

# PENDLE HILL FARMERS GROUP

## ANNUAL REPORT FOR YEAR ONE 2018-2019

The Pendle Hill Farmers Group was set up in March 2018, following a successful application to the Countryside Stewardship Facilitation Fund. Currently there are 28 members covering around 2750 ha.

The group aims to:

- Increase understanding of local Countryside Stewardship priorities and knowledge of landscape scale conservation techniques, and to encourage the uptake of schemes
- Work together with as many group members as possible implementing these techniques on, and across, members' farms by:

i) Restoring, managing and expanding priority habitats: woodlands, grasslands, wetlands and moorlands

ii) Restoring traditional boundaries

iii) Implementing natural flood management techniques

In this first year of the group operating we met eight times, with three indoor evening meetings and five outdoor events. We have concentrated on Natural Flood Management, water quality and management for farmland birds as well as providing information on Countryside Stewardship. In addition, the members of the group have attended meetings organised by the Forest of Bowland AONB on behalf of Defra, looking at the developments of ELMS in the uplands.

**Natural Flood Management:** In August 2018 we took a trip to Nethergill Farm in the Yorkshire Dales (<https://www.nethergill.co.uk/>) to see the demonstration site of NFM features which have been put in place on the farm. This was an excellent way to see the features in the flesh, chat with the owners of the site and also to the Yorkshire Rivers Trust staff who attended.



Group members looked at the fenced off stream sides, temporary floodwater retention pools, wader scrapes and leaky dams at Nethergill, as well as discussing the

future of upland farming, the role of ecosystem services and the emerging ideas around payment for public goods.

Following on from this field meeting, and working in conjunction with the Yorkshire Dales National Park, Yorkshire Rivers Trust and Ribble Rivers Trust, we produced a publication - '**Natural Flood Management Measures – a practical guide for farmers**' which details the NFM and agricultural benefits of different interventions, their construction dimensions, costs, funding streams and maintenance needed, as well as giving guidance as to the type of planning consent which may be needed. This guide was launched to the group in December 2018 by colleagues from the Ribble Rivers Trust who also gave a very informative presentation on the types of interventions which would be most suitable for the farms within the group.



**Water quality:** Following the launch of the '**Farming Rules for Water**' in April 2018 the group were keen to come on an evening walk along the Twiston valley in June 2018 to hear the rules explained in the field by Jackie Monk, a local EA adviser. The cab cards produced by EA were well received, ensuring that members could check up on buffer zone widths whilst out spreading.

This event followed on from an evening meeting led by our local CSF Officer, during which he ran through the Water Capital Grants available through Countryside Stewardship. During the 2018 application window four group members applied for the water capital grant, supporting work to decrease diffuse pollution risk from their yards and buildings.

**Management for farmland birds:** Pendle Hill and the farmland surrounding it is a hotspot for wading birds, with populations of breeding lapwing, curlew, snipe and oystercatchers. As locally people are accustomed to seeing these birds, the farmer group were surprised to learn about how scarce they are becoming in the UK as a whole when we went on a farm walk at Cockshotts Farm in Sabden with GWCT Adviser Matt Goodall as part of the Big Farmland Bird Count in February 2019.



Matt returned to speak to the group in March 2019, this time on the subject of predation control. Matt updated the group on legal control methods and brought a selection of trapping equipment with him.

These two events followed on from the very popular rush management workshop which we held in November 2018 at another members farm, Wymondhouses at Pendleton. Ian Cairns from Agri-food Technical Services in Northumberland was the specialist adviser for the event, and gave extremely good practical advice to all the attendees. As rushes are a common issue in pasture ground, this was very well received. We were joined on the day by local RSPB advisers Janet Fairclough and Chris Tomson, who talked about how rush control can take account of wading birds, and how it is straight forward to manage rushes in a way which also benefits the birds.

As part of the Pendle Hill Landscape Partnership project, volunteers are building various types of bird boxes, including owl boxes, small woodland bird boxes, Sparrow Streets, swift boxes and kestrel boxes. These are going to be sited on members' farms in time for the breeding season in 2020. This is a good example of how the Pendle Hill Farmer Network works well hand in hand with the Landscape Partnership projects.

**Countryside Stewardship:** in addition to the Capital Water grant applications from members, two members applied for mid tier during the application window, and I was able to complete endorsement forms for them.

As part of the Pendle Hill Landscape Partnership team, we have a graduate trainee, who is working on the Pendle Traditional Boundaries project. She has been able to help farmer members with their boundary-only applications and boundary elements of their mid-tier applications.

This first year has been very productive, with the farmer members becoming more engaged in talking about habitat management and also the outlook for upland farming. Some members are more frequent attendees than others. The challenge for the coming year is to continue to provide a programme which is interesting to them. We have a good age range of members, and so are keen to ensure there are elements which appear across the group.

**Plans for 2019:** this coming year we will be concentrating on:

- Soil health, compaction & nutrient status – manure management planning
- Traditional boundaries – training opportunities and troubleshooting days
- Wildlife monitoring
- Nest box location

Sarah Robinson

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