



Welcome to your Farm Cluster Newsletter

Here's what we've been up to in the last month - if you have any questions about the stories in this newsletter or suggestions for future articles please contact:

[Ross Wingfield](#) or [Christine Meadows](#).

Giant Hogweed

Giant hogweed is a highly invasive plant introduced by the Victorians from the Caucasus Mountains. Its sap contains toxic chemicals which can cause severe burns and blistering to the skin. Each plant can create over 20,000 seeds which can stay viable for up to 15 years. It favours river banks and spreads downstream easily and upstream through flooding - so it's essential to control it.



The story so far: Our surveys found that giant hogweed has become well-established along stretches of the River Rother and Dudwell. Small stands around Etchingham saw a ten-fold increase in general between 2016 and 2018. It's the landowner's legal responsibility to prevent giant hogweed spreading to neighbouring land. We've secured funding from the Environment Agency to help Farm Cluster members work together to control it. In spring last year we facilitated a contract with Arborweald to treat plants on several holdings in the Etchingham area.

What next? We'll continue to help landowners work together on their obligation to control this dangerous plant, spraying young plants in April and May to prevent regrowth and investigating alternatives to spraying. We've also produced a report for the Farm Cluster to help with its management - it's on the [High Weald website](#). Have a look to find out where we found giant hogweed and about various control methods.

If you suspect you have giant hogweed on your land: Get in touch with Ross for advice. See the enclosed identification sheet from the Non-Native Species Secretariat website.

Member news

Welcome to our five latest members: Will Davenport of Limney Farm, Susanna Fitzgerald of Wadhurst Castle, Michael Lawson of Stream Farm, Mr Sellick of Pashley Manor Gardens and Kevan Gibbons, ranger at Bateman's.

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Other activity updates

Deer management: Since November we've set up six deer management groups and we'll keep you updated on progress. For deer management guidance, see the [High Weald website](#), or contact Christine or Ross.

Meadow surveys: Following last year's surveys with Natural England's Field Unit, 13 Farm Cluster members have received reports and we held a feedback event last month. Here are the highlights:

- It took some 6,000 years to create the wildflower-rich grassland for which the UK is globally famous, yet in less than a century we've lost 97%.
- Of the meadows surveyed, nearly half were rich in wildflower and grass varieties. Nearly all the rest had potential, with a good number of valuable wildflowers.
- Nationally scarce species were found, including two rare spiders and two furrow bee species.
- It's great news that the High Weald is a hidden gem for this rare and ancient grassland.
- There are opportunities for the Cluster to work together to enhance meadows.
- We look forward to seeing what treasures are in your fields in 2019...

Farm profitability and trees on your land event: Pioneering agroforestry farmer Stephen Briggs spoke to the Cluster last month. He highlighted how agroforestry can lead to greater overall productivity and increases in net farm income, but this doesn't have to mean planting lines of fruit trees through crops. Hedgerows, for example, can be managed for logwood, fruit and animal fodder. See his presentation on the [High Weald website](#).

Sussex Lund grant applications due by 8 April: There are just over 3 weeks left to apply for a Sussex Lund grant - still time to get advice from Ross or Christine. Apply for up to £10,000 for a practical project that improves the High Weald landscape. Your costs need to be supported by quotes: www.highweald.org/look-after/sussex-lund

Countryside Stewardship is open for applications: Land managers can now request 2019 CS scheme application packs. Government is advising that those who get into CS agreements now will be well-placed to benefit from future environmental land management schemes once we leave the EU. Improvements have been made this year so it's easier to apply. **Check the deadlines for application pack requests** at www.gov.uk or call the Rural Payments Agency on 03000 200 301.

Dates for your diary

- **16 March, 9.30am - 4pm: Organic Top Fruit Masterclass** by the Soil Association with Matthew Wilson at Oakwood Farm, Robertsbridge, tickets on [Eventbrite](#).
- **24 April, 2 - 4.30pm: Giant Hogweed & Japanese Knotweed Control** at Bistro@the station, Etchingam, plus visit to Lundsford Farm to see a Rootwave weed-zapper in action (weather permitting). Book for this free Farm Cluster event on [Eventbrite](#), or call Sam on 01424 723011.
- **26 - 27 June: Groundswell Agriculture No-Till Show & Conference** at Lannock Manor Farm, Hertfordshire. See [website](#) for tickets.

About

The Upper Rother and Dudwell Farm Cluster helps farmers, foresters and other land managers work together to improve farm profitability and benefit soil, water, wildlife and historic features not just on their individual farms, but across the area. It has 54 members covering over 3,500ha. The Cluster is helped by the High Weald AONB Partnership with financial support from Natural England's Countryside Stewardship Facilitation Fund, the Environment Agency (Giant Hogweed control), and the Woodland Trust (deer management). Visit the Upper Rother & Dudwell Farm Cluster page at www.highweald.org