

Climate Solutions Group - August Forum report by Kate Bailey

This month we focused on 'nature recovery' in all its forms. There are many examples of regeneration projects all over the UK, some of which our members have visited or worked on, in Scotland, Devon, Kent and, nearer to home, in Ennerdale in the Lake District.

'Wild Ennerdale' is a long-term partnership between the main landowners (Forestry England, National Trust and United Utilities) and Natural England. The valley primarily supports forestry, farming and tourism. A reduction in sheep grazing allowed for the introduction of Galloway cattle. Natural regeneration, native tree planting, river restoration and valley mire restoration, as well as wetland creation, have led to salmon returning to restored river systems and thriving populations of Marsh fritillary butterflies.

'Knepp Castle Estate' in West Sussex was a degraded intensively-managed farm, where sheep and dairy cattle were removed and arable land was taken out of production in 2001. River restoration and wetland creation support a mixture of free-roaming grazing animals - cattle, ponies, pigs and deer. Their different grazing preferences are creating a mosaic of habitats — from grassland and scrub to open-grown trees and wood pasture. Extremely rare species such as turtle doves, nightingales, peregrine falcons and purple emperor butterflies are now breeding there.

'Wildwood Kent' is a native species wildlife charity, focusing on nature-based solutions to return native species and recreate wild spaces. The Trust runs two parks - 40 acres of woodland near Herne Bay in Kent and 45 acres near Honiton in Devon, that are home to over 200 native British species, including bears, wolves, otters, red squirrels and arctic foxes. These parks offer an opportunity for families to connect with wildlife in their natural habitats.

The Trust has introduced conservation grazing to a number of nature reserves, using Konik ponies that closely resemble the extinct wild horse, the Tarpan, and introduced European Bison, with the aim of restoring 600 hectares of ancient woodland. They have also released Eurasian beavers into Ham Fen, a wetland nature reserve in Kent, where the beavers have enriched the wetland habitats, benefitting other endangered species.

There are many examples of projects that can be visited in the UK, where marginal farmland has been improved by the creation of habitats for a wide range of native species. Some of the most ambitious are the 'Atlantic Rainforest' restoration projects, managed by the Wildlife Trusts in partnership with Aviva. Once covering a fifth of the UK, temperate rainforest is now limited to scattered fragments along the west coast. These are wild and wet places, for example Ballachuan Hazelwood near Oban, which supports Pine Martens, Otters, Marsh fritillary butterflies and rare fungi, and Bovey Valley on Dartmoor, which attracts many migrant birds in spring and supports the tiny endangered Hazel dormouse.

