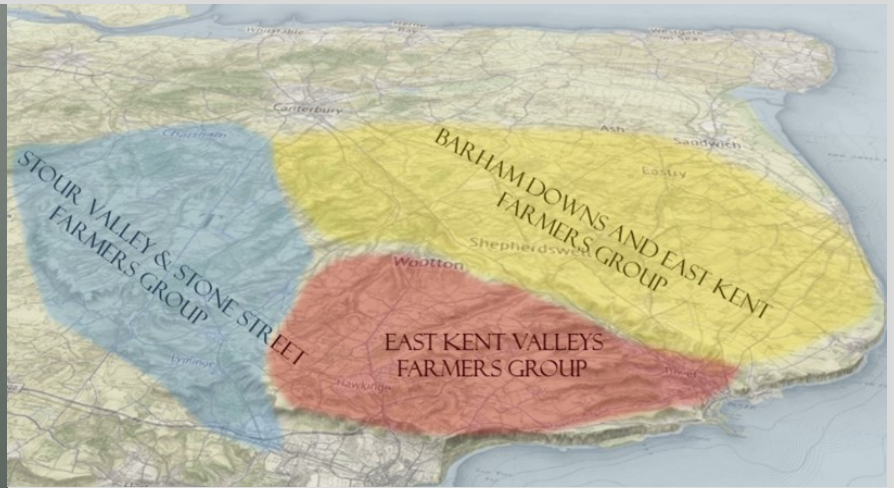




The East Kent Downs Landscape Recovery Project

Farmers delivering wildlife-rich landscapes hand in hand with food production



www.eastkentdownsfarmers.co.uk

Winter newsletter 2025/26

Spring and Summer 2025 Farmer group meetings

Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) workshop and farm walk

Our meeting season got underway in early May with a workshop and tour of Chalksole Farm Habitat Bank near Lydden, the county's first registered BNG site. Our host, the owner John Newbury, along with Vicky and Liam from Biodiverse Consulting gave us a great summary of the BNG process and we then had a tour of the 33ha site in this, the first establishment year, of the various habitats. The wildflower meadows have now been seeded and this winter has seen much of the new woodland and scrub areas planted up. The site helps connect much of the stewardship scheme areas in the Lydden valley. Later in the summer, John hosted a tour of the site for European government officials which also generated much interest.



Spring and Summer 2025 Farmer group meetings

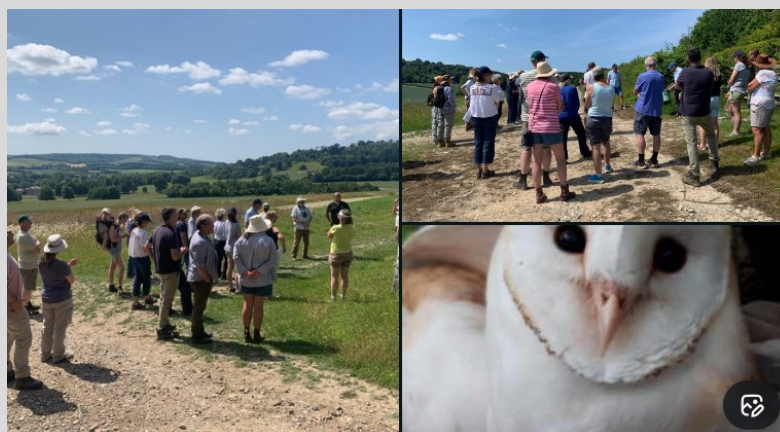
Cattle grazing on Stelling Minnis walk and talk

Early June saw our group meet at Stelling Minnis where we were given a fantastic tour of the common by John Haffenden and Ivor Champion to see the Sussex cattle grazing and the invisible fencing management system which enables the cattle to be contained within the various areas of the common without the need for traditional stock fencing. The success of the cattle grazing in maintaining and enhancing the heathland and acid grassland habitats is testament to the dedication of John, Ivor and the Stelling Minnis managers over many decades to restore the habitats of the Minnis that have evolved over the centuries and when the common was a very open landscape used for grazing livestock. The reintroduction of livestock in recent times has been a real success and a model example of how working with graziers, the local community, the owners, local volunteers and the managers can bring great rewards.



Barn Owl farm walk and talk

Back by popular demand we were greatly indebted to Ben Palmer, Adam, Fiona Sunley and the team at Godmersham Park, where we were treated to another barn owl walk and tour of the farm's environmental areas. The farm has a great range of habitats, from flower rich chalk grasslands to woodlands and riverside wetlands and the farm's ever expanding tally of scarce wildlife such as breeding lapwings, Kentish milkwort, adonis blue butterflies and black veined moth is a tribute to the farm's careful and dedicated management. A big thanks to all the team at Godmersham for the tour and a lovely lunch.



Spring and Summer 2025 Farmer group meetings

‘Glow-worm and bats’ talk and walk

A perfect moon-lit evening awaited us in late June for a truly inspiring talk and farm walk to learn about glow-worms and bats. We were given expert talks from Dr Simon Springate of Kent Field Club and John Puckett of Kent Bat Group on glow-worms and bats before heading out into the beautiful countryside and farmland around Godmersham, owned and managed by the Swire family. Led by Nigel the farm manager, we were treated to an inspiring walk through the farm’s conservation areas and habitats which have been managed for a whole host of wildlife for many years. Within a short distance we found our first glowworm, while serotine and pipistrelle bats were picked up on the bat detectors. As dusk fell a beautiful full moon lit our way and we all enjoyed many more sightings of glow-worms and other night-time wildlife on a walk that brought us back just before midnight! A big thank you to Nigel and team and the Swire family and our speakers Simon and John.



Gingerley Green Flower farm

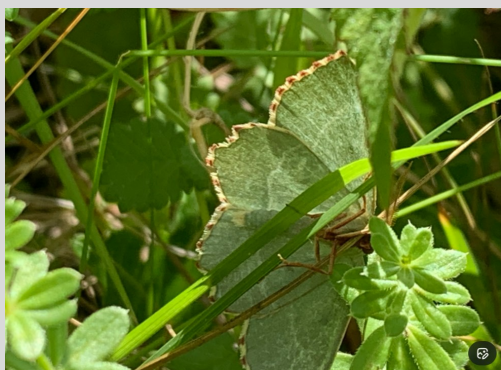
Our last event of the summer took us to Clare Readman’s ‘Gingerly Green Flower Farm’ at Selsted where we were treated to a talk and tour of Clare’s recent venture and farm diversification project—the very successful cut flower business, all managed following sustainable and eco friendly practices. The farm’s recognition as being voted Kent’s best florist 2025 is testament to the dedication and hard work of Clare and family to make it a real success. A big thank you to Clare and family and local caterer Hannah for the delicious tea and scones that rounded off our beautiful sunny afternoon so perfectly.



News and updates

Good year for rare butterflies and moths

The Duke of Burgundy butterfly had a record year in 2025 with an overall 'peak' count of 590 spread over 22 sites in the Crundale and Wye areas. Excitingly we also had confirmed sightings in the Elmsted valley and at a site new Brabourne which, all being well, may herald the start of new colonies. Black veined moth also had a good year and again with sightings of individuals on new sites, which may hopefully be early signs of the moth spreading from its usual areas. Sussex Emerald, another rare east kent moth, was found on a new wildflower grassland site near Petham and the equally rare Bright Wave moth turned up in 1000's on an area of the Barham Downs wildflower grassland area. And finally...dark green fritillary appeared on a site near Crundale (at least 7 or 8) which is a great record for a butterfly that only rarely occurs in east kent. All of these sightings were on new wildflower grasslands created by you the farmers which goes to show all the great work you are doing...



Bumblebee Conservation Trust surveys

We were lucky to be able to arrange for a bumblebee survey in the Lydden valley on all of the newly created wildflower grasslands. This survey undertaken by Bumblebee Conservation Trust found a good range of bumblebees and included rare species such as brown banded carder, ruderal and red tailed bumblebee. With thanks to funding from Affinity Water for helping to contribute to this work.



News and updates

Hedgelaying 2025

Early 2025 saw the completion of a good range of hedgelaying across the east kent area including two 'training' events, at Nonington Farm and at Swanton Farm where volunteers and learners were able to pick up new skills

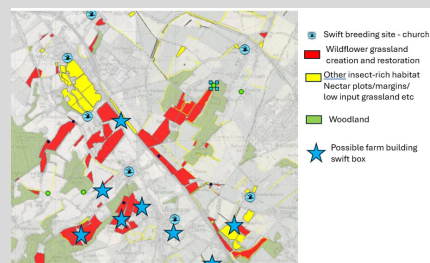


Swift Box project

Building on the success of the Canterbury City Swift project we have teamed up with their group to arrange for a trial of 14 swift boxes on farms within the Bridge, Barham and Kingston areas. Their project has been monitoring nesting swifts in the Elham valley and Canterbury area for several years and it seems that the local churches at



Kingston, Bishopsbourne, Barham, Womenswold and Patricxbourne still support nesting swifts. All the great insect habitat that all of you provide through your stewardship schemes means its highly likely that birds such as swift, house martin and swallow are feeding over these areas. Thanks to some fund-



ing from Affinity Water we are currently arranging for the purchase of 14 boxes to install at 10 farms on barns and other tall buildings to see if swifts will take to these.

National Meadows Conference and Duke of Burgundy event



We were pleased to be invited to talk at the National Meadows Conference near Bath, Somerset in August and at a southern England Duke of Burgundy event in November this year where we presented all the great work you are doing through your stewardship schemes in east kent. All of your work is greatly admired by many organisations nationwide and its always good to tell the story of how your stewardship scheme work is benefitting so many species while at the same time maintaining productive farming in a nature friendly way.



Scheme update

Higher Tier scheme

The new Higher Tier scheme has been officially launched and is open for applications. We are currently taking through around 40 new applications in our east kent area, and many of these are the renewal of schemes that have expired in December 2024 and December 2025. We also have a number of new schemes with farms who have not previously been involved in Higher Tier schemes. For Higher Tier schemes that are reaching their '5 or 10' year points in December 2026 then we will be in touch to discuss a new application in the new year.

SFI scheme and Capital CS scheme

We are awaiting news from Defra on when the new SFI scheme and new Capital scheme will be relaunched. I will update when we have more news.

Affinity Water Funding

We have been very pleased to receive funding this year from Affinity Water for projects and work that helps improve ground water recharge and water quality within their catchment area. Affinity Water are keen to work with our farmer groups, recognising that much of the stewardship scheme work that you all do has overlapping benefits for improving ground water quality and soil health. The program of work that has received funding this year includes green hay spreading work (enhancing long term wildflower grasslands as a way of reducing agricultural inputs), pond creation work and wildflower seed costs for arable reversion projects. They have also run a cover crop grant scheme this year. A big thank you to Affinity Water and we hope to work with them in 2026 on similar projects.



Wildflower seed spreading work



Multi species cover crop

We will shortly be organising the program of farm workshops , walks and talks for 2026 so do let me know of any particular ideas/themes that you would like us to include.

Best wishes to you all for 2026