



Hybu Cig Cymru
Hill Ram Scheme

Environmental Audits 2022 – Biodiversity

Executive Summary



All 54 RMDP Hill Ram Scheme farmers were offered the opportunity to participate in environmental audits of biodiversity and carbon footprint.

The 25 ecological surveys undertaken highlighted the intricate interlinkages between animal husbandry and environmental management and demonstrates how food production can go hand-in-hand with care for wildlife. The entire field, ffridd and mountain networks on the farms surveyed have been developed to manage stock grazing regimes and to provide shade and shelter for the animals. This development and management of important landscape features in the form of traditional field boundaries providing a range of habitats for wildlife. The vast majority of the field boundaries surveyed comprised hedges, rows of trees, dry stone walls, earth banks or stone and earth banks. Most of the hedges and rows of trees were growing on earth banks or stone and earth banks and where fences alone formed boundaries, these were usually on earth banks. The maintenance of farm tracks for vehicular access and stock movement offer a haven for wildlife as many of these tracks surveyed were infrequently used.

Grazing animals, such as the sheep on all the farms surveyed, as well as cattle on many and horses on some are required for the management of the majority of habitats noted. The climax vegetation for these habitats is woodland and removing grazing animals would result in tree sapling establishment which is already found in some



less frequently grazed areas. The stock ensure that more vigorously growing vegetation such as tree saplings, rushes and purple moor-grass are grazed, with bracken trampled allowing more delicate plants to flourish. In particular, sheep grazing was seen to be beneficial on heather moorland ensuring a diverse age structure of heather and other sub-shrubs and browsing any tree saplings attempting to establish. Sheep tightly grazing semi-natural grasslands are beneficial to numerous fungi, including wax caps with short swards of sheep-grazed earthbanks allowing a variety of flora to flourish and provide burrowing opportunities for insects and small mammals.

The management undertaken by farmers to ensure better grazing for their stock such as bracken control and soft rush cutting has benefits for flora and fauna through encouraging a greater diversity of plants to flourish. Trampling by stock



has a similar effect, with the added benefit, in marshy areas, of puddling creating micro-habitats for a variety of insects. Producing silage and in particular hay, with fields free of stock for a period, allows some flowers to set seed and hedge shrubs to develop at base level, with animals necessary for aftermath grazing. The establishment of herbal leys as well as growing root and other arable crops, particularly if there is minimal or no use of chemicals can result in a variety of flowering plants providing pollen and nectar for insects.

There were areas of stock-excluded woodlands on all of the farms with streamside corridors on a few. Many of these areas were stock-excluded as a requirement of an agri-environment scheme, currently Glastir Advanced. The woodlands are stock-excluded to encourage natural regeneration of trees and shrubs but in the longer-term, most will require the reintroduction of grazing to ensure that a variety of woodland ground flora can flourish. The streamside corridors



were established to improve water quality as well as to encourage tree and shrub growth. But Without grazing the more dominant plants vegetation becomes rank, shading and out-competes other flora. This is of particular concern where invasive, alien plants, such as Japanese knotweed and Himalayan balsam become dominant creating a substantial seed source allowing these species to colonise downstream.



Many woodlands, copses, and individual trees have been established or managed on farms for stock shade and shelter. Those farmers in Glastir with woodlands fenced out and stock excluded have the woodlands regenerating naturally with a dense understorey, scrub and ground flora layers developing. However, grazing the unfenced woodlands encouraged a variety of plants which would otherwise have been shaded out; these include a variety of mosses and ferns. Some of the woodlands surveyed were subject to either a light grazing regime or grazing over a limited period only, resulting in a good balance of natural tree regeneration, understorey, scrub and ground flora.

All farms had areas of open water including rivers, streams, ditches, ponds or pools. They are a source of drinking water for stock in many cases and all provide important habitats both aquatic and terrestrial, the later along their banks.

