

Field Trip Notes 2 August 2025 Harold's Park Wildland

The PACE trip to [Harold's Park Wildland](#) rewilding project near Nazeing in West Essex came about thanks to Tom Moat, a trustee of PACE, who had previously given a talk about the project to PACE supporters on 4th March. Tom works for nature restoration company *Nattergal* as Manager of the 500 acre Harold's Park Wildland project, and at the end of that talk he offered to run a guided walk of the site for PACE.

Thus on Saturday 2nd August a minibus picked up 15 people from Manningtree for the 60 mile drive to our destination, where we met up with Tom and 4 other people who had made their own way there, on a beautiful sunny day.

We spent a couple of hours on a fascinating walk around the site, with Tom as a very knowledgeable and enthusiastic leader. The site's most recent uses have been as an equestrian centre, with improved (fertilized) pastures for grazing for a large number of horses, and as a Christmas tree (Spruce) plantation. Things that need to change in order to allow nature recovery are the blocking or removal of old drainage pipes, chemicals in the soil to disappear with time, removing nearly all the fences apart from a new perimeter fence, and the introducing of carefully managed numbers of free-roaming ancient breed pigs, cattle and ponies. A few 'Iron-Age' Pigs will be first, to act as natural 'ecosystem engineers' with their rooting behaviour. Then, the right level of 'conservation grazing' by herbivores will create vegetation at different heights and densities to provide varied habitats for plants, insects, birds and other wildlife. Fallow and Muntjac Deer populations need controlling to reduce the levels of damage to trees and ground vegetation currently occurring. The spruce trees would ideally be removed, but have to be managed under guidance from the Forestry Commission to avoid the potential spread of a serious bark beetle pest.

An interesting feature of this particular rewilding project is that it benefits from some good existing areas of habitat, including some ancient woodland, old hedges, and several ponds. Trees and other vegetation will gradually spread out from these areas to create woodland pasture, with the grazing animals naturally maintaining enough open spaces in the tree canopy to allow good biodiversity.

Nattergal (Danish for Nightingale) aims to achieve nature recovery at a big scale in a way which provides benefits to society such as carbon capture, water management, improved access and education, and to do this in ways which are financially viable for investors. The way that this can be achieved is by selling Biodiversity Net Gain to developers, to meet their legal requirements.

It will be fascinating to go back in a few years to see how things are progressing.