

Farmer Network E-Newsletter Easter 2019

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FARMER NETWORK NEWSLETTER EASTER 2019



It's warming up, just in the time for the Easter weekend.

A reminder to all our farmers - if you wish to share any particular event or activity then please contact Nicola.

Nicola (together with Rachel Price and Jane Atkinson) has now formed **'ELM Associates'** - *Working Together for Sustainable Farming*. She continues to support farmers in adopting innovative, best practice and efficiency measures to reach greater productivity, whilst protecting the farm's valuable natural resources of soil, water and wildlife. Nicola's new contact details are: nicola@elmassociates.co.uk and/or - 07794 082860.

You can view the 'ELM Associates' Website in **'Read More'** below - *please be mindful that the website is still under construction*.

And don't forget to update Terri with your latest news, images, events and publicity. Terri's contact details are terri9hull@gmail.com

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Update - Steering Group Meeting, 15 April 2019





Steering Group

The SRFN Steering Group met on Tuesday evening with a pretty full Agenda.

Facilitator, Nicola Hall, provided some useful updates, not least that she, Rachel and Jane, have most recently left Reaseheath College and have established 'ELM Associates'. Their remit continues to cover 'Species & Habitats', 'Funding and Grants', 'Resource Efficiency' and 'Legislation and Planning'. The good news for the Farmer Network is that the change of employing organisation has no direct impact on the workings of the SRFN.

Andrew Hull, Chair of the Sandstone Ridge, updated the group on its ongoing partnership with the Farmer Network and the vision of collective and collaborative working as laid out in the newly published '**Sandstone Ridge - Strategic Plan 2019-2024**' (*the full document can be viewed in '**Read More**' below*).

The year's work was reviewed, including the popular events and training sessions that have been positively supported. Discussion then centred on proposals for future events:

The 'Trees for Livestock Project' was discussed and how farm animals can benefit from tree rich environments (*a reminder to everyone that National Tree Week is 23 November - 1 December 2019*). Tree Planting was also discussed with early feeding pollinators in mind.

A variety of other potential events and training sessions were suggested which Nicola will investigate and on which she will advise. A 'Summer Farm Walk Series' is also planned so 'watch this space'.

The key objective continues to be to support the Farmer Network in raising awareness of available grants and funding, and assisting with application processes, whilst meeting objectives that are beneficial to the landscape. This combined partnership can only be to the good.

Rebecca Dakin was elected as 'Chair' of the group. Most of you will know Rebecca, but just in case you don't ... Rebecca is a landscape designer and woodland manager, as well as being married to arable and sheep farmer, Charles Dakin, farming at Duckington. Our thanks to Rebecca.

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'The Answer Lies in the Soil'



On an unseasonably cold Monday morning at the beginning of the month, members from the SRFN met at Bankhead Farm in Broxton to learn more about **'Managing Soil Fertility'**.

Led by scientists James Holmes and Siwan Howatson from the Agriculture and Horticulture Development Board (AHDB), the group were introduced to the four quick steps to assess soil structure, namely 'Surface Assessment', 'Soil Extraction', 'Soil Assessment' and 'Soil Scoring'.

Practical demonstration in fields below Raw Head revealed how an assessment could be undertaken in a matter of minutes and the group became adept in determining soil structure assessments based on the ease with which soil aggregates can be broken down.

The importance of worms in creating good soil structure was stressed and this was illustrated when a single spade of soil was shown to contain almost 10 worms! Thoughts quickly turned to guesstimating the number of worms likely to be present in the eight acre field.

On what was a bitterly cold morning, our workshop stalled with the thought of hot coffee and homemade Bakewell Tart waiting back at the farm - our thanks to Alistair and Gill Cliff for hosting the event.

The full report appears below in 'Read More'.

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Countryside Stewardship Scheme 2019 Application Deadlines



The Countryside Stewardship Scheme Application deadlines are fast approaching.

The Hedgerow & Boundary Grants deadline, for example, is in just over 2 weeks ie. 3 May. This involves a simple online application process - just contact Nicola to arrange support.

Regarding the CS Water Quality Grants, please remember that certain items need to be endorsed by your CSFO and the deadline for this is 31 May. Contact Nicola to arrange a referral.

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Cheshire Ploughing Match - 25 September



Now in its 95th year, The Cheshire Ploughing Match is scheduled to take place on 25 September - save the date

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'Results from the Big Farmland Bird Count'



Back in February, our farmers rose to the challenge and for that we thank you - the results from the Big Farmland Bird Count just kept pouring in.

One of our core objectives is to monitor the wildlife and to increase the biodiversity on the Sandstone Ridge Farms. The variety and extent of the bird population is a key to this, especially reversing the decline in some farmland birds. It was great fun identifying the birds and their bird calls, as well as talking about managing farm habitats to benefit them.

Nicola is obsessive about 'Yellow Hammer' - and, are we surprised, she saw one (well more than one actually)!

Read the full report below.

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