

The Shared Earth Trust A Continuing Journey

The Shared Earth Trust was established in 1987 to support, and to take forward, the work started by Neil and Barbara Taylor when they purchased the forty acre Denmark Farm in 1984.

The Taylors started the transformation from a conventional holding with its improved grassland and limited biodiversity to a place that demonstrates how habitat management can dramatically increase plant and animal species. The sharp increase in breeding birds from just 15 species in 1985 to 48 species in 1994 is just one example. Extensive ecological monitoring over the years has shown significant increases in flowering plants, invertebrates and mammals.

The spirit of the early days of the Shared Earth Trust is captured in an article for a newsletter in 1988 written by trustees Maggie and Anthony Barker. They describe how they cycled the 100 miles from their home in Bristol to plant trees at Denmark Farm. But they were drawn here by much more than the practical need to plant trees, as this quotation from their article shows:

“So we come to Denmark Farm, covering the physical distance surely, but also to make a journey of mood. To move from the despair of urban development towards a kind of hope that all is not yet lost; that the balance that is between man and his environment may even now be restored.”

Re-connecting people with nature has been, and continues to be, a central theme at Denmark Farm. This re-connection can happen at many levels as the article by Maggie and Anthony Barker suggests. It can happen through the practical conservation work or the scientific monitoring of species, but it can also happen at a more spiritual level through simply enjoying the natural habitats or using this as a place for reflection.

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Summer 2017

30th Anniversary Newsletter



These different levels of connection are reflected in the variety of ecological and creative courses on offer here and the opportunities to visit and enjoy the site.



The new Wildlife Discovery Room in development. This will be a space for wildlife monitoring and education.

Over the years, the Shared Earth Trust has attracted grant funding to spread the learning from Denmark Farm to the wider community, through projects like the Ceredigion Biodiversity Enhancement Scheme and Wildlife Where You Live. The dependency on grant funding presented constant challenges in terms of uncertainty as each grant-funded project came to an end. The reduction in funding opportunities following the financial crash around 2009 forced the trustees to consider other ways of maintaining financial support for the organisation. This led to the decision to invest in the development of the Eco Lodge as a means of generating income, encouraging more visitors onto the site, and enhancing the accommodation available to participants on residential courses.

Volunteers have always been very important to the Shared Earth Trust, whether through their involvement in practical conservation work or giving

time as a trustee. The fruits of recent volunteer activity can be seen, for example, in the newly developed garden area, with its greenhouse and vegetable beds. Volunteers will play an important role in the future as the Shared Earth Trust continues trying to balance the realities of financial survival with maintaining its aims and purpose.

Development on the site is continuous, with the latest addition being the Wildlife Discovery Room. The habitats are what make Denmark Farm Conservation Centre a special place and their maintenance continues to be a high priority. We hope future developments will include upgrading the facilities in the centre so that we can continue to be an amenity for local people and also attract visitors from near and far. We hope that everyone who visits will be influenced by this special place and connect or reconnect with the natural world upon which we all ultimately depend.



With thanks to the players of People's Postcode Lottery through Postcode Local Trust for supporting the Shared Earth Trust in the 30th Anniversary year and funding this newsletter.



Wildlife and Ecology

Denmark Farm has largely been managed using a 'watch and wait' approach. We let nature take its course, with minimal intervention and, where possible, without the use of large-scale equipment – to reduce our use of fossil fuels and minimise our impact on the land. This doesn't mean we can just sit back. If left unchecked, the flowery meadows would turn into bramble patches, with saplings taking hold, and woodland would eventually develop. In Britain, the area covered by meadows has declined hugely since the Second World War, so we are keen to preserve ours. We need a regular programme of scrub removal, and we use grazing animals to prevent regrowth. Grazing also encourages the growth of wildflowers, which in turn benefits the pollinators.



We have always taken a holistic view of our site and welcome any species that wants to breed or feed here, rather than managing for a particular species or habitat. We aim to maintain a diversity of habitats, and by doing so, encourage as many species as possible to move in. As well as woodlands and meadows, we have watery habitats including a lake, pond and scrapes; each provides a different set of conditions for different animals and plants. Sections of woodland are coppiced regularly to maintain different ages of trees, and our meadows have native hedges around them, providing another valuable habitat. We also maintain small sections of scrub where we deliberately allow brambles and saplings to grow as these provide plenty of food and shelter for wildlife.

We have recorded a variety of mammals using the site, from foxes to badgers, polecats and hares. More recently we confirmed yellow-necked mouse – a species regularly recorded in neighbouring Carmarthenshire, but unusual in Ceredigion. Our site also provides an ideal habitat for hedgehogs, and over the last two years we have released nine hedgehogs that had been rehabilitated by local rescue groups.

A very exciting recent discovery, and a new species for Denmark Farm, is the Roesel's bush-cricket, found during our National Meadow's Day Event. Until recently, this species was only found on England's south-east coast. Since the early 20th Century there has been a rapid expansion in its range, particularly helped by roadside rough grassland and scrub providing a 'corridor' for it to travel along. It favours damp meadows and grassland, but can be found elsewhere. Denmark Farm is one of only two sites where it has been found in Ceredigion.

Our first 30 years have demonstrated what can be done to turn an intensively managed farm into a mosaic of wildlife-rich habitats. However, we can't be complacent. Denmark Farm is not an island, and the impact of changing climate and loss of biodiversity across the UK will no doubt be having an effect here too. It is even more important that we continue to provide a refuge for wildlife, and continue 'connecting people with nature' to ensure that everyone understands the importance of the natural world and our interconnectedness with it.

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Roesel's bush-cricket - photo: The Wildlife Trust of South and West Wales.

Volunteering

Volunteers play a vital role in looking after our 40 acre site, and there are two main ways you can get involved. If gardening is your thing, then why not join our band of Veg Gardeners? They meet fortnightly on Sundays from 10 am to 2.30 pm. The group looks after our organic veg garden and greenhouse under the expert leadership of Malcolm Berry. Or get stuck into one of our monthly site management days (usually Saturdays, 10am to 4 pm) and help us look after the habitats and wildlife at Denmark Farm. Tasks include removal of encroaching scrub from our meadows, and trail maintenance. Volunteers can also gain valuable experience in countryside management skills such as hedge-laying and boardwalk construction and assist with wildlife recording and monitoring.



No previous experience needed, but you do need to enjoy working outdoors and have a reasonable level of fitness. We will provide everything you need, from tools, equipment and training, to plenty of tea and coffee! You'll just need to bring your lunch.



Spotlight on Volunteers



Portia Chandler

Portia has been volunteering at Denmark Farm for three years and is one of our regular and enthusiastic volunteers. Whatever the weather and whatever the task, Portia will be there smiling and enjoying herself. Portia says “I like the atmosphere here at Denmark Farm and volunteering keeps me busy and out of the house”. She particularly loves horticulture and our recent Sowing Seeds Sharing Skills volunteer project was right up her tree. Additionally she enjoys simple things like cutting back the brambles and topping up the bird feeder as it is something which she knows that she is good at and it makes her feel useful.

Jon Sayer

Jon has been supporting the work of Denmark Farm for around four and a half years, in a whole range of different ways. He originally got involved creating a database for our membership, using his professional skills, but has gone on to be there whenever we need him. From IT issues to conservation work and from gardening to general maintenance, we can always rely on Jon to be there with his great humour. Jon says that “volunteering at Denmark Farm contributes towards a healthy lifestyle, with plenty of fresh air and exercise and a lasting sense of achievement”. He particularly enjoys the social elements and says that “even cutting brambles as part of a team is enjoyable”.

Upcoming volunteer dates are listed on our website, or contact volunteer@denmarkfarm.org.uk – 01570 493358 and we will ensure you receive regular emails with dates and other volunteer opportunities.

Growing food and friendships

When I was asked to be part of a vegetable growing project with volunteers at Denmark Farm Conservation Centre I jumped at the chance. Having been involved in delivering projects and courses there for the last few years, I was very happy to continue my association with this wonderful place and the people it attracts. There's certainly been a lot of hard work involved as a corner of a meadow previously used for seasonal grazing, and occasional car-parking, was transformed into a productive growing space.

It was decided to have a layout of eight triangular beds arranged around a small oval one in the centre, which was for herbs to go in. This gave the opportunity to compare side-by-side two different systems of vegetable production: on the one hand is a classic four-bed rotation grown as monoculture (where all of each crop is grown together), and on the other a polyculture (where all crops are mixed together and spread around all the beds). I have a passion for polyculture and see it as the best way of preventing major losses to pests or diseases, as not all plants will be attacked because they won't all be found. This is something which has been proved on site by cabbage root flies, where almost every plant is affected in monoculture but more are untouched than attacked when grown in polyculture.

In addition to the outdoor beds we were looking to install a polytunnel towards the end of last year (always handy for when it's raining!), although this became unnecessary with the kind donation of a good-sized greenhouse. This gave us the facility to raise all plants for the outside beds, and to grow some crops under cover, such as salads in winter, tomatoes and melons in summer.

This has all been achieved by a happy and committed group of people with a wide range of ages and experience, and the shared interest of growing their own food. They deserve every credit for all their hard work.
Malcolm Berry – “The Dreaded Gardener”



Jackie Hofmann, a regular group member and volunteer at Denmark Farm shares her experience: I first visited Denmark Farm in the Summer of 2016. I had often passed and wondered what they did, so one summer's day I decided to visit the site to find out! As I walked through the woodland, I thought how nice it would be to work in such a beautiful and unspoilt setting. So I decided to register as a volunteer and was lucky enough to be able to help out in the office. There's not many office jobs where you can listen to the birds singing and enjoy the peace and tranquillity, whilst still be being able to do your job.

I then decided that I would like to join the gardening group, who had just acquired a new greenhouse for the vegetable plot and were getting ready for a second season of growing their own veg. I turned up the first day, a little unsure as to what to expect, but the group was very welcoming, and the more experienced gardeners are happy to share tips and hints with newbies like me. Our group leader, Malcolm Berry, is a very knowledgeable man and is also very patient, passing his vast experience on in a way that makes it interesting and memorable. We get to practice what he preaches! Our greenhouse is now planted out with tomatoes, melon, cucumber and peppers which all seem to be thriving at the time of writing.

I feel that by volunteering I have not only increased my skills and knowledge, but have met some lovely people who are kind and supportive. If anyone out there would like to get involved in any of the volunteer days, I would say definitely give it a go, you won't regret it.



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Seeking new Trustees

Have you got the skills to contribute as a Trustee for Denmark Farm? We are seeking individuals with a diverse range of backgrounds, experiences and skill sets.

A full description of the role and person specification can be found [by clicking here](#), or see below.

We are particularly keen to recruit individuals with legal, conservation and fundraising expertise, but other roles are also available. The Trustees meet up to 10 times a year and meetings usually take place on weekdays.



Spotlight on Trustees

Guy Hopwood

I became involved with Denmark Farm in 1997 with my partner. We joined as volunteers helping with general maintenance including the development of the wildlife garden, clearing ditches and cutting timber for the Roundhouse. The story of the site appealed to me because it showed how land which has been degraded through intensive agriculture can be restored and that such areas are important refuges for a range of plants and animals. It's also a really nice place to spend some time watching the birds and insects and walking through the hay meadows and woodland and meeting people who also value our environment.

After several years as a volunteer, I was approached about becoming a Trustee. I felt that my environmental and agriculture / forestry knowledge might be of value in terms of practical site management as well as for strategy and future developments. Following the decision to construct the Ecolodge in 2010, I became a director of the trading company DFCC. As a Trustee / Director I get the satisfaction of helping to keep the SET story going, keeping our wonderful staff employed and the site open for guests and other visitors to enjoy.



Lizzie Wilberforce

I have had a life-long enthusiasm for natural history, and first moved to Ceredigion in the mid-1990s to study Environmental Biology at Aberystwyth University. Following a PhD in fungal ecology in Aberystwyth and a season on Skomer Island as a seabird field worker, I returned to Ceredigion in 2003 as a nature reserve manager for the Wildlife Trust of South and West Wales, where I first started working in partnership with Denmark Farm. I still work for the Wildlife Trust, in the role of Conservation Manager for West Wales. I am particularly interested in conservation land management, species conservation and biological recording, and hope to bring this professional experience to support Denmark Farm. I am now based in Carmarthenshire but work throughout West Wales.

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Trustee Job description:
goo.gl/BmkcGb

Eco Tourism Flourishes at Denmark Farm

The Shared Earth Trust's decision, around five years ago, to develop its Eco Tourism provision has been an extremely positive one. Our main facility is the Self-Catering Eco Lodge, which consists of three interconnecting apartments with space to sleep twelve. This holiday accommodation is often fully booked up to a year in advance for peak periods. Trying to cater for different markets we also offer low cost dormitory beds, for those attending events, and a small bunkhouse for groups looking for a budget holiday. Additionally we have a small Eco Campsite with a new Glamping Yurt for those who like a night under the stars.



All profit from holidays at Denmark Farm is ploughed back into maintaining the 40 acre nature reserve. We haven't quite yet reached financial sustainability, but with your support, booking stays and spreading the word, we are well on the road.

All accommodation is listed on our [website](http://www.denmarkfarm.org.uk) (www.denmarkfarm.org.uk) or you can call Mara on 01570 493358 to check availability.

Don't forget that members of the Shared Earth Trust can benefit from a generous 10% discount off all accommodation at Denmark Farm.

Learning Opportunities and Events

2017 has been an incredible season for new courses and events, all very well attended. As well as our own programme of crafts and sustainable living workshops we've hosted a wide range of Aberystwyth Lifelong Learning Ecology courses and a number of one-off events supported by external organisations including Plantlife, Bumblebee Conservation, Freshwater Habitat Trust and Woodland Classroom. There is still more to come during the remaining part of the year, from Basket Making to Needle Felting, Building a Shave Horse to Drum Making and Bat Identification to Field Survey Techniques, we're sure there is something to whet your appetite.



On Sunday 25th September 2017 we will be holding our annual open day at Denmark Farm. This is a chance for us to showcase all the exciting recent developments, raise awareness of key environmental issues and reach out to friends new and old. Please put the date in your diary and join us if you can. If you live further afield, why not make a weekend of it and book a stay at Denmark Farm?



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Become A Member Of The Shared Earth Trust

Help us to ...

- Continue our holistic approach to conservation, managing for habitats rather than individual species
- Build on ecological restoration work we have been doing for 30 years
- Keep the 40 acre nature reserve open to the public, all year round and free of charge
- Teach others about the natural world and the threats it faces
- Inspire other landowners to help wildlife on their own land
- Fund projects such as native woodland restoration, providing nest boxes for small birds and owls, wetland and wet meadow restoration, monitoring wildlife, restoration of wildflower meadows and conservation grazing with Welsh mountain ponies.

Membership fees

Individual	£36.00 pa
Joint	£60.00 pa
Associate	£100.00 pa
Life	£1000.00

Benefits to you

- **Discount on courses and events**
- **Discounted accommodation when attending courses**
- **Discount on holiday accommodation**

For further information or to join online see our [membership page](http://www.denmarkfarm.org.uk/membership/) at (www.denmarkfarm.org.uk/membership/) or pick up a form when next visiting.

Donate or Fundraise to support our work

With almost no grant funding on the horizon, we are currently fundraising to support our core essential work via the online platform LocalGiving Cymru.

This simple website enables hundreds of charities to raise money online and takes only a few minutes for you to sign up. You can opt to give a one-off donation or a regular monthly contribution by direct debit. For those of you who like a challenge, why not fundraise for us? You can create your own fundraising page via LocalGiving and use it to request donations for a special event. This is where you can feed your sense of adventure and be creative. From climbing mountains to shaving your head, it can be a lot of fun to fundraise.

Please visit our [LocalGiving page](http://localgiving.org/charity/shared-earth-trust/) (localgiving.org/charity/shared-earth-trust/)



Welcome to the Welsh Mountain ponies! We have a number of new site conservation assistants with us this season in the form of a small group of Welsh mountain ponies. They are known as “Section A’s”, the smallest of the Welsh mountain ponies and a hardy breed with a thick winter coat. The ponies are on loan to us from a local breeder, and can be seen happily chomping their way through overgrown areas in our meadows, helping us to maintain our diverse flower-rich habitats.

Contact us:

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