

Farming and Wildlife.

The Wilder Landscape Manager of the Suffolk Wildlife Trust, Sam Hanks, gave a talk to our local group about the wider aspects of land management and biodiversity in our county, with a particular reference to farming. The Trust is part of a wider network of organisations encouraging farmers to participate in regenerative agriculture. The aims are to combat climate change by focusing on nourishing the soil, increasing crop diversity, improving water quality, capturing carbon, and regenerating lost woodlands and hedgerows. There is no single organised approach yet, and pesticides and herbicides are still in use, but there is enthusiasm across the region, with organisations such as the Nature Friendly Farming Network taking part.

The Trust sees its role as enabling people to bring about change, and thus it gives free advice to farmers, community projects and individuals. There are farm clusters – locally the Blyth Valley, where farmers can meet together, share ideas, and receive support. There are Stewardship projects, one of which is to alleviate flooding with attenuation ponds, which flood in the winter, reducing the run off downstream. Encouragement to add diversity to the land is exemplified at Nonsuch organic farm, where Sam is the manager. Here, the fertilised hayfield will return to its old meadow status. Hedgerows are being replanted: one stretch is to be four metres wide, and has been hand-strewn with local hedgerow seeds in an experiment to see how well this method will work. Elsewhere on the farm, ponds have been excavated to add to biodiversity, and to supply drinking water for stock animals. A range of fruit and nut trees are being planted. It's very much a work in progress.

There were some inspirational ideas, and we were heartened to remember that we can all help in the process, both in our own plots and gardens, and by supporting local producers.

Our next meeting is at the Arts Centre, Southwold, IP18 6JP, on Thursday, 13th April at 7.30pm. There will be a brief AGM, followed by a film, "Secret Rivers – the Waveney", featuring Paul Heiney. No admission fee but a small charge for drinks.