

Whinney Hill Farm.
Saturday 30th September. Tour of Whinney Hill Farm,
Leader David Wood.

On Saturday in beautiful sunny weather, Berwick Wildlife Group visited Whinney Hill Farm near Longhorsley, where wildlife conservation has been wonderfully integrated into a working farm by David Wood.

This 300 acre farm is situated on the boundary between arable and hill land, and includes both pasture and cropped fields. After a picnic lunch, Berwick Wildlife Group members began by visiting a damp peaty area of one field, now fenced and very lightly grazed, where a lowland heath flora with heather, cross-leaved heath, cranberry and sphagnum moss has re-appeared (although none of these plants were present when the area was a drained, grazed pasture). Snipe, skylark, meadow pipits and hunting owls take advantage of the longer vegetation, which is occasionally very lightly grazed by sheep to prevent scrub invasion.

Around the arable fields are wide grass margins, seeded with wild flowers (for insects) and cocksfoot grass. The grass seed is spread thinly so tussocks develop, providing ideal



conditions for small mammals which in turn are food for owls and other predators. Field margins are cut on a rotational basis about once every three years. A set-aside area has been sown with sunflower, gold-of-pleasure and quinoa-and-kale mix, providing an excellent food source for small birds. Between the fields, mixed-species hedges have been planted. These are managed in a variety of ways to increase the range of habitats, kept trimmed or allowed to grow taller and laid on a 20-year cycle.



The farm includes an ancient woodland, more recently planted mixed broadleaved woodland, unfertilised grasslands with various grazing regimes (some with rig-and-furrow patterns), a small lake

and three ponds. All these areas are specially managed to add to the range of wildlife habitats. For example, one pond is designed to attract dragonflies, with an open southern aspect (sunshine), native shrubs planted around to provide shelter and attract insects to provide food for the dragonflies, vegetation on the pond margins for dragonfly larvae to crawl up before metamorphosing into adults – in short, it caters for their every need. Similarly, birds are provided with 120 different nest boxes to suit everything from blue tits to barn owls, and a wide variety of food-rich habitats.

The wildlife of Whinney Hill is privileged to have such an understanding and enthusiastic custodian of the land, and Berwick Wildlife Group were equally privileged to be shown the workings of this remarkable farm.

Thank you very much, David.

Fiona, 3rd October 2006