

Iford Estate News

J & H Robinson Iford Farms Ltd – est. 1895

www.ifordestate.com

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Farm Report Ben Taylor, Estate Manager



After an exceptionally dry early part of the winter, just before Christmas the heavens opened and, writing this in mid April, it feels a little like it hasn't stopped since! The dry winter meant that all our

intended crops of oilseed rape and wheat got planted in good conditions and look pretty promising. The cattle were able to stay out much longer than usual and some good crops of stubble turnips meant that some have stayed out right the way through.

The stubble turnips are planted after harvest and grow rapidly in the autumn to provide winter food for the cattle. There are many benefits to this: the cattle much prefer to be outside and the growing crop uses nutrients that might otherwise have been washed away. The muck the cattle produce adds to the organic matter of the soil and will hopefully provide dividends in the next crop.

'The Beast from the East' caused a few problems with burst pipes and frozen troughs, and the following rains have seriously delayed the spring sowing with an inevitable effect on final yield. This is one of several reasons for having a balance of crops sown so that hopefully at least one does well.

As we move into spring, the focus turns to feeding and protecting the crops from disease. An agronomist (crop doctor) advises us on what to use and when, and this

means a lot of crystal ball gazing... what diseases are going to be prevalent this year?

On the cattle side, calving has started, and you should start to see them outside soon. Unfortunately our annual TB test showed that we have a 'reactor' – a constant worry and risk we run since this part of the county is a TB hotspot. The animal in question was immediately slaughtered by the authorities and we must now retest the cattle every 60 days until we have two successive clear tests. When you have about 1000 cattle that need gathering, injecting and then gathering again three days later to 'read' the test, this is a huge extra workload. It will take eight days each time and need 3-4 people to assist – a job we could really do without. Having TB also means that we cannot buy or sell any cattle unless they are going straight to the abattoir, so the breeding cattle we had planned to buy have been cancelled and the herd will become a little smaller as a consequence.

STOP PRESS!

Swanborough Lakes Luxury Lodges and Egrets Way Extension

The first phase of this £1.5M project is well underway and will open in the summer. We will be holding an open day for parish residents later in the year.

'Whole Estate Plan'

The Iford Estate 15-year 'Whole Estate Plan' (until 2033) was adopted by the South Downs National Park Authority on March 29th.





A photo from our archives showing Iford School and School Cottages in 1932

My Grandfather's Correspondence John Robinson

My Grandfather was a prodigious letter writer. Telephones were uncommon in the early 1900s and, becoming very deaf, he didn't trust them when they became available, so every communication he made with anyone was done by letter. Unusually for a farmer, he lived away from the farm in Newick and commuted to Iford by train and bicycle.

On days when he wasn't coming, he would send the next day's work instructions by letter. If he wanted something as small as a packet of tap washers he typed a letter and kept a copy. He never went on holiday and paid for my grandmother to have a companion, as he must have sat up most nights typing letters to trades people and to people associated with his various philanthropic charitable activities.

In 1972, when we moved the farm office out of Norton House, I discovered that the letters were being burned.

I managed to save most of them and, for the last five years, archivists from the Sussex Records Office have been processing and cataloguing them. They are now on their way to 'The Keep'* for future agricultural historians to study.

* *The Keep is a world-class centre for archives that opens up access to all the collections of the East Sussex Record Office (ESRO), the Royal Pavilion & Museums Local History Collections and the internationally significant University of Sussex Special Collections.*



Jamie Horner, RSPB Project Officer with the Peak District Bird of Prey Initiative, recounts his experience as a 'Yorkshireman down south'



Jamie Horner holding one of five hen harrier chicks fledged from a nest on land regenerated into heather moorland by a grouse shooting tenant

I've been involved with shooting and conservation since the age of twelve in my home county of Yorkshire. To many people's surprise, both activities work hand-in-hand together perfectly.

One of my many jobs is as Field Officer for the Peak District Bird of Prey Initiative. My role is to help resolve the bird of prey conflict with grouse shooting and quash the illegal persecution of protected birds in and around the Peak District National Park.

Earlier this year I was asked by a friend if I'd like to be a gamekeeper for three months and run his shoot down at Iford in East Sussex. I'd always wanted to try my hand at gamekeeping but never wanted to do it full time. I was

also a little dubious about moving down south, having been told "They don't even say 'good morning' down there!" and "There's no wildlife" and "You'll not get many ticks on your yearly birding list!"

How wrong they all were. On my first day at Iford, at the end of July, I bumped into a breeding pair of stone curlew. Not just a year's tick – that's what we call a 'lifer' in birding circles. The same evening I was sitting out on the Saltdean side of the estate where I counted 20 to 30 calling cock quail. This tiny game bird is unique due to the fact that it migrates from Africa each year to breed in the UK.

Each day my list grew. Peregrine falcons, hobby, barn owl, buzzards, hen harriers, Montague harriers and merlin – the last being one of the birds I monitor as

part of the Bird of Prey Initiative. I've often wondered where they overwinter after breeding on the moors of the Peak District. Most days I see five individual merlin; they're here due to the high population of their favourite food – meadow pipits and skylarks which thrive here at Iford due to the mosaic of habits created by the farming methods and the crops that are specially planted for the shoot to hold the partridge that we release.

So far, my list of birds is up to 63 species. I'll never tire of seeing the hundreds of corn buntings all around the estate, and wheatear too, as they gather in large numbers to feed on the abundant insect supply before their long crossing of the Channel on their way back south for the winter. I've also seen two Greenland

wheatear: these amazing little birds breed right up on the west coast of Canada and all around Greenland before heading back to sub-Saharan Africa.

Iford Estate is a uniquely special place for wildlife. It's a rural oasis for numerous species and an extremely important stopping-off point for our migrating birds. I'm already looking forward to next season, and hoping to get my list to 64!



Barn owls were one of the many birds of prey Jamie Horner added to his list while here at Iford.

Birds recorded on Iford Hill

Barn Owl	Golden Plover	Linnet	Skylark
Blackcap	Goldcrest	Magpie	Sparrowhawk
Blue Tit	Goldfinch	Marsh Harrier	Starling
Buzzard	Green Woodpecker	Meadow Pipit	Stock Dove
Chaffinch	Greenfinch	Merlin	Stone Curlew
Chiffchaff	Great Tit	Montague Harrier	Swallow
Corn Bunting	Grey Heron	Nighthawk	Swift
Crow	Hobby	Peregrine Falcon	Tawny Owl
Curlew	House Martin	Raven	Twite
Dottrel	Jackdaw	Reed Warbler	Wheatear
Dunnoch	Jay	Rook	Whitethroat
English Partridge	Kestrel	Sand Martin	Wood Pigeon
Garden Warbler	Lesser Whitethroat	Sedge Warbler	Yellowhammer

Recorded Summer 2017

Birds recorded on the Brooks

Barnacle Goose	Firecrest	Little Grebe	Sedge Warbler
Barn Owl	Gadwall	Little Ringed Plover	Shelduck
Bewick's Swan	Garganey	Long-eared Owl	Short-eared Owl
Blackbird	Golden Plover	Long-tailed Tit	Shoveller
Black-headed Gull	Goldcrest	Hagpie	Skylark
Blackcap	Goldfinch	Mallard	Snipe
Black-tailed Godwit	Grasshopper Warbler	Marsh Harrier	Song Thrush
Blue Tit	Greenfinch	Meadow Pipit	Sparrowhawk
Brent Goose	Buzzard	Merlin	Spotted Flycatcher
Canada Goose	Great Black-backed Gull	Mistle Thrush	Scarling
Carrion Crow	Great Grey Shrike	Moortien	Stock Dove
Cattle Egret	Great Tit	Mute Swan	Stonechat
Cetti's Warbler	Great White Egret	Oyster Catcher	Swallow
Chaffinch	Green Sandpiper	Peregrine Falcon	Swift
Chiffchaff	Greenshank	Pheasant	Teal
Collared Dove	Green Woodpecker	Pied Wagtail	Tufted Duck
Common Dove	Grey Heron	Pintail	Turtle Dove
Common Gull	Grey Lag Goose	Pochard	Water Rail
Common Sandpiper	Grey Wagtail	Raven	Whimbrel
Coot	Hen Harrier	Herring Gull	White-fronted Goose
Cormorant	Hobby	Red-backed Shrike	Whitethroat
Cormorant	House Martin	Red-legged Partridge	White Wagtail
Crow	Jackdaw	Redstart	Wigeon
Cuckoo	Kestrel	Redwing	Winchat
Curlew	Kingfisher	Reed Bunting	Willow Warbler
Dabchick	Lapwing	Reed Warbler	Wood Pigeon
Darwin	Lesser Black-backed Gull	Ringed Plover	Wood Sandpiper
Dunnoch	Lesser White-throat	Robin	Wren
Egyptian Goose	Linnet	Rook	Yellow Wagtail
Fieldfare	Little Egret	Sand Martin	Yellowhammer

Recorded 2015–2017



The Pettit family, c.1935, in front of the long-gone cottage

The Story of Harvey's Cross

John Robinson

This is an evocative tale of lives lived and lost on our doorstep over the course of two centuries

The Copper family singing in front of the second cross, 1999. Bob Copper is second from left



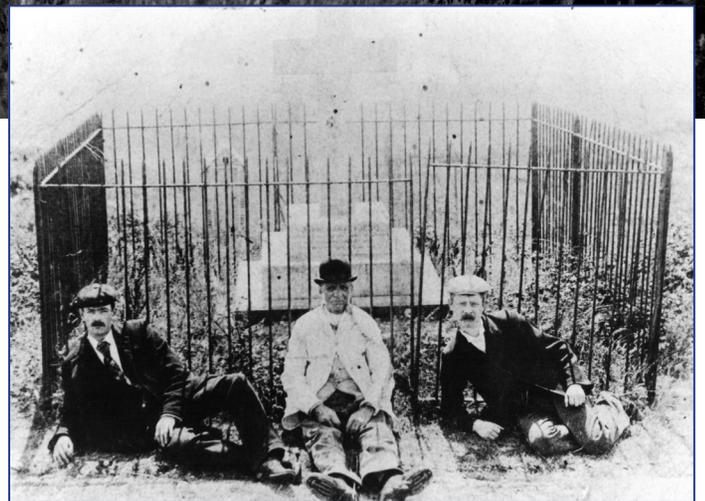
On June 20th 1819 Colonel John Harvey of the 9th Lancers, who was on holiday from his home in Bedford, was riding on the Downs between Iford and Rottingdean when he was thrown off his horse and killed. A stone cross surrounded by metal railings was erected on the spot by his family as a memorial. It gave its name to the area.

Subsequently a flint cottage was built nearby with some farm buildings which, in the 1930s, was occupied by Charles 'Steady' Pettit, his wife Elizabeth and their eight children. 'Steady' worked as a carter for my grandfather. He was always known by his nickname which he acquired, reputedly, because he used to make weekly trips by horse and cart to the Black Horse in Rottingdean from where, having had far too much to drink, he would return by taking a short cut up a very steep slope saying "Steady, steady ol' gall!" to the horse.

The cottage lay alongside the public footpath that runs from the deserted hamlet of Balsdean to Telscombe and Elizabeth used to serve afternoon teas to walkers. At the outbreak of war the military took over the buildings

and the family had to move out. The house, the farm buildings and the cross were all destroyed during the war; ironically not by the enemy, but by our own side who used them for target practice.

The cottage was never rebuilt but my



'Steady' Pettit with sons Edwin and Chub in front of Harvey's Cross, c.1935

grandfather built a new set of buildings which were used until the 1980s when they eventually became too small for modern farm use. The hurricane blew off what was left of the roof, and the remains can be seen to this day.

In the 1990s, a historian living in Peacehaven, Douglas d'Enno, arranged with the Harvey family to reinstate the cross, which they did, and a commemoration ceremony was held on the spot on 20th June 1999 exactly 180 years after his death. The inauguration ceremony was performed by the Lord Lieutenant of East Sussex, there was a blessing by the vicar of Rottingdean and speeches by various other dignitaries. Most memorable for me though was the singing of Bob Copper and his family from Rottingdean. To hear the old Sussex songs sung unaccompanied as they would have been for centuries on the top of the Downs looking out to sea was an experience that I will never forget.

Unfortunately the story doesn't have a happy ending because it wasn't long before the new cross was vandalised beyond repair. It would have needed a sledgehammer to damage it, which nobody walking along the footpath would normally have on them. The cross's destruction must have been carried out by people with deliberate intent. I have, however, heard a rumour that the cross may be replaced a third time.