

## **Slide 1: intro**

### **Futurescapes:**

Futurescapes is the RSPB's recognition of the need to do more for ALL NATURE and the need to do this TOGETHER, on a bigger scale. As populations grow and development occurs, wildlife habitats are becoming increasingly fragmented, leading to vulnerable landscapes and declining wildlife. Futurescapes are areas that have been identified as spaces where the RSPB can do the most for landscape and wildlife conservation.

### **SDNP Map:**

The South Downs Futurescape, which follows the same border as the National Park, is our local landscape. Futurescapes champions partnership work. If we are going to save UK wildlife, we need to work together! The South Downs Futurescape core partners are: SDNPA, National Trust, Sussex and Hampshire Wildlife Trusts, Game and Wildlife Conservation Trust and Our Land (a sustainable tourism initiative).

We are also working with others – farmers/landowners, local communities and businesses, government bodies and other environmental organisations – to do more for nature, creating corridors of healthy habitat in our landscape that are wildlife friendly.

### **Habitats:**

Within our South Downs Landscape we have a diversity of habitats: farmland, heathland, wetland, woodland and chalk grassland. Each one contains wildlife species – both flora and fauna – that are uniquely adapted to these habitats.

### **Farmland:**

Encouraging and advising farmers is one of our key efforts in the SE, and we put a lot of emphasis on this. The South Downs is 1 of 2 priority areas in the SE, the other being N. Kent. Bruce Fowkes is our lead farm advisor... and one of the projects that we're focusing on is the South Downs Farmland Bird Initiative, which links farmers to environmental stewardship packages that are specialised to their land and needs.

### **Grey Partridge:**

Peter Knight is the farm manager for the Norfolk Estate, owned by the Duke of Norfolk. His extensive conservation management efforts have led to a major turn around for a large number of wildlife species. They even came in 2<sup>nd</sup> place in the Nature of Farming Award last year!

Where they had been virtually none left in this area where they used to flourish, there are now about 800 grey partridges found on the estate! And these are birds that have been bred and not simply stocked! Such efforts in conservation farming for grey partridges have led to beneficial knock-on effects for other wildlife species.

**Farmland Lapwings** have been struggling throughout the Downs, but the estate is now home to about 40 now (recent RSPB survey – spring 2013!)... Yellowhammers and Corn buntings are also flourishing as hedges and headlands are restored and beetle banks put in place.

Many may say that this is all well and good for an estate with seemingly limitless funds, however, there are also low to no-cost options that normal-sized and smaller farmers can do, such as marginally increasing headlands or occasionally pausing spring drilling to create skylark plots. Many farmers can also tap into the Stewardship Programmes, though these will soon come into review by the EU, so we will have to wait and see what the outcome will be there.

Although farmers are as diverse as the lands they work and live on, generally speaking, there are 3 types of farmers relating to conservation farming:

1. Those actively hostile to conservation, a minority
2. Active conservationists, a minority
3. The majority are farmers who are in the middle: they farm because it is their livelihood and they are not hostile to conservation efforts, but still need to carry out their business!

**Skylark plot slide:** The RSPB own and run a normal business working farm up in Cambridgeshire called Hope Farm, with the sole purpose of demonstrating how normal farmers can alter intensive agricultural practices in ways that benefit wildlife without damaging their business. Indeed, healthier farmland equals healthier animals and farm products!

The Game and Wildlife Conservation Trust also do an amazing amount of work in turning game and wildlife populations around and have a great reputation in giving sound advice, particularly with species such as the grey partridge.

**Brown Hare:** a lovely farmland species, and they give a fantastic display if you can catch them boxing! This 'mad March hare' behaviour is actually the attempt by females to ward off passionate males. The timing of crops and their growth is critical to the life-cycle and survival of the brown hare.

**Corn buntings:** nest near the ground in field margins and are mostly likely to be found in good headlands on the boundary between arable farmland and grassland. Their song is often likened to 'jangling keys'.

**Wetland:** another South Downs habitat, and particularly special because of the chalk rivers that run through.

**ARC** – the Arun and Rother Connections – is a fantastic example of landscape-scale conservation. It is a major river restoration project which also works to connect local communities to their river systems.

77,108 hectares project area. 7 partner organisations. I won't go into all of the project details now, but if you have any questions about the project, I'll do my best to answer them at the end! Though I will say we have just received HLF funding for the Delivery Phase of the project, which will roll out over the course of the next 3 years.

### **Top level habitat restoration targets:**

- 13km River Restoration project – Upper Arun near Horsham
- 10 ha species rich floodplain meadow (12% Sussex BAP target)
- 10 ha Wet woodland (inc planting 2,700 trees)
- 5 ha wet heath
- 3 ha Fen
- 3 ha Reedbed
- 3 km Chalk stream
- Combat invasive species, remove fish obstructions, restoring natural river flow for flood mitigation

### **Community engagement at the heart of the project:**

- Governance structure – made up of a partnership board and 6 sub groups – allows broader membership and transparency
- 2,460 volunteer days will be delivered over course of project
- Innovative wetlands education programme for 64 primary schools in project area (including river field trips)
- Free taster days in angling, canoeing, bushcraft and wildlife / landscape photography for young people (targetting deprived communities)
- Oral history project
- Landowner training and engagement
- Annual ecosystem services conference
- Rain gardens (sustainable urban drainage) engagement project

**Lapwings**, also mentioned earlier, nest in both river valleys AND dry bare soils. The interesting thing is, sometimes, when they fail to breed in one habitat, they'll try again in the other!

**Water voles:** After a severe decline, water voles are making a comeback. Mink, voracious and non-native hunters of the water vole, are now being managed; water voles have been re-introduced in some areas to help strengthen weakened or decimated populations; better river system management.

**Heathland:** is found in the north western parts of the South Downs and is quite the contrast to the well-known chalkland. The Sussex Wildlife Trust sites, Iping and Stedham Common, are perfect examples of heathland in the South East.

There is a relationship that happens between heath and conifer plantations, though not to the benefit of the heath. Both like the same soils, however, once conifers grow to a certain height they begin to shade out the heathland, making it unsuitable for the heather to grow. Amazingly though, the heathland seedbank can retain its viability for over 50 years!

**Clearance slide:** So, heathland CAN BE RESTORED under forest clearance. Heather and gorse very quickly regenerate when they are exposed to the sun. It looks like a horrible, decimated area to begin with, but surprisingly quickly returns!

It takes just a few years to look like a healthy heathland again. Also, there is a little phenomenon which we cheekily refer to as **dare to be bare!** A certain amount of bare ground is needed in heathland, as 60% of heathland wildlife species have adapted to bare patches of

ground which were once the result of poor peasants harvesting bits of turfs. Somehow these folks managed to figure out the optimum ratio of bare earth to heath to the benefit of people and wildlife!

**Nightjar:** particularly fond of heathland habitats. It is a glomming bird: it loves the dawn and dusk. They have an enticing churring song and when the males are displaying for females or marking out their territory they clap their wings above and below their bodies.

**Field cricket:** By 1988 it was believed that just 100 of these insects remained in Britain, and they were located on one small area of heathland in the South Downs. The decline had been caused by the fragmentation and disappearance of light chalky or sandy heaths with the short, grazed grass preferred by the field crickets. Today, through breeding and translocation programmes, this colony is providing crickets for reintroductions at suitable habitats elsewhere in Sussex and Surrey.

**Woodland:** SE England is the most wooded part of the country, and is particularly known for its Ancient Woodland. Ancient woodland is that which has been wooded since the 1600s, and there is actually quite a lot of these woodlands in the South Downs!

However, some specialist woodland birds aren't actually doing very well. Much of our woodlands are not well-managed anymore – for example, there is now very little rotational coppicing because it is no longer an economical enterprise. This has led to very shady and overgrown woodland with little sunlight getting through to the floor. Thankfully, there are new and upcoming programmes now that are encouraging more coppicing.

**Nightingale:** still fairly common and widespread across the Downs, and Pulborough Brooks is a great place to see them. Elsewhere, however, their population is struggling, especially in areas with increasing development pressure, such as Kent. It's up to us to help this amazing bird, renowned for inspiring poets, writers and the like!

**Pearl-bordered fritillary:** a specialised butterfly, like most, this beautiful species needs a well-managed woodland with lots of violets growing for food. The Norfolk Estate is a great place to see them.

**Duke of Burgundy:** on the other hand, can be found on the Heyshott Heath escarpment, between Petworth and Chichester. This butterfly is a bit complicated, requiring very specific attention and land management. They don't like vegetation to be too short or too overgrown, but need diversity. This butterfly was, in the past, primarily known as a woodland butterfly, where it fed on Primroses growing in dappled sunlight, with a number of colonies in chalk and limestone grassland. However, the cessation of coppicing in woodlands has had a marked effect on this species, with many woodland colonies dying out as a result. Primrose is used as the larval foodplant in woodland, whereas Cowslip is used on grassland.

**Chalk Grassland:** is perhaps the most well-known of habitats in the South Downs. Unimproved chalk soil is very nutrient poor, but ironically, exceptionally species-rich! On just **one square meter** of unimproved chalk grassland can support between 40-50 different species of flowers, orchids, grasses, vetches and the like!

**Adonis blue butterfly:** is a chalk grassland butterfly, favouring just one plant – the horseshoe vetch. They also only appear on south-facing slopes of the Downs, as they require a warmer micro-climate. Within this mini-ecosystem, they also depend heavily upon ants (who also require warmer spots)! The Adonis blue caterpillars adopt an ant... as a bodyguard! The caterpillars are heavily predated, so over the years have adapted to this situation by luring ants over to their side. They produce a heavenly-scented pheromone that the ants absolutely swoon over and also secrete a mead-like juice that drives the ants crazy! The ants will go to all efforts to protect their caterpillar!

**Chalkhill blue:** another chalk downland (and sometimes limestone) butterfly, like the Adonis the larvae also loves horseshoe vetch, whereas the adults love to feed on the nectar of bird's-foot trefoil, thistles and thyme, among a few others.

**Round-headed rampion:** also known as the 'Pride of Sussex', it is more common on the South Downs than anywhere else in the UK, only growing on chalk grassland here.

#### **Hedgehog Slide:**

Just this May, the State of Nature report was published by a coalition of the UK's leading conservation and research organisations – the RSPB being one of the driving organisations. An audit of the UK's wildlife at the top level, it confirms the alarming state that the UK's wildlife is in. The report reveals that 60% of the species studied have declined over recent decades. More than one in ten of all the species assessed are under threat of disappearing from our shores altogether; and this trend is worryingly mirrored across the south east of England.

**Give Nature a Home Slide:** This highlights even further the need for *everyone* to be involved in the conservation of our very special and unique landscape and the wildlife that live there. So for our part, we're encouraging people to give nature a home...

**Bird box Slide:** whether you have just a window box or small garden, a local park, farm, or a whole estate –

**Mini-beast Slide:** – wherever you are, whatever you do, you can do something for nature!

**Ellie slide:** We want to connect up our landscape and connect our communities to it... for now and for future generations!

**Thank you! and questions?**