

## Wouldham Rewilding project (WRP)

WRP is looking for more volunteers to help on a small project aimed at improving a small area of degraded, over-grazed chalk grassland south of Rochester on the N Downs AONB (or whatever it is called now).

In most senses the area (1.75 acres) is too small to be properly called “Rewilding”, but it reflects our desire to follow the principles of rewilding, which here is more of do as little as possible maintenance/ repair to the area, but just enough to then stand back and let nature look after itself.

The site received a grant for tools, a 5 year conservation plan & for other miscellaneous costs.

The site itself is absolutely beautiful, particularly the upper field & the gardens, as well as the view down the hill to the Medway.

We have 2 types of work for which we would like help with.

The first is to assist on our 2 “green hay” days (31<sup>st</sup> July, 12<sup>th</sup> September).

The second is to help with planning & a low key maintenance scheme the rest of the year.

“Green hay” is a widely used method where you take a hay crop & in our case it will be cutting the upper (bio-diverse) field and spreading the hay thinly across the (degraded) lower field. The area where we will be spreading the hay has to be cut first & hay from there removed before we spread the green hay across it.

We take 2 cuts from the upper field each year, taking different halves each time, in July & September.

This method works if you take a hay cut from two very similar field types. We will be going from a good to a poor chalk grassland separated by only 100 yards.

The area consists of:

1. The (southern) upper field - bio diverse, with some invasive plants, which need to be controlled, such as bramble (which can be strimmed) & sycamore/ dogwood, which shouldn't be cut but pulled out by using a tree popper.
  - a. A hedge we installed by the southern fence.



2. A joining area which is largely left untouched, but was cut back a bit on the last volunteer day



Joining area

### 3. Small pond with newts



Pond

4. The over-grazed, degraded northern lower field, which is the area we are seeking to improve
  - a. On the southern edge, we had to cut back to the fence invasives that had taken a chunk out of the chalk grassland field
  - b. On the extreme northern edge, a small derelict wildlife garden
  - c. Brash pile hedges against the fence (brash here implies stacking up twigs, branches to act as a small animal, invertebrate refuge)
  - d. Before the green hay, cutting back the areas on which we wish to spread the green hay; removing the cut vegetation; stacking it in piles within the woodland edges. Again as a small animal, invertebrate refuge, but reducing fertility as well
  - e. As wild grasses and flowers cannot compete with more aggressive grasses and flowers on higher fertility soil, anything cut on the field is moved off it to reduce fertility



Lower field

5. A beautiful conventional garden; bluebells in spring.
6. A vegetable garden, being worked as a small market garden
7. Trees on either side
  - a. Road (western) side, largely sycamore, which is being trimmed
  - b. eastern side, sycamore & ash (some of which is healthy, some not)

#### Maintenance work

- a. Cutting back all the invasive plants; the mature sycamore trees where practical
- b. Keeping the southern end of the lower field clear of invasive plants (trees, grasses, plants)
- c. Create brash piles by the fences; hay piles in the woodland edge
- d. Improve the wildlife garden area

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