

NATURE OF FARMING AWARD NATIONAL JUDGING FORM

REGION/COUNTRY	WALES	FARMER	BRIAN AND SORCHA LEWIS
FARM ADDRESS	TROEDRHIWDRAIN, POWYS		
FARMING SYSTEM	HILL FARM	FARM SIZE (ha)	580

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

• **Birds**

- Restoration of traditional, existing fridd habitat to benefit breeding ring ouzel, tree pipit, wheatear, whinchat, stonechat, merlin, peregrine and cuckoo.
- Careful hedgerow management and restoration along with traditional managed hey meadows create a suitable interface in between which it is hoped species such as yellowhammer will nest.
- Hay meadow management to benefit curlew (feeding and nesting on the adjacent moor), woodcock, sandpiper, starling, swallows, house martins, house sparrows, redstart, spotted and pied flycatcher, and lesser spotted woodpecker amongst others.
- Working with, NRW and Elan Valley Trust, Brian and Sorcha have been integral landowners in a project focusing on molinia management for the benefit of golden plover, curlew and short eared owl, skylark and meadow pipit. Halting the burning of this habitat was initially a difficult concept to grasp but the advantages of cutting is increasingly being seen.
- Erecting bird boxes and platforms.
- Surveys carried out by local Elan Valley ranger service, RSPB and personal observations.

• **Butterflies**

- Troedrhiwdrain is included in a Welsh Clearwing monitoring program due to evidence of the moth using land on the farm. Further downy birch trees have been planted to help ensure a succession of habitat for generations to come.
- Restoration of traditional, existing fridd habitat to benefit small bordered fritillary.
- Careful species rich hay meadow management to benefit Welsh clearwing, chimney sweep moth, latticed heath moth, narrow bordered bee hawkmoth, dark green fritillary, small heath, small pearl bordered fritillary and silver washed fritillary.
- Rhos and Fridd management to benefit double line moth, red sword grass moth, forester moth, Welsh clearwing and small pearl-bordered fritillary.
- Surveys carried out by local Elan Valley ranger service and personal observations.

• **Plants**

- Moorland areas support sphagnum species and others such as cotton grass. Efforts to control *molinia* through cutting and burning are done so with the intention to restore the moorland habitat.
- Across the grassland and wetland areas there are numerous species including; crested dogs tail, devils bit scabious, hawkbit, greater butterfly orchid, saw wort, meadow thistle, wood bitter vetch, mountain pansy, fragrant orchid (including one white individual), round leaved sundew, butterwort, heath spotted orchid, betony, tormentil, sweet vernal grass, pignut, bluebell, common knapweed yellow and yellow/purple, yellow rattle, bog asphodel, water forget-me-not, globe flower, ox eye daisy, great burnet, self heal, eyebrights – *Euphrasia rostkovianna*, *E scottica* and *E artica spp. borealis*. Careful management has ensured these species continue to thrive in their fields.
- Some of the more heavily grazed fields are home to some fungi species, including; *Hygrocybe ovina*, *Hygrocybe psittacina*, *Hygrocybe reidii*, *Hygrocybe calyptriformis* and *Lactarius flexuosus*.
- Ray Woods has noted that some of the wet flushes look suitable for bog orchid although none were found this year.
- Surveys carried out by local Elan Valley ranger service, Ray Woods, David Mitchel and personal observations.

• **Other wildlife**

- The species rich hay meadows support mountain bumble bee, stoats and pygmy shrew and are often feeding areas for noctule bat, pipistrelle bat and brown long eared bats.
- A small pond adjacent to the rhos pasture is home to a variety of aquatic invertebrates, and amphibians including common and palmate newt and common frogs, and mammals such as water vole, otter and water shrew.
- Surveys carried out by local Elan Valley ranger service and personal observations.

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

Troedrhiwdrain, like many upland farming operations has to compete with the more productive lowlands. They acknowledge that producing/finishing large lambs on a remote hill farm isn't financially possible, in response they have worked with what they have and used their local understanding of the traditional hay meadows to produce quality slow grown lambs fed on the herb rich swards, some of which are named and still used as Cae Ysbyty or hospital fields. A quality product and habitat they are passionate about, such that Sorcha is working with the Wales Wildlife Trust and others to develop a conservation certification for meat produced on conservation rich farmland.

A number of traditional breeds are used on the farm as these are better able to survive the often hostile conditions, as a result the fleeces each have unique qualities and Brian and Sorcha are looking into selling these also. A website is being created to educate about, and sell the products on the farm.

Many of the conservation measures carried out on the farm are inexpensive and can even be profitable in themselves, such as the coppicing of willow in a wet flush. Benefiting globe flower in the adjacent meadow and their winter fuel store.

Well administered AES (Glastir advanced) options and S15 agreements on the SSSI hay meadows also help to ensure commercial success.

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?

Brian and Sorcha are a farmer/conservationist couple and find the common ground where conservation and good farm business/production meet; they are both equally influential in the decision making on the farm. Sorcha's work in the local area provides her with many contacts through which she sources expertise and advice, and given their appreciation for what wildlife they already have in this HNV area there is a wealth for them to target management towards.

They have mentioned that in the past their Tir Gofal officer has worked closely with them and CCW (NRW) have implemented grazing restrictions and stocking numbers through their S15, they hope to be able to have a similar relationship with their Glastir Advanced officer and hope that they'll be able to manage for the species they have more prescriptively.

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

Troedrhiwdrain sits within the Elan Valley, the catchment for water supply to Birmingham and as such the farm has been managed for generations in a manner that has minimal impact on the land.

Habitats such as the SSSI hay meadows are maintained through careful grazing and cutting regimes, they also realizes the potential benefit that cattle grazing the area would bring, though this conflicts with the stocking limitations that are enforced around the reservoir edge and have entered discussions with Dwr Cymru to try and address this conflict.

Restoration of the fridd habitat on the moorland edge has been carried out to provide suitable habitat for various species including ring ouzel, this is to be continued but using birch saplings to also ensure continuity of trees for the Welsh clearwing.

As well as entire habitat restorations, single species reintroductions have taken place on the farm, an example of which is the propagation and planting of globe flower.

The creation of a small pond near the rhos pasture has further increased the farm's wildlife value; this was previously a difficult area to manage and would just be dominated by *molinia* if it was left. This was of little nature value and seemed a logical location for a pond. This now supports water vole, water shrew, otter and various invertebrate and plant species.

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

Brian and Sorcha hope that entering their Glastir Advanced agreement will help in focusing their next phase of conservation work/plans for the future. Alongside this agreement they hope to:

- Further explore their rhos pasture management using cattle to benefit double lined moth and red sword grass moth.
- Continue research into the propagation of the globe flower and re-introduction into areas where it had been historically found in the area.
- Restore more fridd habitat using birch to provide further continuity of trees suitable for the Welsh Clearwing.

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

There is no doubting Brian's and Sorcha's enthusiasm and willingness to promote the ability for farming and conservation to co-exist.

- At a local level they promote hill farming and the local wildlife to general public through farm walks and open evenings and tailor topics to more specific groups, such as wildflower meadow talks to local gardening groups.
- As already mentioned, they hope to soon establish a website, not only to act as a market place but also as an outreach education tool.
- They are keen to spread the message that wildlife and farming can co-exist and as I type they are being filmed by BBC Countyfile on the subject of farming in the area.

Summary

Troedrhiwdrain, looking over the Elan Valley reservoirs and Victorian dams is home to all manner of wildlife, including golden plover, curlew, water vole, Welsh clearwing and numerous orchid species. The species rich hay meadows and moorland bustle with life all the while supporting a healthy farm business. Farming traditional sheep breeds allows Brian and Sorcha to carefully manipulate their farmland while producing quality, slow grown lambs for the table and maintaining clean water for the residence of Birmingham.