

Yorkshire Dales Millennium Trust Hay Time Project

Results Based Agri-environment Payment Scheme (RBAPS)

It's been a busy few months!

Time has flown since our first newsletter was produced in February. We are delighted with the level of interest in the project and the feedback we have had.

Work has continued apace with a focus on meeting up with the farmers at events aimed at providing advice and support for the options they are undertaking. These have been well received and it has been a great opportunity to meet everyone as well as enabling those participating to get to know each other. More on this in the newsletter.

We launched our website where these newsletters will be published together with other background details:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/results-based-agri-environment-payment-scheme-rbaps-pilot-study-in-england>

A visit by George Eustice to Wensleydale and a trip to Brussels complete a memorable couple of months. Full report on page 2.

We are now looking forward to our first season of assessments with anticipation and will be reporting back on the results early next year.

The Project Team

<https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/natural-england>
<http://www.yorkshiredales.org.uk/>

In the next issue: The first years assessments will be completed for all the options.....

Live Agreements

34 agreements in the two pilot areas covering 230ha.



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Coming Up.....

Wensleydale, Grassland Farmer Event:

Hay meadow walk and species ID refresher

Date TBC at Lane Farm, Muker by kind permission of Mr Raw. Please contact Jane Le Cocq on 01756 751608 or Jane.LeCocq@yorkshiredales.org.uk if you are interested



YORKSHIRE DALES
National Park Authority



To Brussels.....

Farming for biodiversity: Results-based payments for biodiversity achievements in agriculture - 30 March 2017, Bruxelles was the title of the conference being run by the Directorate General of Environment at the EU to hear of our experiences together with the two other funded projects.

It was with much excitement and some trepidation that Annabelle, Helen, Vicky and John Sanderson, one of our arable agreement holders, boarded the Eurostar to head to Brussels to present at the conference; a new experience for all. Despite our visit coinciding with the triggering of Article 50 we were warmly welcomed at what was a very informative and interesting event.

The day brought together delegates from 27 member states and a representative from Japan to hear of the projects experiences in designing the pilots, developing the results and implementing them on the ground. Hearing from the farmers themselves was central to this and John gave an eloquent and passionate talk about his reasons for applying for the pilot and his belief in the approach. This alongside the Irish and Romanian farmers presentations brought to life the reasons why these pilots are running and the positives and the challenges this approach faces. It was recognised that RBAPS is not a silver bullet to delivering agri-environment schemes in the future, but must be considered alongside other approaches as a way forward.

The overall feeling was very positive with a high level of interest. An end of project conference is also proposed. The conference presentations are available on the RBAPS website <http://ec.europa.eu/environment/nature/rbaps> where you can download the documents and watch a recording of the day.

Closer to home.....

A Ministerial visit to Wensleydale

On a windy afternoon on the 16th March, the Northern Upland Chain Local Nature Partnership and RBAPS farmers from the Wensleydale pilot area played host to the Farming Minister, George Eustice.

The Minister had been invited to find out more about the results based approach and to see it in action at William and Kevin Utleys farm in Coverdale. He was able to see first hand how it works in practice by undertaking an assessment of the allotment that is under agreement for breeding waders. The allotment was full of lapwing, redshank, snipe and a flock of golden plover at the time, so provided a great display for the Minister. The walk and talk enabled opportunity for debate about the results based approach. Farmers were able to provide feedback on how they thought it would work at a regional and national level and were able to put forward suggestions for the future of farming post Brexit. Mr Eustice posed some thought provoking questions about the mechanisms of the scheme and appeared keen to learn more.

Word is getting out to the farming community and the public about the project.....

As a result of a number of press releases, the project has been featured in the Farmers Guardian and Farmers Weekly, with a double page spread on both elements of the pilot, along with a number of websites including Stackyard. There have been articles in a number of regional newspapers including the Yorkshire Post. It has also been a focus for the BBC Radio York farming program with one of the Wensleydale farmers, Paul Hunter explaining why he is taking part in the project.



Arable Update



We had an excellent event at the end of February at Shotford Hall, kindly hosted by Tim Lewis and attended by all the farmers in the pilot.

After initial presentations by the project team covering the RBAPS approach and the two options we handed over to our two guest speakers for the day: Marek Nowakowski from the Wildlife Farming Company and Peter Thompson from the Game and Wildlife Conservation Trust.

Marek started the day by explaining the basics of why we are creating these habitats, the importance of quality and then focused on the pollen and nectar option. Prior to the start of the day we had asked all the farmers for the key points they wanted to be addressed, with weed control being the main concern for this option. Marek's informative presentation covered this along with a range of other topics from heterogeneity and succession to how to provide food for pollinators throughout the season.

Peter then picked up the winter bird food option running through the different crops that can be included in a mix, their characteristics and preferences by different bird species. Deliberately not giving a mix to use for the pilot, but providing information to enable an informed decision to be made together with some top establishment tips.

Heading out to look at some of Tim's plots in the afternoon enabled us all to cover some of the points raised during the morning.

The day in February was followed by an afternoon farm walk in June hosted by one of the pilot's farmers, Nick Anema at his farm near Dereham, Norfolk. Nick bravely let us scrutinise his winter bird food and pollen and nectar plots and they provided some useful discussion points as well as allowing us to identify and show the various species that had been sown. The assessment methodology was introduced by David, David and Clare, demonstrating their resourcefulness having made their own quadrats, each one being unique and reflecting their makers personality!

The delicious curry and barbeque afterwards enabled everyone to talk about how they were getting on in a relaxed environment and the levels of enthusiasm and commitment to the pilot was evident. It is a privilege to be working with and getting to know those involved.



With all the pollen and nectar plots sown and establishing well we have decided to bring forward the start date of the assessment window to mid-June to take into account the early season we have had. Luckily the rain arrived just in time for the winter bird food plots so these have now been sown and are being closely monitored to see how they are germinating.

In the next issue we will be able to report back on how the first year's assessments have gone.

Contact: Vicky Robinson at vicky.robinson@naturalengland.org.uk

Grassland Update

With lambing out of the way for another year, farmers have been turning their attention to other jobs including the RBAPs breeding wader grassland and hay meadows. Self assessment for the breeding wader grassland falls in May and June with a focus on the structure of the habitat and how wet the habitat is. The problem we have had this year is that spring has been so dry – possibly one of the driest for many years. This has presented us with a few headaches trying to work out a score which is partially based on the degree of wetness. But, this is what a pilot project is all about – testing the process to see if it is robust enough.

Farmers that have undertaken their self assessment also receive a visit from the project advisers who carry out their own assessment, with scores compared and management discussed. Given the issue with the wetness, the scores still tallied between the adviser and the farmer, which indicates that the system of assessment is working. A number of farmers have undertaken work, or are intending to, in order to improve the habitat and their score. This has included rush control and scrape creation.

The most challenging thing so far is being able to count all the birds – for some farmers this has been really difficult due to the high numbers in the field and from the surrounding areas. It's a nice problem to have!



Redshank



Lapwing



Curlew



Snipe

Hay meadows have now been shut up to allow the plants to grow and it is expected that they will be ready to survey towards the end of June and in to July. In anticipation of this, the project team have organised a meadow walk and flower species ID event at one of the best meadows in the National Park. This will hopefully prepare the farmers for their own self assessments.



Buttercups in full bloom in Coverdale

The project team have identified 'control' sites to enable comparison of the habitats and their management between a prescriptive approach and a results based non prescriptive approach. The control sites have been matched against certain features of the pilot sites, including altitude, location and orientation. The project team will be undertaking the same assessments on these sites as the RBAPs sites and comparing scores and management. This will test whether the prescriptive approach yields more or less results over the non prescriptive and contribute to the ongoing discussion on future scheme design.

Contact: Helen Keep at Helen.Keep@yorkshiredales.org.uk

The Team

The Arable Team



Vicky Robinson (Project Manager, Natural England) has an arable farming background and 16 years of experience working on agri-environment schemes within Natural England and its predecessors.



David Ward (Project Adviser, Natural England) has worked on agri-environment schemes for Natural England and its predecessors for 15 years. Previous to that he worked as an agronomist for ADAS for 15 years.



Clare Bains (Project Adviser, Natural England) has worked for Natural England and its predecessors for 18 years, in various advisory capacities, especially agri-environment schemes. Working across Norfolk and Suffolk with a range of arable, mixed and livestock farms.



David Whiting (Project Adviser, Natural England) has 17 years of experience working on agri-environment schemes within Natural England and its predecessors. Areas of expertise include agronomy and land management.

The Grassland Team



Annabelle LePage (Project Manager, Natural England) has spent more time than she cares to remember working on the design and roll-out of new agri-environment schemes. Prior to that she's worked in environmental consultancy and visited hundreds of farms collecting agronomic data.



Helen Keep (Senior Project Adviser, YDNPA). Sister to a dairy farmer and originally from Bristol, this offcumbden has made the Yorkshire Dales home for nearly 21 years working on the delivery of agri-environment schemes and providing support to hill farmers during this time.



Adrian Shepherd (Contract Manager, YDNPA), brought up on the family potato, sheep & beef farm in the mosses of North Lancashire. Adrian has worked in the agri-environment sector for almost 30 years including time at FWAG, the Peak Park Joint Planning Board and now in his current role.



Jane Le Cocq (Project Adviser, YDNPA). has a livestock farming background and co-manages the family farm in her spare time! Born and bred in North Yorkshire, Jane has worked for the YDNPA for nearly 12 years on agri-environment scheme delivery and support to hill farmers, prior to that she was a veterinary nurse.