

Environmental Stewardship

Case study: Home Farm



Name:	GE Fenemore and Son
Region/County:	South East / Oxfordshire
Address:	Home Farm, Oxfordshire
Farm Size/Type:	210 hectares/mixed arable
Cropping:	340 acres of cereals
Stocking:	400 breeding sheep and 60 bee hives
Land features:	A very diverse habitat of ironstone brash and river valley flood meadows (River Cherwell).
Key objectives	Restoration and maintenance of flood plain habitat for breeding and wintering waders and lapwing, curlew and snipe.

The Fenemores rent a modest, mixed arable farm near Banbury in the Cotswolds. As well as 400 breeding sheep, they have a bee keeping enterprise selling honey at their local Farmers Market. Mr Fenemore has also recently started up a small pedigree flock of the rare Cotswold sheep with the aim of selling the wool locally.

They applied for HLS in 2006 on finishing a previous agreement, and Mr Fenemore says “it fits in well with my own love of the countryside and wildlife, creating an improved working environment and providing the finance to enable me to carry it out. I am thoroughly enjoying the scheme which is working well and I love to walk around the farm in the evening and see the grey partridge and other wildlife.”

Mr Fenemore does not have specific public access options in his agreement as he wishes to encourage birds and wildlife. However he does run his own farm walks outside of the agreement and is personally involved in a local festival in which there is a farm walk.

Mr Fenemore is often invited to talk to groups and schools about his farm, wildlife and bees and also talks to the public at the Farmers Market where he sells his honey. He wishes to provide a positive image to the public and writes two articles per month for a local magazine.

Mr Fenemore says “the agreement works well for me because I was able to fit the agreement around the farm rather than the other way round. We do not farm intensively so it works well from that perspective and there is a synergy between the scheme and my beekeeping business as they are benefitting from the blossom and flowers.”

The key objectives for this agreement are the continuing restoration and maintenance of flood plain habitat for breeding and wintering waders and wildfowl, together with a wider collection of farmland bird indicator species. Mr Fenemore is closely involved with the RSPB Breeding Waders scheme.



Narrow-leaved water dropwort

The agreement includes land on the floodplain of the River Cherwell, adjacent to Bestmoor SSSI, described as semi-improved flood-plain meadow with a long history of traditional grassland management. The site includes uncommon wetland plant species such as the very rare narrow-leaved water dropwort (*Oenanthe silaifolia*).

Monitoring data is available from 2007 on the wet grassland and species-rich grassland and shows excellent progress. The 2010 wet grassland assessment shows that by the second year of the agreement there were breeding lapwing, redshank and snipe that had not been known in that area for 30 years. These wading birds are in decline due to land being drained to increase arable land and improve pasture. Lapwing, in particular, are so under threat that they are on the Amber list in the UK Biodiversity Action Plan (BAP) which sets out a programme for conserving biodiversity in the UK. Monitoring data also shows Golden plover were frequent, with large overwintering flocks and curlew breeding numbers increased. These are both also on the UK BAP list so this is very positive.

For Mr Fenemore the most successful options are the Breeding Wader project and the wild bird seed option that has attracted flocks of linnets. Another success has been the field strips which are margins that are not farmed to encourage wildlife. Many of the farms fields have margins that average 6 meters in width and support a variety of wildlife and can allow long-lived insects to complete their lifecycle.

Vicky Robinson, the Natural England Land Management Adviser for the farm says “Having worked closely with George for the last 8 years it has been wonderful to see the increase in wildlife on the farm. The HLS agreement has a number of objectives and I am delighted that we are managing to put habitats in place for birds associated with wet grassland and arable land as well as protect archaeology and increase the number and variety of wildflowers. George is very enthusiastic and keeps me very well informed of what is happening on the farm enabling us to tweak things as necessary to ensure his options work. We considered and chose the options together and this means that they dovetail well with his farming system which is so important for an agreement to work.”

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