

Farmer SOMERSET AND CAROLYNE CHARRINGTON
County ARGYLL AND BUTE
Farming system UPLAND LIVESTOCK
Farm size 750HA

What key conservation measures have been undertaken on the farm and what evidence is there of benefit for wildlife?

They manage a number of habitats, such as ancient native broadleaf woodland, wetland, open hill, peat bog, moorland and herb rich grassland, which encourage a wide range of biodiversity.

Birds

Corncrake have been attracted to the farm through provision of early cover and late cutting of damp silage fields. Grasshopper warbler, reed bunting and sedge warbler and have benefitted from wetland creation, with the latter heard for the first time in 2010. Native woodlands host goldfinch, lesser redpoll and siskin with bullfinches recently breeding in areas of natural regeneration. A mosaic of gorse and diverse grasslands provides breeding habitat for increasing yellowhammer and whinchat populations. Thistles and burdock left in margins attract flocks of goldfinch and twite. Extensive grazing provides diverse swards with increases in curlew, red grouse and snipe populations.

Short-eared owls and quail are present. Ponds provide habitat for species including whooper swan and nest boxes and bird feeders are across the farm.



Butterflies/Moths

17 species of butterfly, 255 species of macro moth and 94 species of micro moths have been recorded on the farm, all benefitting from targeted grazing regimes and wetland management. Rarer species include the transparent burnet moth. Butterfly Conservation have conducted a visit.

Plants

Enhancement through wetland creation, fencing off native woodland, extensive grazing of species-rich grassland and moorland with associated bog communities and coastal sedge communities. No artificial fertiliser is used. Monitoring shows diversity – 14 species of orchid (including frog, early-purple, fragrant, greater butterfly, and small-white orchids, narrow-leaved helleborine and broad-leaved helleborine). A number of rarer plants, such as field gentian and wood bitter-vetch thrive in late cut silage. Other plants include bog asphodel and oysterplant.

Other wildlife

Mountain hares favour the coastal margins, species rich grasslands and ungrazed areas. Voles benefit from rough grazing on in-bye and woodland regeneration. Healthy population of otters along the coastline make use of one of the ponds. The de-silting of the pond and maintenance of shallow pools has encouraged 10 species of dragonfly, including keeled skimmers.

Is the farm a well-run commercial operation and on what basis has this been assessed?

Treshnish is managed as a whole entity, with 400 hill black faced ewes and an in-bye flock of 60 Cheviot ewes producing better lambs than the cast black faced ewe flock they replaced. A small cattle herd mainly comprises of Aberdeen Angus, with a few Highland shorthorn cross cows. When they took on the farm there was no grazing policy or specific habitat management plan – with the majority of habitats overgrazed. Reducing the number of hill sheep to around 400 from over 700 has resulted in healthier sheep, higher lambing percentages and increased grass for winter grazing.

Somerset and Carlyne were keen to improve the health and productivity of the sheep flock as well as improve the conservation value of the farm so they signed an Environmentally Sensitive Area agreement, which guided decisions on the grazing regime, silage cutting dates, ploughing dates, etc. They continued this management through RSS and currently through SRDP. They are a Scottish Quality Assured farm, which monitors animal welfare and good farming practice as they would like to re-assure people that their meat is an excellent local produce, raised in a respectful way.

A Whole Farm Review was undertaken a few years ago, and as a result various tweaks have been made to

management to ensure continued sustainability for the farming business - this included withdrawing from organic status (which was costing money rather than making money, largely due to being at a distance from other parts of the organic supply chain), cutting back on cow numbers to a balanced herd size, and increasing product value by selling mutton, lamb and beef locally.

They are very keen to demonstrate that a successful/profitable farm can be beneficial for the environment, not only through the habitats on the farm and associated species, but in the way that the waste is managed, food miles and fuel use are considered. They also own a number of holiday cottages which add to the business value of the farm.

How has the farmer demonstrated they understand how the conservation action benefits the wildlife on the farm and shown enthusiasm for the conservation work undertaken?

They have an excellent understanding of the diversity of habitats on the farm and how careful management of these benefits different species. When they took over the farm they entered into the ESA scheme in order to create a management plan to benefit a wide range of species; through this, seeking organic conversion and through their own interest they have spoken to a number of advisors in order to learn more about management of the land. For example, they have learned about grazing regimes and how leaving fields ungrazed can provide grass for winter grazing, which provides essential food in the winter and aids fertility.

They started undergoing organic conversion in 1999, but they took a decision to stop certification as they had difficulty controlling the bracken as this was affecting both the farming business and the environment. Artificial fertilisers are not used which led to a reduction in fertility - addressed by reducing the herd size.

How has the farmer been successful in maintaining, restoring and creating habitats on the farm?

It is clear from wildlife monitoring that the habitat creation and restoration (described above) has reaped rewards for priority species. They stopped using artificial fertilisers during organic conversion, and over the following 10 years there was an associated increase of biodiversity on the farm. During this period bracken encroachment onto species-rich grasslands and heather was proving difficult to manage through mechanical cutting and bruising – especially on steep terrain. The cutting time was in conflict with other flowering plants. They thus reluctantly gave up organic certification in 2009 so they could use asulox.

What future improvements does the farmer plan to make to further enhance the wildlife value of the farm?

They are constantly evolving their farm plan to maximise biodiversity on the farm and to further enhance the sustainability of farming operations. They are looking at small-scale renewable energy schemes, to continue with the bracken control programme to encourage wild flowers, and aim to trial different breeds of livestock. They are members of LEAF through which they monitor the farm strategy, and aim to further reduce their carbon footprint and promote their farm as an environmentally-friendly farm.

Has the farmer demonstrated a willingness, and/or ability to successfully promote the conservation messages of their activities to others?

- They have a fantastic website - <http://www.treshnish.co.uk/index.html>
- This is constantly updated as they are keen to promote what is happening on the farm. They write three blogs (nature, farming, photos) which provide a rich source of information on the activities of the farm as well as the wildlife found there.
- They featured in the latest edition of the Butterfly Conservation Trust's Herald. They hold a Gold Award for Green Tourism are members of Mull and Iona Eco Charter, and are Scottish Quality Assured, therefore have a great network.
- They also hosted an event for the Food and Drink Festival in September 2010.
- They have a number of self-catering cottages that they let out all year round and therefore have the opportunity to interact with a great number of people.
- They attend local and national farming events and are passionate about encouraging their way of farming – working with nature, not against it.

Summary (100 words max)

Treshnish Farm is a 750ha upland livestock unit on the Isle of Mull, run by the Charringtons. Since taking it on in 1994, they have managed the farm with a view to running a sustainable, profitable farming enterprise, whilst creating and restoring key habitats such as native broadleaf woodland, wetlands, peat bog, heather moorland and species-rich grasslands. Species have responded to targeted grazing regimes and newly created habitats, including wildflowers such as wood bitter-vetch and field gentian, priority bird species such as corncrakes and curlews, and a host of invertebrates - including 10 species of dragonfly and over 300 species of moths and butterflies.

Some quotes.....

“The quality of species-rich areas on the farm were exceptional, a testament to the previous and current sympathetic management. I have not seen such a diverse and colourful sward at any other farm or nature reserve in Scotland before” Dr Tom Prescott, Butterfly Conservation Scotland.

“It scored top marks as they tick all the right boxes on the score sheet. It’s not just ‘good’, it’s ‘excellent’ throughout. The place has been transformed from being over grazed to a biodiversity hotspot. I always knew it was an amazing place but yesterday’s visit exceeded expectations.” Dave Sexton, RSPB.