

GOAT WALK LAND TRUST

Matthews Hall Fore Street Topsham EXETER EX3 0HF
Registered Charity No 1162973

AUTUMN NEWSLETTER 2018

When we first took over the management of the Goat Walk Land, a survey of the fields and a soil analysis confirmed that the fields were, indeed, very fertile with high levels of nutrients. Our initial concern was that the grasses would utilise the nutrients and overwhelm the wild flowers. However, this year we have again had a problem with the growth of perennial weeds in the meadows: last year it was ragwort; this year, thistles.



It is our aim to use herbicides only when necessary. This meant that the large number of thistles growing across the fields could only be controlled by hand. From spring onwards Peter Gray and the Management Committee organised several working parties to keep the thistles in check. Initially they were

cut down at their roots but later in the year we simply removed the flower heads before they could seed. As seeds will survive for many years in the soil, we can expect several more years' weeding to keep their numbers down.

The advice from both farming and environmental experts was that we would need to reduce the fertility of the land if the wild flowers were to thrive. The management plan involved allowing the grasses to grow and then removing them from the fields, thereby gradually reducing the fertility. At the same time we would need to let the flowers set seed before cutting and removing the plant growth.

With the wet spring and a long hot summer, we have seen just how much the fertility of the soil can influence the plant growth. By July the growth of the grasses had made it difficult to walk across the fields. However, it was important to allow the wild flowers, which we had sown with the grass, to set seed before they were cut down and removed. At the end of July the fields were cut but, unfortunately, the presence of perennial weeds in the grass has



made the resulting hay unsaleable, so we now have a large pile of hay in each field.

In future years, when the fertility of the soil has reduced, we will have less grass and more flowers but, until then, we must expect further harvests of hay. The Trust is therefore intending to cut temporary shorter grass paths across the fields to encourage visitors to use the whole field not just the paths around the edges.

The saplings planted last year are starting to grow beyond their protective sleeves and you can now begin to see the extent of the new woodland which future generations will be able to enjoy. The Trust has been looking at improvements to the existing woodland and has been advised to thin some of the smaller trees to allow the others to grow properly. We have also been investigating sources and local varieties of apple trees for the proposed new orchard in the lower field. Once again we will be looking to our volunteers to help with planting.



The aim of the Goat Walk Land Trust is to keep the land as rural fields rather than a manicured park and we have tried to keep the number of signs to a minimum. However, to make it clear that the land is open to the public, a new "Welcome" sign carved in a granite pillar was installed at the entrance to the lower field in May. We are very grateful to Ben Jones for carving and donating this.

The new path, constructed through the edge of the woodland, has matured well and with plants growing over its borders it now provides a more natural access, though the lower field, to a new bench that we installed in April. A second bench is at the top of the higher field with some good views over the

river.

The scrapes worked well in the spring rains, draining the fields and access ways. Some re-landscaping may be necessary though, to direct more of the water from the higher field into the scrape. Despite the lack of rain this summer one of the scrapes retained just enough water to allow wildlife somewhere to drink.

Many thanks to all those who have helped with working parties during the summer. If you would like to help and are not on our volunteers list or if you would like to become a member of the Trust, please contact us by email at info@goatwalklandtrust.org.uk or find us on Facebook, Twitter or through our web site [www.goatwalklandtrust.org]. You can also contact the Trust at our postal address, Matthews Hall, Fore Street, Topsham EX3 0HF.

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