

Report to RAW on Williamwood Farm visit (near Brydekirk, Dumfries and Galloway)

Williamwood Farm is part of the Nature Friendly Farming Network and hosts events and training. It is a 300 acre farm with cattle and sheep, with diversification of holiday cottages. It receives environmental and agricultural grants to carry out its improvements. The farm is of interest to RAW as it has a vibrant tributary called Butcherbeck flowing into the Annan, which is a biodiverse riparian woodland. Butcherbeck riparian woodland is visible on the OS map.

It has several large ponds on an area which was not good for grazing as sheep tended to get liver fluke, being too wet for much of the year. They have been stocked with rainbow trout which otters have eaten. Native woodlands and native hedges have been planted over ten years. RSPB have carried out surveys and there has been increase in species, including hedge sparrows, for which nesting boxes have been put up. They have squirrel traps supplied around 10 years ago by the Red Squirrel Network. They have both reds and greys but the feeders they have, although 'red friendly', don't seem to be used. They have a captive Barn owl pair the offspring of which can be released locally under licence. During the visit, 3 deer were seen and a rabbit.

They have deliberately enhanced access and information available throughout the farm, including a badger hide and signs at several points. Hay and haylage is made, when possible, top cutting wildflower meadows. Sowing and cultivating wildflower has had mixed results but leave-alone fields have wildflower coming back on their own.

They still "manage" "predators" and use glyphosate on small areas. There are several non-native species of trees like sycamore and non-native plants like Snowberry. There are many challenges to creating biodiverse farms with zero emissions, one is that modern stock breeds are bred to eat non-native fodder and concentrate. The farm is very conscious that it is a work in progress especially in terms of CO2 emissions. Other farmers visiting on the day were a 30-acre smallholding at Auldgirth, a farm at Clarencefield and a 60 acre farm in Ayrshire.

We gave out the new RAW leaflet and were invited to do some workshops on River restoration in the Spring and Summer of 2022. NFFN has some farmers in the Annan Catchment and Williamwood can pass on our information to them