

# Woodland Creation case study

## Heathpatch Farm

Expanding woodland cover to create a species-rich habitat, reduce farm pollution and benefit the farm business through active woodland management



2020 planting builds on previous planting to complement landscape.

Photography © Nick Taylor

### Key facts

- **Site:** Heathpatch, Ipswich, Suffolk
- **Size:** 260 hectares of woodland, expanded by 8.5 hectares in this latest project, with a further 3 hectares planned for 2024
- **Type and species mix:** Predominantly native broadleaf trees and shrubs, a mix of 25 species selected to increase resilience with future climate in mind, including: oak, wild cherry, small-leaved lime, hornbeam, hazel, alder, silver birch and Scots pine, plus a mix of non-native conifer (Corsican pine and western red cedar)
- **Date planted:** Winter 2022/23
- **Grant:** England Woodland Creation Offer (EWCO)
- **Key objective:** To connect with existing woodland on site, creating a diverse habitat and wildlife corridors



Ride maintenance within 2021 planting connecting two blocks of 1999 planting together with a new pond.

Photography © Nick Taylor

**Heathpatch is a 1,700 hectare farm ten miles west of Ipswich. The farm includes 260 hectares of woodland, with a range of ages and species. Owned by the Buckle family, the farm is a traditional mix, with a variety of crops, sheep and cattle, plus some equestrian land.**

Over the years, the farm has diversified and Heathpatch currently owns and runs a number of businesses: these include manufacturing electro mechanical and electronic enclosures, renewable energy through anaerobic digestion, machinery sales including a wide range of forestry industry equipment, a brewery and a hospitality business consisting of a hotel, two pubs, and Nedging Hall Estate – a 10-bedroom country house and garden surrounded by the farm which is available for short lets.

The farm itself has 145 hectares of woodland within 70 blocks, ranging from 0.5 to 11 hectares – the majority of these have been planted by the current owners. Two additional blocks of ancient woodland sit five miles away, Bonny Wood to the north and Raydon Wood to the south. Bonny Wood is a 15 hectare site which is part of a larger woodland, while Raydon Wood spans 99 hectares and has a disused railway line running through it – the wood was used by the US Airforce as an ammunition depot during the second world war to service the air defence and bombing campaign launched from East Anglia. At present, two full-time foresters work at Raydon Wood to convert a Plantations on Ancient Woodland Site (PAWS) to a working mixed woodland.

The Buckle family is committed to woodland creation and management. They have added a remarkable 25 hectares of new woodland between 2020 and 2023 – equating to a total of 45,000 young trees. This was with the support of Countryside Stewardship until 2021 and since then under the new England Woodland Creation Offer (EWCO). The plan is to continue to expand woodland cover where it is most appropriate and to bring more of the existing woodland inventory into management.



Volunteer checking young trees.

Photography © Nick Taylor



Creating habitat with the arisings from pond clearance.

Photography © Nick Taylor

## Creating a landscape that benefits wildlife

Prior to the 1970's much of the tree and hedge cover in the area had been removed. Since the Buckles arrived in 1973, they have worked consistently to plant and restore the wooded landscape. Biodiversity and nature recovery have been their key drivers and several locations on the farm offer an impressive 360-degree view of woodland and hedges, all of which have been planted by the family.

The planting over the years has always been majority native broadleaf trees together with a few conifers, in a largely agricultural landscape, and often with generous rides incorporated into the design to help increase suitable and diverse habitats for birds, mammals, and invertebrates. Planting alongside existing blocks of woodland or hedgerow has helped to connect habitats and provide wildlife corridors, supporting nature recovery and helping species to adapt to the changing climate. To complement the benefits of woodland creation and accelerate nature recovery, Heathpatch has created feeding plots for turtle doves and installed swift boxes on the farm; the boxes are complete with systems that play the calls swifts use when in their nest to help non-breeding swifts identify potential nest sites.

The aquatic habitat and water quality of the River Brett which runs through the farm has been improved. Working closely with neighbouring landowners, this has been achieved with funding and operational support from the Environment Agency, Dedham Vale Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB), Stour Valley Project and Heathpatch.

To date, over 60 features have been placed in the river and its tributaries to modify the water flow; these include gravel glides, berms (low level shelves constructed to restore the natural flow of the river), flow deflectors and flood plain connections. To complement these measures, five- to 20-metre-wide stretches of the riverbank have been fenced off from livestock, with more planned in the future. Some riparian strips have been planted with suitable tree species, while other areas have been left to allow vegetation to colonise naturally.

A leading pond ecologist has surveyed the farm ponds periodically since 2006: there are over 50 ponds in existence, plus a number of 'ghost ponds' – ponds that have disappeared over the years having either silted up or been deliberately filled in due to changes in agricultural practices. The surveys have informed a programme of works which involves the removal of shade-casting vegetation where appropriate, dredging and restoration. When dredging, particularly in the ghost ponds, the hope is to find rare vegetation seeds which have survived under layers of leaves and mud. Restoring existing ponds encourages greater biodiversity to return, which typically happens more quickly compared to creating entirely new ponds. That said, seven completely new ponds have been created in the last four years, all within or adjacent to the 25 hectares of newly planted woodland. Significant numbers of invertebrates are already present at the sites, and in one location robins were spotted using a brash pile nearby one of the new ponds for nesting only six weeks after the pile was made.

*"It is a delight to walk around the farm, within the woods and along the river and to see the improvements being built upon year on year... we were showing off the results to a group of interested parties last year and, right on cue, a kingfisher flew across! It is heartening to see the riot of nature responding to the changes made, even within such a short period of time."* James Buckle, Owner, Heathpatch

# Reducing farm pollution and capturing carbon

Most of the new woodland has replaced agricultural land which was previously used for grazing, hay, or crops. This land use change will make the farm's arable management less intensive and will reduce the use and application of herbicides and manufactured fertiliser across the catchment – reducing the farm's overall pollution output.

The new woodland is set to capture carbon and is registered with the Woodland Carbon Code (WCC). Heathpatch holds two contracts under the Woodland Carbon Guarantee (WCaG), providing the option to sell carbon credits to the government every five or 10 years up to 2055/56 for a guaranteed price that is index-linked for the life of the contract. The plan is to sell some of the carbon units, either to the government under WCaG or on the open market, and to use other units to offset the emissions from group activities.

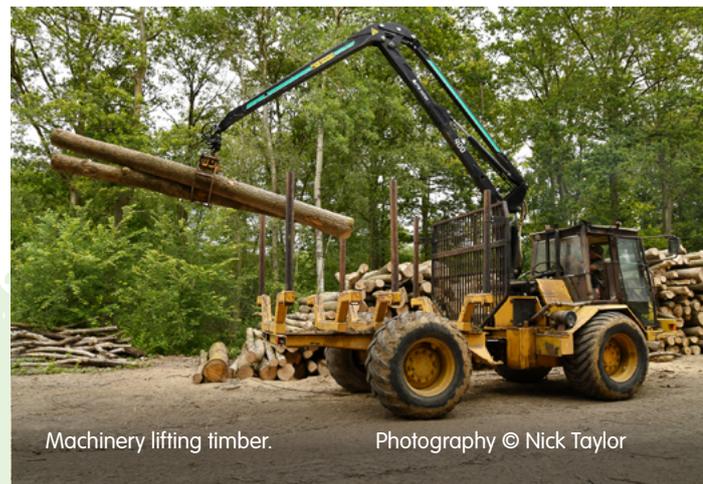
## Top Tips

1. Don't plant woodland if you are not prepared to manage it.
2. Consider natural regeneration if you have the patience.
3. Rides can never be too wide and remember to leave ample space around ponds and other woodland features.
4. Volunteers can be highly effective: we have discovered that many people in our community like to spend time helping in the woods and are keen to get stuck in; volunteer numbers are growing.

## Woodland management for the benefit of the business

The owners are conscious of the impact of agriculture on the environment and take pride in their farm – feeling responsible to create a balanced landscape that can enhance biodiversity and their business, while providing amenity. They have always recognised the importance of woodland in the landscape and understood the opportunities that come with active management – and although secondary to improving wildlife and biodiversity, the woodlands must meet commercial objectives.

A range of edge species (typically shrubs or coppice species) have been planted around most of the woodland blocks forming a graduated edge to the internal species, some of which will be managed for long-term timber production. Traditional silvicultural management (the process of tending, harvesting, and regenerating) will produce firewood, coppice products and subsequently a timber yield. The timber will be milled and used internally or sold to local markets. Any firewood produced has a ready-made market in Heathpatch – destined for homes and hospitality venues nearby. An evolving local market for added-value coppice products is providing more opportunities to make this woodland work for the farm business and for the wider environment.



Machinery lifting timber.

Photography © Nick Taylor



Batching wood product for sale.

Photography © Nick Taylor

**For guidance on woodland creation and information on grants and available support, visit:** [www.gov.uk/forestry/tree-planting-overview](http://www.gov.uk/forestry/tree-planting-overview)

**Find out how other farmers and landowners are benefitting from woodland creation, visit:** [gov.uk/forestry/tree-planting-case-studies](http://gov.uk/forestry/tree-planting-case-studies)