

NATURE OF FARMING AWARD NATIONAL JUDGING FORM

REGION/COUNTRY	SOUTH WEST ENGLAND	FARMER	CHARLIE WATSON SMYTH
FARM ADDRESS	TREGIRLS, CORNWALL		
FARMING SYSTEM	MIXED BEEF / SHEEP / CEREALS / VEGETABLES	FARM SIZE (ha)	500

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

• **Birds**

The rotational mixed farming system helps provide an abundance of invertebrate life during the breeding season, with ancient species-rich Cornish hedges and strategically placed margins providing nest sites for many species including grasshopper warbler, yellowhammer and grey partridge, and providing good hunting for the many barn owls and raptors on the farm. Areas of sacrificial barley and ryegrass are grown for nesting corn bunting, the farm is key for this isolated population – the only stable one in the UK. These areas combined with overwintered stubbles provide essential over-winter food for vast thousand strong flocks of seed eating birds, regularly present on this windswept Atlantic headland.

Late cut grassland allows successful nesting for skylarks, with the cliff grassland and adjacent arable reversion grazed to bring the Cornish Chough back to the farm. Although they are not yet resident, the signs are encouraging.

• **Butterflies**

The cliff top grasslands support Small Pearl-bordered Fritillary and Grayling with more widespread species throughout the farm using the network of Cornish hedges and margins. Moths are under recorded but Thrift Clearwing occurs on the maritime slopes.

• **Plants**

The farm has a very good arable flora with the low-input cereals and targeted cultivated margins a riot of colour in the summer. Corn marigold and parsley occur alongside several fumitories and scarcities such as field woundwort. Surveys have shown the management for these species has had a positive effect with the seedbank rejuvenating and new species being discovered all the time. The low intensity grazing of the coastal slopes and hinterland allow the typical flora to flourish with spring squill, trefoils, sea campion and thrift creating a changing colour palette through the year. These species are also making a comeback on the arable reversion fields.

• **Other wildlife**

There have not been detailed surveys of the farm but the management benefits a wide range of other wildlife from brown hare in the arable to adders and lizards on the grasslands. The grazing animals are carefully wormed to ensure the dung provides maximum benefit not just to chough but to other species that are recorded in the area such as greater horseshoe bat and hornet robberfly. The created and existing ponds teem with wildlife, including masses of toads that gather to spawn every year creating a seething spectacle.

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

Tregirls is run by two generations of the Watson Smyth family and, as is typical of many Cornish farms, it's a varied enterprise. The family successfully managing a commercial mixed farm, growing vegetables for local shops and restaurants, running a farm shop and holiday accommodation as well as looking after wildlife.

Whilst creating and maintaining habitat for wildlife for the future in this corner of Cornwall is important to the family, the management is carefully chosen to sit alongside the commercial operation so is chosen for its minimal impact on the bottom line. This approach ensures that wildlife and the food they produce and sell is delivered in a truly sustainably fashion.

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?

The farm works closely with RSPB and Natural England to ensure the conservation objectives are met. There is a willingness to listen and interpret what conservationists want, to give practical outcomes for wildlife. As with many farmers there is genuine interest and enthusiasm for the wildlife and habitats on the farm but there is a realisation that these must be delivered alongside not instead of the farming operation.

They recognise the importance of retaining species and habitats not just for future generations but for the ecosystem at large. This ethos also sits comfortably with their varied customers from farm shop to holiday accommodation so has a real commercial value, especially with 95% of their livestock sold through the farm shop. Farming is not all about profit, but putting something back.

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

Returning grazing to the cliffs and restoring this BAP habitat was an easy decision for the family with a real desire to return the chough to the farm. This is despite the many the issues that can arise including fencing, ragwort and walkers. Whilst ragwort can still be an issue, many of the dog walkers have been won over with targeted information about the conservation importance of grazing or closing fields from access.

The areas of sacrificial crops were also a 'new' habitat for the farm but have been managed superbly both grass and arable. These were initially trial plots for RSPB research and having such a supportive and pragmatic farmer has really help develop working solutions for the area's wildlife.

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

The family look forward to continuing to work alongside RSPB, Natural England and others in the years to come, with the arable research delivering for corn bunting, arable flora and brown hare, a driving force is to ensure the grazing management delivers for chough and the associated grassland species.

The natural world is the selling point for the farm and Cornwall as a whole and anything that will enhance the wildlife will be considered, and discussed before implementation. Similarly the farm always has an open mind to further management trials or other suggestions.

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

With a significant part of the farm income coming directly from contact with the public, the conservation and sustainability message is already a key part of the farm's business model. If more farms were run like Tregirls then we could all be confident that the future looked much more positive for our wildlife and for the food we eat.

Summary

Conventional farming and wildlife sit happily side by side at Tregirls, proving that you can produce great food and still make home for nature. Traditional cattle graze the cliff slopes and pastures creating perfect conditions for the Cornish chough, which recently returned to this coastline. Late hay cuts allow skylarks and corn buntings to flourish; cereals teem with insects and are peppered with corn parsley, fumitories and marigolds, adding a splash of colour to the landscape. Ancient Cornish hedgebanks, full of interest and life are a delight to the many visitors that come to this family run farm on holiday, the scent of honeysuckle and the lazy drone of bees creating lifelong memories.