

# Noakes Grove AGM 2017

## Nature reserve report

Compared to last year's reports, this year's will seem very tame.

### **Sheep, lambs and pasture**

Our seven ewes went happily on their holiday in October. Well, it was a sort of a working holiday with the purpose of meeting and greeting Ron the ram. Ron lives in Wimbish, with Hedi Threlfall and Rich Cooke; he is a pedigree Wiltshire Horn and already had a harem of four of our last year's ewe lambs. Our flock stayed there throughout the winter and over the spring lambing season. Many, many thanks to Rich for his extremely skilful handling of the whole lambing process, which in two cases was much needed. Lizzie produced triplets, one of which was weak and had crooked legs. Rich saved his life, straightened his legs and began the topping-up bottle feeds. That lamb is now a very promising ram. A couple of weeks later Josephine was obviously in trouble and had Rich not pulled her two lambs out of her, they might all three have been goners. All this means that we had 13 very healthy and good lambs. In August, two ewe lambs were given as payment for all the work done, and Hedi and Rich bought four castrates as store lambs. We are left now with four ewe lambs and two castrates. Lizzie and Jeannie are probably no longer robust enough to have any more lambs, so we will keep some of the ewe lambs to replace them and allow old ewes to enjoy a well-earned retirement.

The bottle-fed triplet needed feeding three times a day, so David found two extra shepherdesses to help us and Emma. Welcome Stephanie Maxwell and Catherine Flack to the team – you have made a considerable contribution to the project. Thank you.

While the sheep were away we cleared the fences and took great delight in having the whole meadow to bounce around. Keith Glover cut two of the sections although the hay was not good enough to be fodder. However, the resultant grass growth was excellent, so that when the sheep returned in April, they had lots of lovely fresh grass.

### **Woodland and thorn scrub management**

Luckily David was able to organise and run the work parties while Vyvyan and Gay were away. These all went well and quite a lot of the broad thicket of scrub that makes up the boundary hedge at the bottom of the scrub was thinned back. The beehive field was cut and we got the sheep to manage the docks and nettles field – they only needed a week. A start was made on the roadside hedge, as the verge there is actually a wildflower verge reserve and more light is needed to encourage the flowers to grow. At the moment there is not much there, but with a bit of extra light and protection from vehicle tyres, flowers will re-establish.

### **Ponds**

One major change this year was the creation of a nice big pond. We had made a little one beside the barn, but David wanted a large one at the bottom of the hill where the

ancient woodland meets the end of the scrub. A small stream used to run down the side of the wood there, but these days it mostly appears dry. But when Keith got his digger there and excavated the marked-out site, the hole began to fill with water as he was working. It seems that the bone-dry stream still runs, but underground. Once the pond was dug, it filled up incredibly quickly. We gave both ponds a little starter of frog spawn, and tadpoles appeared in due course.

## **Events**

Our large, fenceless meadow was ideal for the first public event of the year, which was the Lambs and Bluebell day in April. We made just one paddock over the far side of the meadow to show off the sheep, but the rest of the field was alive with exciting things to do or watch. There was a treasure hunt, crafts, campfire cooking, puppet shows, while Tara ran an all-day forest school in the wood. The previous night, David had run the moth trap and set some small mammal traps, so he was able to take groups round looking at the catch. This proved immensely popular – perhaps we can do something similar again.

In June we took a stand at the Swards End Fete. David's idea of taking a couple of lambs to show was great fun, if somewhat time-consuming catching and transporting them. Emma had managed to acquire some wonderful prizes for a treasure-map game created by Bernard and Jean, which raised a good lot of cash, another less popular game and lovely display of photographs and information panels to tell people all about Noakes Grove. We did manage to get a few more names on the list, but not as many as the Lambs and Bluebell day.