

Summary of PACE Field Trip to Parrington's Farm, 6 Aug 2024

There were 27 of us on this Field Trip to Parrington's Farm to the West of Lawford, plus four very informative walk leaders. Jenny Francis and her nephew Ben, who own the 105 acres and properties at Humberlands and Broom Knolls, led two separate walks with Bob Gooding and Liz Cutting, who have recorded wildlife on the farm over many years. The object of this trip was for PACE supporters to appreciate what a good biodiversity site feels like and what is involved in its management.

We started in the acid grassland near the barn on the Essex Way where Barn Owls roost, and walked past the arable fields – normally cropped but this year growing *Phacelia* and wild flowers – to the old 17 century farm yard, another haunt for Owls and Swallows and home to the neighbour's, Josh Starling, sheep and lambs which graze the meadows – important for Stewardship agreements and biodiversity. Then down through ancient woodland with Oak, Ash, Alder, Sweet Chestnut, Hazel and the special Black Poplar; across the Mill Stream towards Shirburn Brook – both were used to fill the Mill Ponds of Shirburn Mill and they are served by countless springs along the scarp slope, known for their fauna of caddisflies, mayflies, freshwater shrimps etc. Past the old water cress beds, through Hazel and Alder coppice with Song Thrush and Green Woodpecker calling; back up the slopes by the veteran Field Maple to ponds frequented by Grass Snake, Water Vole, Otter and Badger, all species protected in law; round the 16 Century pargetted house of Humberlands (dated 1560 by the late Oliver Rackham the ancient woodland expert), through what is left of the old orchards which used to extend to 15 acres and be commercially viable until the 1950's; and into the top wildflower meadows where Bob sweep netted to show the biodiversity of insects in the hay crop. By the time we were back at the barn it was dusk, and we released the amazing contents of a moth trap which had been set the previous night – several hundred moths indicating the great hidden biodiversity of this farm.

Most of the farm is in High Level Stewardship with DEFRA – Stewardship awards payments per acre providing that the landowner keeps to strict conservation management – for meadows this means no chemicals and not cutting hay until August; for hedgerows this means strict cutting regimes to allow bird nesting and winter feed; for woodland this means keeping to an agreed woodland management plan and for arable maintaining grass field margins and such things as Turtle Dove and Skylark plots. The modest payments are welcome income but would not alone make a farm commercially viable.

Thanks to Jenny and Ben for looking after this superb oasis for biodiversity – an oasis on the edge of the sea of arable that is the Tendring peninsula – and thanks to Liz and Bob for their wildlife expertise.

Next Field Trip on Tuesday 3 September 7pm will be to Manningtree Sewage Treatment Works – places are limited to 30 so please book if you want to come and we will send you details manningtreepace@gmail.com

Photos:

1. Ben and Liz explain the history of the Black Poplar.