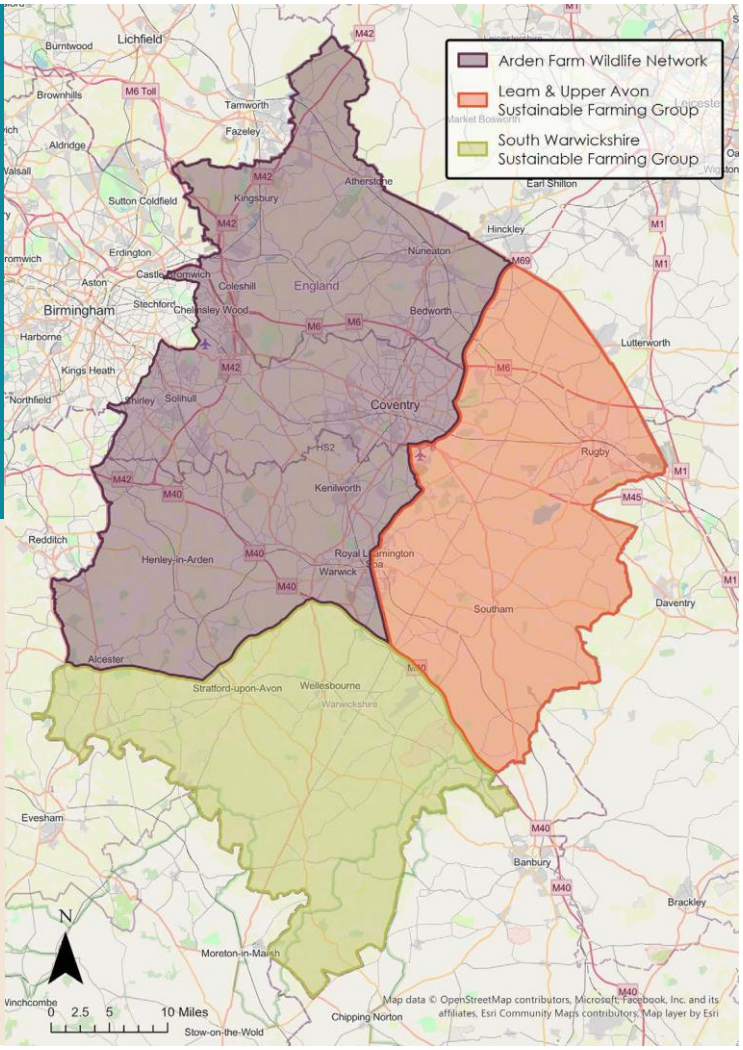
Warwickshire Sustainable Farming Groups

Newsletter Winter 2026

The big message in the last newsletter was agri-environment schemes were opening again. The big news from this newsletter is how disappointing the whole process was but this is why our groups are more important than ever. The future of government funding streams seems unreliable so new and different funding streams for nature restoration and transition to sustainable farming will need to be considered. We are committed to help you identify funding for your environmental projects so do bring us your ideas and get involved if and when we get these projects going.

See you all soon.
Jane, Zoe, Kirsty, Emily, Sally and Izaak



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Free Trees

Ordering for this year's free trees is now closed. The interest in these has been at an all-time high so we've had to make some cuts to some of the orders, you will be emailed with your updated order. We are hoping to get the trees out in December this year so you have longer to get them in the ground, which will be important if we have another year like last year. We will let you know asap when we have collection dates arranged. We will be having 3 locations this year one for Warwick District and Solihull Borough, one for Rugby Borough, and one for Stratford District.

Terms of reference

As our groups have grown, we have identified the need for a Terms of Reference document. We felt we didn't need a formal agreement but needed to define the purpose and structure of Sustainable Farming Groups and the involvement of partners. The document will be shared with you by your facilitator and copy can be found here.

Funding

Sally and Ian have been busy writing a proposal for DEFRA's **Farm Collaboration**



Fund. If we are successful, then this could bring a lot of money to help with the facilitation of our groups and the ability to make a big step forward with all our ideas from landscape scale environmental projects to investigating local food markets. DEFRA say we will find out if we are successful in November and if we are then the agreements start in December, so it is a very quick turnaround. There will be another round in April next year so if we are unsuccessful, we will try again then.

Mink eradication project: Protecting our native wildlife

This project has recently expanded to Warwickshire following success in Norfolk and Suffolk, and we are working with the project to identify farmers with rivers or streams through their land.

The Waterlife Recovery Trust (WRT) aims to protect the native wildlife of Great Britain by removing just one highly damaging invasive species: the American Mink, *Neogale vison*. Over 95% of Britain's water voles have been lost in recent decades, with mink shown as the single most significant cause of this decline. Mink hunt a wide variety of prey, taking almost anything within reach. From fish to rabbits, frogs to partridge; even hole-nesting birds like sand martins and kingfishers are not safe. Having successfully eradicated mink from Norfolk and Suffolk, the project is expanding into Central England, including Warwickshire, thanks to funding provided through Natural England's Species Recovery Programme.

WRT are actively seeking farmers in Warwickshire to provide locations for the 'smart' traps and volunteers to help monitor them. In contrast to traditional mink traps, the smart traps do not need daily checking – instead, with the aid of a remote monitoring device, they will send an alert on the trap door closing. All monitoring activities follow strict guidelines to ensure the mink population are humanely eradicated. WRT are particularly keen to hear from farmers with river frontage, including the rivers Avon, Leam, Arrow, Stour, Alne, Sowe, Anker or Swift.

How to get involved: WRT invite anyone who would like to contribute to this vital conservation effort to get in touch. If you are a landowner or would like to volunteer to help monitor the traps, please contact Jade Parker-Burton at jade.parkerburton@waterliferecoverytrust.org.uk / 07894 560625.

Farm Resilience Programme launches in Warwickshire

The Royal Countryside Fund's Farm Resilience Programme is being delivered by Warwickshire Rural Hub in 2026/27. It offers farmers practical, independent support to manage change and plan ahead. Warwickshire farmers can now register their interest in the forthcoming programme.

Programme details – four free workshops include a meal and networking covering agricultural change, environmental and business opportunities, planning for change and succession.

Learn more and register your interest. Visit the Warwickshire Rural Hub website and email Jane at info@ruralhub.org.uk with your postcode. Places are limited, so act fast!

Joint Events (all group members welcome):

■ **CSF East Midlands**
14th October, 20th November, 18th December
Hosted by the Welbeck Estate the morning will include talks including Defra grants, Severn Trent STEPS and Forestry commission. The afternoon session will be a tractor and trailer tour of the Welbeck Estate encompassing field scale early establishment cover crop trials, maize field management and manure incorporation trials.

Update from Arden Farm Wildlife Network

Disease Resistant Elm
Butterfly conservation volunteer, Jon Holmes, is currently growing disease resistant Elm for our group. These will be grown on for another growing season and distributed for autumn planting 2027, to the farmers who have expressed an interest. Elm is the main breeding plant for White Letter Hairstreak.


VAUGHN MATTHEWS


Hedgerow management talk

KIRSTY BUCHTON


Farm walk at Bragborough Hall

SALLY EADON

Brown Hairstreak Butterfly
Brown Hairstreak lay eggs on 2 or 3 year old Blackthorn suckers. This project is helping to identify lengths of blackthorn on farms close to existing egg finds. Hopefully this winter Butterfly Conservation volunteers will be visiting these hedges to see if there are any eggs present. If you farm in the West of the Arden area, and haven't contacted Zoe with you hedge location then please do give her a call or send a map with the locations on.

River restoration and Natural Flood Management (NFM)
We have been working on three watery projects, linking with partners who are active in the area and have access to pots of funding. The funding is currently small, but we are hoping to access more in the future. The areas we are working in are near Temple Balsall on tributaries feeding into the River Blythe. In the River Arrow and Alne catchments and the brook running from Shawbury into the River Blythe. If you own land or farm in these areas and are interested in finding out more then please let Zoe know. We are also trying to work with more farmers and landowners in these areas so if you know of anyone who may be interested, please do put them in touch.

Hedges
Izaak has been working on completing some of the hedge plans for the Central AFWN. The aim of these are to help prioritise hedge restoration and make it easy for you to feed this into a CS capital grant application or free tree scheme order. We are trying to access further funding to roll these plans out to more members.

Update from Leam and Upper Avon Sustainable Farming Group

As Imogen Rutter has now left Severn Rivers Trust and the facilitation of the Leam group, we are delighted to introduce Emily Padfield as your new facilitator. Emily and her husband farm at Hill Farm, Watergall near Ladbroke and she has been an active member of the group from the conception. She's looking forward to building group momentum and members and putting on lots of interesting events so if you have any ideas for event topics, speakers or would like to host please reach out to Emily at emily@emilypadfield.co.uk.

Recent Events:

■ **Farm walk at Bragborough Hall courtesy of Phipps family**
We had a lovely walk around Louis' farm looking at the various agri-environment scheme options he utilises including flower rich margins, herbal leys and winter bird seed plots. We also discussed the grazing management of his suckler cattle herd, the various farm diversifications they have undertaken including rentable office and conference spaces and a dog walking field, and we discussed some drainage problems occurring in one field. We finished the evening with some delicious food provided by the Warwickshire Rural Hub. Thanks again to Louis and family for a delightful evening.

Upcoming Events: See also joint events.

October Farm Walk – Pond Creation, Restoration and Management
Join us on **Wednesday 28th October, 2pm–4.30pm**, at Stoneton Moat Farm, Priors Hardwick (CV47 7SR), by kind permission of the Robinson family. With growing interest in farm pond creation and restoration, this practical farm walk will explore Lily Robinson's work to restore the farm's historic moat, alongside expert advice from Tim Burridge of Severn Rivers Trust on pond management and Aquatic Solutions UK on controlling weeds and algae. There will also be a short presentation and chance to explore an exciting new technology that filters out phosphates that that can drive algal blooms and prevent the harmful pollutant getting into waterways. The afternoon will conclude with discussion and light refreshments. Free to attend – book your place by emailing info@ruralhub.org.uk. Please access the farm via Priors Hardwick due to HS2 works.

Update from South Warwickshire Sustainable Farming Group

Recent Events:

■ **Managing Margins for Maximum Effect**
Due to the early harvest we decided to postpone this event and will revisit it next year.

■ **Managing Hedgerows for Added Farm Value**
We enjoyed a very informative evening at Tom Newbury's farm where Izaak Taylor, Warwickshire Wildlife Trust Agricultural Advice Assistant, gave us lots of very useful tips and pointers for effective hedgerow management to get the best from them for our farms and wildlife. We learnt that a study of over 5,000ha in France showed that a 1-3% increase in hedges, resulted in up to a 50% decrease in the need for insecticides. If managed well, hedges can last for many decades, so establishing a



system of rotational laying, coppicing and careful, measured cutting practices will keep them in prime condition. We rounded off the evening with pork pie and a beer.

Upcoming events: See also joint events.

SWAN and farming
Date: 10th November
Time: 5.30pm-7.30pm
Venue: University of Warwick Innovation Campus, Wellesbourne, CV35 9EF
A talk by Rosemary Collier on the South Warwickshire Action Network *for Wildlife* (SWAN) about their work, particularly their Curlew Project, other farmland wildlife and linking with farmers.

Remember the Warwickshire Rural Hub also host lots of different events so have a look on their website.

Help, advice and monitoring

■ **Catchment Sensitive Farming**
Chris Morgan is the new Catchment Sensitive Farming Officer for the Warwickshire Avon (this includes any tributary that flows into the Avon, even if not in the county of Warwickshire). He has asked for farmers and land agents to get in touch with him here. Please download the form and send back to csf.severn@naturalengland.org.uk. Mic Orchard is still working in the Tame, Anker, Mease Catchment and can be contacted through the same form above.

■ **Farm and Wildlife Advice Service**
Warwickshire Wildlife Trust's Farm and Wildlife Advice Service offers free first advisory visits to all members of the sustainable farming groups both new and old. We can help with habitat management, wildlife and habitat surveys and accessing funding. Please email land.advice@wkwt.org.uk or call Sally on 07495 457132 to book your visit.

Local and national initiatives and funding in the area

We now only list the most recent funding opportunities, but lots more can be found on a dedicated page on the Rural Hub Website Rural Hub Website.

■ **Government Funding**
We will keep you up to date with any future rounds of SFI and Capital Grants that are announced. You can keep up to date with current government schemes here.

You can apply any time of year for the Animal Health and Welfare Review CS Higher Tier species rich grassland, woodland schemes and scheduled monument schemes are still open for Expression of Interest

■ **Severn Rivers Trust (SRT)**
SRT have secured a commitment from Carlsberg Britvic for a funded 10-year programme to support nature-based projects across the Warwickshire Avon catchment that improve water resilience, restore river and wetland habitats, and help tackle the impacts of flooding and drought. Working with local farmers and land managers is central to the programme, and they are keen to hear from anyone who has opportunities on their land that could help slow, store or improve the movement of water through the landscape. Potential projects could include wetland and pond creation, floodplain reconnection, woodland planting, natural flood management measures or river restoration works.

If you have a project idea, SRT can work with you to assess its potential, develop designs and oversee delivery. They will manage the technical aspects of scheme development and implementation, ensuring projects deliver benefits for both your land and the wider catchment. In addition to capital funding for approved projects, there may also be opportunities for long-term maintenance payments of up to ten years, helping to support the ongoing management needed to keep these measures effective and delivering benefits for people, wildlife and water resources into the future.

You can read the project press release here. If you are interested in finding out more or have a project idea, get in touch with SRT's Programme Manager George Clark via george.clark@severnriverstrust.com

■ **Environmental Farmers Group (EFG)**
EFG is a cooperative group of farmers delivering positive environmental change at a landscape-scale, funded through natural capital trading (private finance). They are supported by some of the UK's leading natural capital specialists, act as a trusted navigator for farmers and landowners and ensure fair financial reward for Members. EFG's mission is to harness scale and member cooperation to secure the best environmental results and financial returns for a wide range of natural capital goods and services. EFG's desired outcomes are:
- Biodiversity and species recovery
- Clean water
- Net Zero farming by 2040

The Central England group was set up in 2024 by Johnny Wake of Courteenhall and now has Zoe Bell as its local lead. If you are interested in finding out more about EFG and how they can help with BNG or soil carbon projects contact Zoe Bell 07980 771872 zbell@gwct.org.uk

USEFUL RESOURCES

Don't forget we have all the links from our previous newsletters on the Rural Hub website.

If you have been affected by the recent SFI fiasco, please know that you are not alone and there is support out there if you are struggling or feeling overwhelmed. Please reach out to one of the following organisations.

RABI – 0800 188 4444
Farming Community Network
03000 111 999
Addington Fund
01926 620135

Local Wildlife Sites

Do you own or manage a Local Wildlife Site on your farm? The Wildlife Trusts have just launched a new website to help raise the profile of Local Wildlife Sites, help people understand the important role they play in supporting wildlife and how you can manage them. Check out the information and resources available.


Harvest mouse