

Iford Estate News

J & H Robinson Iford Farms Ltd – est. 1895

www.ifordestate.com

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Farm Report

Ben Taylor



It seems like every newsletter I've written has started with a grumble about the weather; and it would be a shame to break the habit! Our vulnerability to the changing climate was brought into stark focus this year with the wettest ever recorded monthly rainfall in November and the longest dry period ever in the spring. Harvest started early but was beset with rain delays and with yields well down following the dry spring. This year has also been the most expensive year on record thanks to spiralling prices for fertiliser, fuel and machinery, and sadly the wheat price has fallen back to pre-invasion levels... a true double whammy! You may be pleasantly surprised though that I am not going to mention the weather again and instead will focus on some more cheerful subjects!

Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG)

We were very pleased to welcome many residents to our BNG Open Day in June, and hopefully you are now well informed about our plans to deliver a landscape scale nature recovery scheme. Since the Open Day we've managed to complete our Section 106 (S106)

agreement with South Downs National Park (SDNP), legally securing our first phase of habitat creation at Houndean Farm and enabling us to start selling BNG units to developers who cannot meet their BNG obligations on-site. It helps them move ahead and provides us with the funding to carry out this long-term restoration. (If at this point you're feeling lost, have a look at www.ifordbiodiversityproject.co.uk – our dedicated website). The signing of this S106 agreement has also enabled us to be well ahead of the game as far as BNG is concerned and we're attracting interest from many different developers across the South East. With luck we will sell the first phase this calendar year and be able to move on to phase 2 next year.

Virtual Fencing

We've also been working on a project to restore some chalk grassland on the southern end of the farm, working with the SDNP to clear scrub and reintroduce grazing on a site that for access reasons has been largely abandoned for 30-plus years. The Herdwick sheep you'll have no doubt seen around the village have been fitted with GPS collars which enable us to activate what is called a virtual fencing system. This animal-friendly system enables us to confine or move livestock without using fixed fences, allowing us to target the grazing so that the scrub doesn't return and wild flowers can flourish. We are also using the same virtual fencing system on the cattle which allows us to graze arable fields in which we have grown cover crops or stubble turnips without the need for any physical fence. This allows us to be far more flexible as we can very easily put the cows in for a few days where previously the hassle of an electric fence was prohibitive. The recycling of organic matter this type of grazing facilitates is an important part of improving soil health and sequestering carbon, and is a key leg of our regenerative farming practices.

Cycle path update

John Robinson

At long last we have finally been able to complete the extension of the Egret's Way cycle path to Iford. This is something that I have been very keen to achieve for many years and has now been made possible thanks to financial contributions from the SDNPA and the District Council. This means that for the first time residents, and in particular children, can now cycle on a hard road all the way into Lewes without crossing the C7 road.

Top left: Ben handing over the signed copy of the S106 agreement to Trevor Beattie, the Chief Executive of the South Downs National Park Authority to create 100 acres of permanent grass at Houndean available for BNG sales. This is the first such agreement in the country.

Electric landscaping and building maintenance

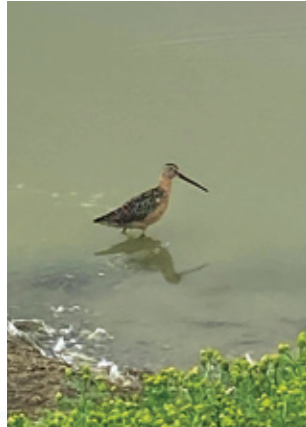
From left to right: Oliver Whitfield, Alan Notley, Roy Powis and Mark Leivers.



You will no doubt have noticed that the village is looking much smarter than it once did, thanks mostly to the efforts of Mark Leivers and Roy Powis who form our landscaping department. We have recently invested in a pair of electric vehicles, one for Mark and another for Alan Notley and Oliver Whitfield who maintain the buildings on the estate. The type of short journeys they

make around the village are ideally suited to an electric vehicle and I'm very pleased that we are gradually reducing our carbon footprint. Non-fossil fuel-powered tractors are not yet commercially available but we hope that in time we will be able to adopt these too.

Our most recent carbon audit is available on the Iford Biodiversity Project website (see below).



Long-billed Dowitcher on our wildlife pond.

One important aspect of our plans to comply with DEFRA's Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) initiative involves increasing the water levels on the Brooks, thereby creating standing water throughout the year to provide feeding and breeding areas for wading birds. The Brooks is a somewhat artificial landscape, having been drained over many centuries through a network of ditches that have become an important habitat for many rare species. Since the 1960s we have relied on a pump at Rodmell to remove excess water and prevent flooding. Unfortunately last year the Environment Agency decided that they would no longer run the pump which resulted

in the widespread flooding you will have seen last winter. Without an effective gravity outfall we were forced to hire and install our own pumps to remove the water, and ended up pumping over one million tons of water back into the river. We hope that by the time the winter sets in a new gravity outfall will have been installed and, although they may rise, water levels will return to normal fairly quickly. This is exactly the type of intervention our BNG will be focusing on: too much water, like this year, is not good for the biodiversity we find in the ditches and we also need cattle grazing to promote insects that in turn feed the birds.

Crime scene re-enactment...



For the second time this year we had a visit from the film crew of the television series *Grace*, based on the best-selling books by author Peter James, who happened

to live for many years in a farmhouse on the Downs at Beddingham and based his detective thrillers in and around the Sussex area. It was quite some entourage!

The film crew's vehicles at Iford during the filming of the television series 'Grace'.

One notable bird, photographed by staff member Aaron Hall on the wildfowl pond this year, was the Long-billed Dowitcher (see photo left). These medium-sized waders are a rare but annual visitor to Britain with records peaking in September/October. They belong to the sandpiper family and feed snipe-like with a fast 'sewing-machine' probing of mud.

The Long-billed Dowitcher is just one of 150 species of birds recorded on the farm – over 30 of them red-listed. You will find a drop-down page devoted to

them at www.ifordbiodiversityproject.co.uk under 'Documentation & Media'. Here you will also find individual reports on such things as flooding, greenhouse gases, environmental screening and the fascinating Graeme Lyons Report where he provides the findings of his intensive 9-day flora and fauna survey of the Estate revealing over 1300 species comprised of 870 invertebrates, 325 vascular plants and 80 birds – several of them extremely rare. His next survey here is due in 2024 and will seek to compare species abundance with the existing baseline report. Really fascinating stuff!



Chalk Hill Blue butterfly.





Restoring the Lake

John Robinson

*The groundwork now finished, it's nature's turn to work its magic.
Inset: The Lake in 1900.*

The Lake, as it has always been known, is really a pond created by damming the stream that runs in the winter from under the Downs at the north end of the village and then on under the sheepyard to feed all the ditches on the Brooks.

The OS Map for 1873 shows it as being used as a 'fish pond' and in 1900 it was being used as a boating lake as part of Oatlands (now Iford Grange) gardens (see black and white photo above). To my knowledge it has never before been cleaned out and has gradually

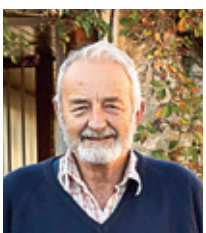
become silted up and overgrown with trees and overhanging branches.

This autumn we have started on a major restoration of the north end of the village.

We have dredged the lake of centuries' worth of silt, cut back a lot of the overhanging and dying trees and reconstructed the dam. Then in future years we will clean out the lower pond area and restore and refurbish the sheep yard.

Salve et Vale to Brian, Irek and Wes

Brian Deeprise Brian retired in April. He joined us initially part time in about 1978 and gradually became an important member of staff



taking on the duties of sprayer driver and became a very familiar face in the village. We thank him for his valued time with us and wish him well in his retirement.

Ireneusz Kosek After 16 years of service we were sorry to say goodbye to Ireneusz Kosek (known to everyone as Irek) earlier in the year. Irek arrived with us in 2007 as a lambing assistant, having been interviewed by telephone



to return home to Poland and we thank him for his many years of input and wish him every success for the future.

Wes Udall In Irek's place we are very pleased to welcome Wes Udall to the team as assistant manager. Wes started virtually the day we started harvest, so was very much in at the deep end. He and his new wife Emily have

in Poland, and with him not speaking a single word of English. Over the years he established himself as a key member of the team here at Iford. However he took the decision

moved from Warwickshire into Shepherds Cottage with their two spaniels and a cat. Wes has a slightly unconventional background, having been working at Sainsburys as an Agricultural Manager in their poultry and duck division, but following an agricultural education he was keen to get back on a farm. He brings with him a wealth of experience from a completely different side of the industry. Emily has just started a new role with dairy consultants Promar advising farmers on aspects of their dairy business.

