

Molescroft Grange Farm Wild Things visit June 2024

Tamara Hall gave us a fascinating tour around part of her farm today, sharing personal stories along with her experimental and environmental work, and describing some of the dilemmas and difficulties of being a modern farmer.



Tamara inherited the farm from her father and today runs it along with her sister and farm manager, James, although her original degree was in engineering followed by a stint at art college before running her own tailoring business. She has certainly applied her ingenuity and creativity to this unexpected career change. As the farmland is Grade 3, beset with problems of flooding and fertility, she has had to diversify. Now the farm shares its space with several office blocks, two nurseries and four dog-walking fields. This has freed up Tamara to concentrate on environmentally-friendly farming techniques and trials, although the challenges and precariousness of farming are never far away. Recent floods set her schedule back by six weeks and destroyed the entire oilseed rape crop and half her wheat. “Farmers would rather die than go bust” she told us.

All of her land is used for regenerative farming, with 20% managed predominantly for wildlife and the environment. She showed us fields where ‘cover crops’ such as clover were grown to regenerate the soil naturally, and in strips of one large field trial crops are grown to test their ability to restore the soil. Over the years these trials have included human sewage sludge, various mustards, and plants like phacelia, a green manure plant often included in wildflower mixes which produces gorgeous bee-friendly flowers. The farming industry is desperate to find the best crops to restore fertility, especially nitrogen and potash. The latter is a finite resource worldwide, and Tamara reported that recent literature has suggested that whole civilisations have collapsed through loss of soil fertility.



Above: the group on the trials' field, and in a conservation area.

Tamara no longer uses insecticides or anti-fungal sprays but does have to use some glyphosate early in the crop year, to keep weeds down, which she described as 'the lesser of two evils'. Wetter weather has made fungi more of a problem, hence her desire to try whatever she can to make the soil healthier naturally. She uses 'direct drilling' methods to sow crops into the residue of the previous crop to reduce disruption of the soil's ecosystem.

One of her crops is fava bean, which, we were intrigued to hear, is largely used for animal feed or exported to Egypt for falafel. It's a perfect substitute for chickpeas and could easily be eaten here in the UK. Let's hope food fads change. One of her main crops is oats, which she supplies to Quaker, who have very high food and environmental standards.

Tamara is very proud of her biomass boiler. She showed us how it uses local renewable wood to heat water for the farm and nursery. There are solar panels too, and a few grazing sheep and cattle, but mixed farming on a large scale has proved difficult for her on such marginal land. We loved her pet pygmy goats.



Tamara also supports community enterprises on her land, including Frith Farm, an organic community farm, and allotments. On the edge of the farm, by the River Hull, she has worked with Yorkshire Wildlife Trust to create scrapes for wintering birds, and her father planted Storkhill Wood, by the Barmston Drain in 2001, which is open

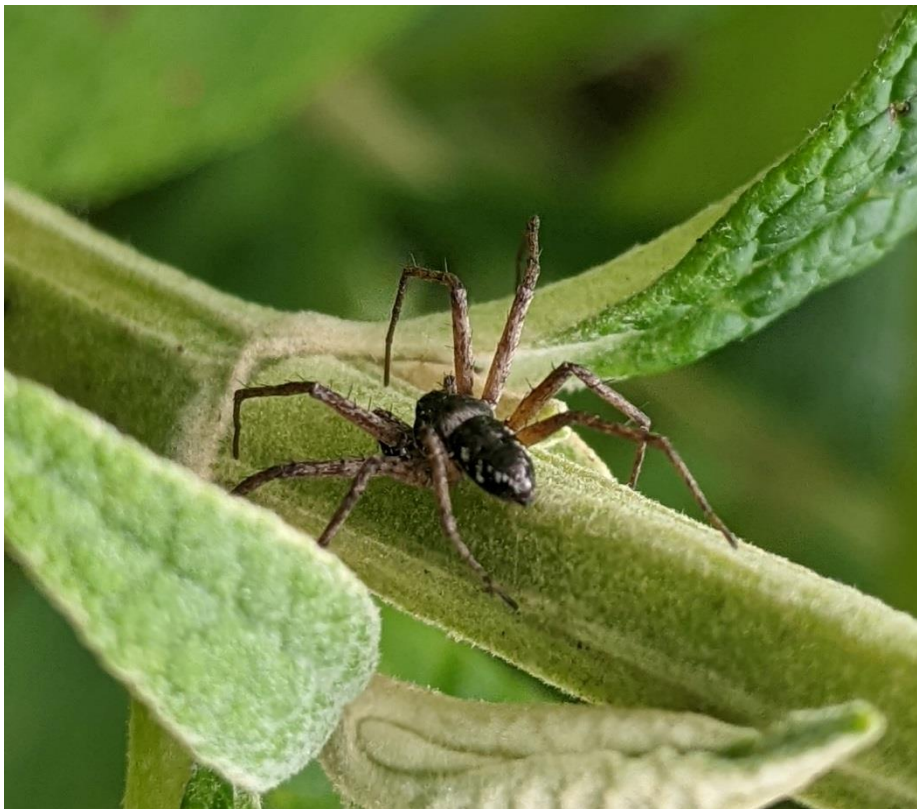
access from the footpath by the drain.

As our photo gallery shows, we also managed to capture a few wildlife sightings, the most thrilling for me being on a single Orange-Ball Buddleia bush next to the nursery.

Twenty-one of us turned out today. As Tamara said, "This is an interesting time to be in farming". We wish her the very best. HK. Photos from Mervin, Karyn, Helen and Nancy.



Above: a cultivated Orange-Ball Buddleia supported a host of invertebrates including a Honeybee, a colony of Figwort Weevils and this Running Crab Spider on the hunt for a meal.





Clockwise from top: Scavenger fly (*Sepsis cynipsea*) on a snail. Also known as an Ensign Fly, it flaps its spotted wings to attract females; 2-spot Ladybird, Light Brown Apple Moth, Marmalade Hoverfly, 'Footballer' Hoverfly, *Helophilus pendulus*, and 'Dagger or Dance flies', *Empis livida*, which impale prey but also love nectaring, here on a Blackberry flower.