor National Park Authority who are acting as the responsible body for the development phase.

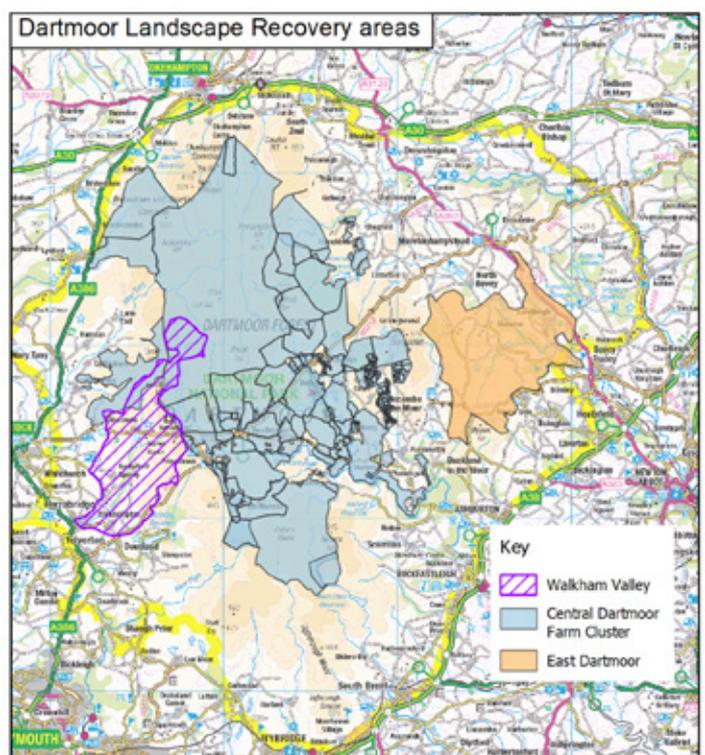
The project area is already recognised for its ecological and cultural value with a range of important habitats of which designated Oak woodland is a notable feature. It runs from the river source on the Forest to just above Horrabridge and includes a wealth of natural and cultural features that are testament to a long tradition of pastoral activity and land stewardship. Working with the farm businesses and landowners the project will seek to identify new opportunities to integrate and enhance management within the catchment focusing on key themes such as water, woodland and peat. Support will be provided to help improve business resilience and to test innovative approaches to animal husbandry and regenerative farming practices. For further information, email [cgiles@dartmoor.gov.uk](mailto:cgiles@dartmoor.gov.uk)

### The East Dartmoor Landscape Recovery Area (Circa 6000 HA)

The East Dartmoor project is working across some of Dartmoor's most iconic landscape and spans three river valleys – the Wray, Becka and Bovey. Led by Devon Wildlife Trust it includes a number of Government agencies and conservation bodies with land holding interest in the area. This includes Devon Biodiversity Records Centre, the National Trust, Natural England, RSPB, Woodland Trust, Dartmoor National Park Authority and Oxygen Conservation Ltd.

The LR is working with the local community to develop a plan that will support landscape resilience and ensure key species and habitats have a secure future. As well as expanding premier nature sites the project is seeking to re-connect and enhance fragmented habitat and to naturalise water courses. There is also an ambition to reintroduce lost fauna and to develop new partnerships and knowledge exchange forums.

For more information visit the Devon Wildlife Trust website [Wilder East Dartmoor](http://www.wildlifetrust.org.uk) | [Devon Wildlife Trust](http://www.devonwildlifetrust.org) or email [nrobinson@devonwildlifetrust.org](mailto:nrobinson@devonwildlifetrust.org) ■



# Down on the Farm – Trialling SFI Grassland Options

**Following on from our grazing brassica trials run last year, the Hill Farm Project is trialling different Sustainable Farming Incentive (SFI) grassland options on farm. With the SFI offer becoming more attractive with increased payment rates and a softer approach to achieving the goals, many are now looking towards the new schemes. However the most popular grassland options – NUM2 (Legumes on Improved Grassland) and SAM3 (Herbal Leys) do present some challenges.**

Whilst these options can bring significant income on farm, they do provide significant changes to more traditional grassland, both in yield and in management. Furthermore, with increasing focus on minimum and zero tillage options for establishment, the trials this year will focus on both of these grassland options, but also on how they are effected by different establishment methods.

The Hill Farm Project will be establishing trial plots of both Legume rich grassland and Herbal Leys, as well as a conventional grass mix on several farms across the moor, with different soil types, climate and management for comparison.

In addition, there will be different methods of establishment used, including: Inversion Tillage, Min-Till with an overseeding machine and a direct drill, as well as comparing the use of glyphosate and without.

The Hill Farm Project will be working closely alongside the farms in order to understand the performance of each plot, which will be measured with a plate meter, as well as total grass yield throughout the season. Financial aspects will be monitored and elements of soil health. We will evaluate overall, whether the trial plots meet the SFI standards.

In addition, The Grazing Discussion Group will be undertaking smaller scale trials looking at novel low cost and simple methods for establishing and incorporating clover in managed grazing systems, such as broadcasting before grazing and feeding to animals.

The hope is that through these trials, farms will be better informed about both the practical aspects of yield and management differences these options require, gaining an understanding of the costs involved with the options and establishment, as well as what elements of the seed mixes are most successful, allowing farms to reduce both establishment cost and risk.

The Hill Farm Project will be hosting a series of open days and events for those who are interested in both visiting the trials as they progress, as well as the results of the trials, which we will also publish on our website. For more information on the trials and events around them please visit [www.dartmoorhillfarmproject.co.uk](http://www.dartmoorhillfarmproject.co.uk) ■



Grass harrow with seeding unit being used to establish ley.

# Precious Time Out



**With so many farming related events out there its sometimes hard to know which ones to prioritise and give your time to; what's most relevant or likely to provide value in some form to the farm business compared to what maybe just an interest? At the Hill Farm Project we know that 'spare time' is a rare thing, so any events we run try to provide 'value' in return, which maybe information, advice or opportunities.**

We aim for events to be practical and informal to encourage questions, generate conversations or lead into more detail where relevant. You are always looking to move your farm forward but may overlook perhaps the most important cog in that machine; *the people*. To make this happen you need to ensure you maintain your own health & wellbeing too. Using the analogy of tractor maintenance; ensure you look after your hydraulics, grease points and filters but like all things, it can breakdown if over-run or over-stressed.

This led us to think about how you need to look after your **PTO: (Precious Time Out)**, which is essential as part of a healthy balance. We can't do it all and we should not be afraid to ask for help when its needed, our events aim to encourage people to take the opportunity for an hour or two away from the farm, to provide a little "brain space" as a breather, combined with a chat and company if you want. And always food.

We have reported regularly on our work with FCN that supports the farming community here on Dartmoor: Farmer Breakfasts and other events like our recent Quiz Night have seen over 700 individuals get involved. Some



The well attended Quiz Night in Princetown earlier this year.

regular Breakfast groups are now venturing out to visit other locations or include interesting talks. The money initially raised from the Witheridge to Frenchbeer (WTF) fundraiser enable us to not only set up new groups, but support events more widely via the Dartmoor Farmers Wellbeing Group (see also their Facebook page) to expand coverage across more parishes. Just get in touch with us at [hfp@dartmoor.gov.uk](mailto:hfp@dartmoor.gov.uk) if we can help you get started with a kitchen table, local café/ farm shop or village hall event – or to find out more. We even help with the washing up!

The Farmer Breakfasts originally centred around opportunities for men to meet up, many of the groups still are exclusively male and this has helped to foster a suitable, comfortable space for their conversations (rarely actually about farming...)! Meanwhile, RABI actively provide support via their 'Community Pillars' pilot which has focussed on provision for women in farming, recognising the difficulties juggling demands from family too, and has run get togethers to suit timings around school for example. These continue to run at Tor Royal Farm (Princetown) as does a regular ladies breakfast club.

Stephen Dennis, FCN Regional Director said: "It's hugely important given all the current changes in farming for people to take a little time out. Also to realise you are not alone in your thinking as we are all facing shared challenges. A couple of hours away from the farm can make the difference, put things into perspective or find further help or advice if that's what's needed." ■



Ed Pollard, Hazel Kendall and Stephen Dennis were recently interviewed by SW Farmer about our events across Dartmoor. PHOTO: SW Farmer

**RABI**  
helping farming people

**FCN** THE FARMING  
COMMUNITY  
NETWORK

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**Dartmoor  
HILL FARM  
PROJECT**

# Events Diary

A selection of our events or training planned in coming months to cut out and keep. Full details are regularly updated on our website [www.dartmoorhillfarmproject.co.uk](http://www.dartmoorhillfarmproject.co.uk) where you can also subscribe for email news bulletins.

**8 MAY, 11am - 2pm**

## Grassland Establishment Machinery Demo Day



Demonstrations of current grassland establishment and rejuvenation machinery, in association with Vincent Tractors.

With a focus on min till in many ELM options this is a great chance to consider different establishment options.

**TOR ROYAL FARM, PRINCETOWN PL20 6SL**

**29 MAY, 10am - 3pm**

## Potential Role of Trees on a Dartmoor Farm



Come along to Hall Farm in Harford for a mix of indoor and outdoor talks, with discussions led by Harriet Bell - Regenerative Farming Lead, Lindsay Whistance- Senior Livestock Researcher and Louise Davis- Farm Business Adviser.

**HALL FARM, HARFORD PL20 OJG**

**24 JULY, 12 - 3pm**

## No Fence Collars on the Moor



Join Farmers who use virtual fence collars to discuss how they work in practice. Including input from No Fence.

Invisible collars are increasingly useful and relevant to grazing on both the in-byre and commons.

**GLEN IRIS FARM, SHEEPSTOR PL21 6PF**

**31 JULY, 11am - 3pm**

## Tick Borne Disease and Animal health on the Common



A workshop with various presentations focussing on animal health and welfare for commons and semi natural grassland. Will include Beth Wells from Moredun discussing Louping Ill and sheep scab and the new vaccine. Other contributions from APHA vets and Clive Turner discussing results of the Healthy Livestock Project on Holne and Harford and Ugborough commons.

**HUCCABY FARM, HEXWORTHY PL20 6SB**

**6 JUNE ONWARDS, evenings**

## Novice Sheepdog Handler Training



With Kenny and Jed Watson at Postbridge aimed at improving working farm dogs. Six sessions starting 7 June and running until mid August.

**Cost: £140+ VAT (£120 for contributors)**

Please contact the office for details [hfp@dartmoor.gov.uk](mailto:hfp@dartmoor.gov.uk)

**POSTBRIDGE**

**28 AUGUST, 12 - 3pm**

## Boundary maintenance payments workshop



A workshop looking into the current and announced SFI boundary options, as well as Countryside Stewardship Capital Grants available for boundaries.

Come along to find out more about the new maintenance options for banks and dry stone walls

**EGWORTHY FARM, WALKHAMPTON PL20 6LJ**

To book any of our events, please either visit our website [www.dartmoorhillfarmproject.co.uk](http://www.dartmoorhillfarmproject.co.uk) where you can use the direct Eventbrite links, or contact us via email [hfp@dartmoor.gov.uk](mailto:hfp@dartmoor.gov.uk) or call **01822 890913**.

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Follow us on @hillfarmproject | Website: [dartmoorhillfarmproject.co.uk](http://dartmoorhillfarmproject.co.uk)

Dartmoor Hill Farm Project is hosted by the Dartmoor National Park Authority who provide core funding along with the Duchy of Cornwall and The Royal Countryside Fund.



**Dartmoor  
HILL FARM  
PROJECT**



**DUCHY of CORNWALL**



**THE ROYAL  
COUNTRYSIDE  
FUND**



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