



Species and Habitat Recovery at High Stoy Sites of Nature Conservation Interest

Since 2017, the High Stoy Conservation Cluster has been working together to improve how land is managed for nature in this varied and rich part of the Blackmore Vale. Actions taken in the last few years include botanical survey and review of important sites, habitat management for Duke of Burgundy butterflies and enabling better grazing management of grasslands.



**Duke of burgundy
eggs on a cowslip leaf**

© Mariko Whyte

The cluster comprises an increasing number of farmers and landowners roughly centered around Hilfield Friary. Their land straddles an area of very variable underlying geology, from chalk slopes to clay and greensand and includes a significant number of sites which are recognized for their importance for nature at a county level as Sites of Nature Conservation Interest (SNCIs).



Grassland across the Hilfield Friary holding which will benefit from new grazing plans

© Mariko Whyte



Geoff and Elizabeth Kenton's SNCI grassland will benefit from grazing by the Friary's Cattle

© Mariko Whyte

The surveys also identified other areas of grassland, fen and rush pasture which were undergrazed and in decline; where wildflowers such as Marsh Orchids, Marsh Valerian and Ragged Robin have been unable to compete with coarse grasses and rushes. The cluster has enabled landowners to work together in ways that weren't previously possible and the Friary's herd of cattle will be utilized across the cluster to ensure sites are grazed optimally to maintain and enhance the grasslands.

In 2022 a bioblitz weekend was held, to update information and collect new data about the plants and wildlife of some of the core landholdings. As part of this, five SNCIs were monitored and as a result three sites were extended to include additional areas that were considered to be of SNCI quality.

Alongside this, in collaboration with Butterfly Conservation, management work on key chalk grassland sites has helped to support a fragile colony of Duke of Burgundy butterflies. This has included clearing scrub and enabling better grazing to ensure that the

cowslips that the caterpillars feed on are thriving and that conditions on the slope are suitable.

Much of the work has been supported by the Dorset National Landscape's Farming in Protected Landscapes (FiPL) programme. This has enabled capital work such as scrub management, fencing, supply of water for livestock as well as funding for management plans and grazing plans which are helping facilitate closer and more effective cross-holding co-operation. Together the cluster will ensure that the long-term future of these habitats and species can be secured on these sites.



Newly open habitat on slopes about Hilfield Friary that will benefit from the introduction of grazing to restore a chalk grassland flora

© Mariko Whyte

Landscape Recovery in Dorset

Landscape Recovery is one of three Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs' (Defra) Environmental Land Management schemes (ELMs), alongside the Sustainable Farming Incentive (SFI) and Countryside Stewardship (CS).

The scheme supports large scale projects to restore ecological and/or hydrological function across landscapes. Long-term public funding will be blended with private investment to

achieve ambitious outcomes requiring decades to fully deliver. Projects aim to establish bespoke agreements which are specific to the location; and fund actions that contribute to local and national priorities for nature recovery.

Within Dorset there are four Landscape Recovery Projects currently in their two-year development phases, they were successful in the first two application rounds for the new scheme:



Wet grazing marsh in the River Frome floodplain

© Wareham Arc

Wareham Arc

Wareham Arc is an ambitious nature recovery project looking to transform over 4000 hectares of farmland, heath, forest and wetlands in south-east Dorset. The partnership of more than 25 land managers includes: farmers, estates, local businesses, conservation organisations, and statutory bodies. Alongside helping wildlife to thrive, the project will support people and local communities by improving accessibility to green spaces, encouraging more nature-based events, and improving resilience for rural businesses.

We are building plans for a 20-year delivery phase which would involve river restoration, changes to forest and farmland management, and the creation of areas for rare and endangered species to call home. We hope this project will help to protect Dorset's wildlife and support local communities for decades to come. Discover more here: [Wareham Arc \(arcgis.com\)](https://www.arcgis.com)



River Axe

© Upper Axe CIC

River Axe

The River Axe on Dorset's western edge used to be one of the most remarkable rivers in England. It is now beset with a range of environmental problems with a decline in health of both the water and the land neighbouring the river. We intend to fix it.

The Axe Landscape Recovery project is led by the Upper Axe Landscape Partnership. It is currently focused on the Upper Axe and Blackwater sub-catchments, but we hope to eventually cover one third of the catchment that feeds the River Axe Special Area of Conservation (SAC) and Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI). The project includes 30 farms, covering over 2,500 ha, each with bespoke environmental plans that we have drawn up with the farmers, according to their needs and the needs of the river. Get in touch or find project updates here: [Upper Axe Landscape Recovery](https://www.uxa.co.uk/landscape-recovery)

“Alongside helping wildlife to thrive, the project will support people and local communities by improving accessibility to green spaces, encouraging more nature-based events, and improving resilience for rural businesses.”

Brit Valley © Sam Rose

A third round of applications for Landscape Recovery is expected to be announced in the coming months, with many other prospective projects across Dorset likely to be coming forward. Look out for more information through your networks or get in touch if you are interested in finding out whether there may be opportunities for you to get involved in any of these.



The River Allen in its summer glory

© River Allen Landscape Recovery

River Allen

The River Allen Landscape Recovery project covers the River Allen (21 km) in east Dorset, from its headwaters near Monkton Up Wimborne to its confluence with the Stour at Dean's Court. With 19 committed land managers, including several SNCI landowners, the project offers an exciting opportunity for long-term protection and restoration of this incredible chalk stream.

We are six months into our two-year development phase and have carried out baseline surveys over the summer, including pollinator transects, water quality and habitat surveys. This winter, we will work with Wessex Rivers Trust and University of Southampton to study the catchment's hydrology and identify restoration opportunities. In spring, we will discuss these ideas with landowners to agree a holistic catchment plan. Find out more here: [Home - River Allen Landscape Recovery \(riverallenlr.com\)](http://riverallenlr.com)



A tributary of the River Brit

© N Gray

Brit Valley

The Brit catchment Landscape Recovery project, led by West Dorset Wilding in collaboration with DWT, is now called the Brit Valley Project and, like its habitats and striking species, it's multifarious. Over 50 farmer and landowner partners have fashioned a vision for the scheme and are making plans to restore much larger, more effective blocks of crucial habitat like wetland, wood pasture and flower-rich grassland (4000 hectares altogether).

Of course, SNCIs form the basis of this connected pattern of wildlife-sustaining ground, and the Brit Valley Project's core land will be woven into the farmed landscape, often along agriculturally marginal banks and frequently flooded low ground, to achieve a catchment-wide mosaic balancing sustainable local food production with thriving populations of birds, butterflies, bugs and bullheads. Look out for updates here: [Brit Valley Project | West Dorset Wilding](#)

ELMs update: Sustainable Farming Incentive 2024

This year Defra have increased the number of Actions available in SFI to 102, there is arguably something to suit all farming systems. With so many Actions to choose from and the potential for “stacking” with existing Countryside Stewardship and SFI agreements the devil really is in the detail. Our Farm advisors can help, please see contact details below.

For owners and managers of grassland SNCIs, the payment rate for GS6 under Countryside Stewardship and GRH6 under SFI is now £646 per hectare. This better reflects the ecological merit and

reality of delivering these habitats and creates an incentive for farmers to create more.

There will be further Actions released next year along with information about the Higher Tier element of the scheme which will fund more creation of habitats.

All the actions can be found on the [‘Find funding for land or farms’ tool on GOV.UK](#)

There’s also a [PDF version](#) which includes all 102 SFI actions.

Capital Grants

Applications are open year-round. The agreements last 3 years so you

have 3 years to make the purchase and claim reimbursement. There is currently no cap on the value of capital items you can receive funding for.

There are 108 capital items on offer ranging from woodland management planning to fencing, hedging and guttering of farmyards.

More information can be found here – [Countryside Stewardship grant finder. www.gov.uk](#)

As always, our advisors are available to help if needed. Please call Emily Newton 07770262334 or Nick Gray on 07824438974

Local Nature Recovery Strategy (LNRS) update

Dorset’s LNRS is currently in development, led by Dorset Council with BCP Council and Natural England. This will agree nature recovery priorities and activities to help achieve those priorities across Dorset. The Strategy is currently being drafted with input from representatives of organisations involved in nature, farming, forestry and land use, as well as a farmer cluster advisory group which is made up of farmers and facilitators from [13 farmer clusters across Dorset](#).

Anyone managing land and spaces for nature can join the [Nature Recovery Dorset network](#), celebrating and supporting individuals, farmers, landowners, communities and organisations who are helping restore nature in Dorset.

A consultation on the draft strategy is expected in spring 2025.

To find out more and look out for future opportunities to feed Dorset’s LNRS visit: dorsetcouncil.gov.uk/nature-recovery



Chalk grassland Little Bredy

© M Whyte

Dorset Wildlife Trust may be able to support or facilitate SNCI landowners and managers to connect with nearby landowners or develop opportunities for sharing knowledge or resources when it comes to nature-friendly farming practices and management of special sites and habitats. If you have any ideas for training, events or resources that might be of interest please get in touch. Contact **Mariko Whyte (SNCI Officer)** mwhyte@dorsetwildlifetrust.org.uk

For further information on SNCIs and resources for landowners visit:

www.dorsetwildlifetrust.org.uk/SNCI or contact Mariko Whyte, Conservation Officer: mwhyte@dorsetwildlifetrust.org.uk or 01305 264620

For land advisory services including agri-environment schemes, management plans, access to funding opportunities and surveys and monitoring:

Visit: dorsetwildlifetrust.org.uk/land-advisory-services or contact: enquiries@dorsetwildlifetrust.org.uk

Forestry Commission:

Roly Boughton (Woodland Officer, West Dorset and Purbeck): roly.boughton@forestrycommission.gov.uk or 07442 862772

SW Area Office: 0300 067 4960

FWAGSW: Alex Butler: alex.butler@fwagsw.org.uk

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