

## **SDG#15 “Restore Terrestrial Ecosystems”**

2021 is the start of the UN Decade on Ecosystem Restoration

This is my first story of ecosystem restoration



### **Vignette “Sometimes doing nothing is the only help nature needs”**

I am a natural scientist at heart and nature has always interested and inspired me. That is why I became a geologist. Because of this SDG #15 is the easiest goal for me to relate to in my everyday life as I am surrounded by 9 acres of land that I am responsible for looking after.

A few years ago I set up a blog and started making movies to record some of the wonders I encounter and some of my garden projects <http://www.normanjackson.co.uk/garden-notes> . I had two reasons for doing this the first was to share the wonder and beauty of my garden, the second was for my own benefit knowing that when I leave this place I will still be able to revisit and enjoy my experiences in it.

I know that attending to my garden is one of the most important factors for my wellbeing. I am very conscious that I am only the custodian of this landscape and the time, effort and financial resources I put in to maintain it is also for the benefit of the people who will live here in the future and I will be one of the unknown gardeners in their past. It is through the continuity of effort that a healthy landscape is sustained.

I like to conduct experiments in my garden and one of my experiments this year was simply to let the grass grow. Normally I cut the grass about 10 times a year. It looks neat and tidy but it eliminates the biodiversity that I know must be there if given a chance to grow. This year I let the grass grow and the results were stunning. By early June the oxeye daisies formed a dense beautiful blanket together with many wild flowers – buttercup, dandelion, clover, cowslip, and the most beautiful magenta pyramid orchids to name but a few. Together they create not only a wonderful and uplifting spectacle but they supported a thriving community of insects.

By July most of the daisies had withered and I wanted to mow the area and scatter the seeds. We’ve had a few days of hot dry weather so I took the opportunity to mow. I needed a few days of dry weather as wet cuttings are difficult to get off the ground. I was worried by the amount of time it would take me to cut and clear the dead grass and flowers. It took me about 6 hours in total which is similar to the length of time I would have spent cutting between March and July in previous years, so I have not expended more time and energy.



It's now September and I am continuing my experiment as I have left some areas standing to see what happens. I noticed that there are some patches of bare earth in the grass I had cut so I scattered wildflower seeds I have purchased together with oxeye seeds from this year's crop so hopefully next year they will germinate and flower. I will also use the mowed cuttings as a mulch in other parts of the garden and hope that the seeds it contains will germinate next year.



### **Reflections and future actions**

My experiment showed me that sometimes all nature needs is a helping hand. Stopping what I normally do - cutting the grass, enabled the plant life that is in the soil to flourish. In doing so I also enabled nature to create an environment that supported a diverse population of insects and the birds and animals that the ecology supported. Presumably at some time in the past the oxeye daisies were allowed to flourish and that is why they have spread so prolifically. I know that my garden was once an orchard so perhaps this was the previous ecosystem which I inadvertently restored. Only one apple tree remains adjacent to the wild flower meadow. After doing a bit of research I discovered that wild flowers were cultivated in orchards to attract insects that would then help pollinate the apple trees. Flowers were an integral part of the orchard ecosystem and once established they would sustain themselves by self-seeding. Through my experiment I had helped restore an orchard ecosystem.

Our one remaining apple tree from the orchard that was once our garden



I have cut the grass on this lawn every summer for the past 16 years but this year I let the grass grow over large areas and the results were spectacular and inspiring for me and my family. More than this it enabled plants and animals that do not normally inhabit this space to flourish.

My experiment with nature has changed my perception of my garden and changed my ecology of practice in my garden. I know that I will repeat and expand the experiment for as long as we live here. Perhaps a lot of trying to change practice in response to the SDG's will involve small scale experiments that we learn from, followed by more significant actions when we are convinced of the value of what we are doing.

One final thought, in writing this story and documenting my experience in text and photos, I have created a story that shows I care for my garden. By creating my story I have engaged in a creative way with my experiences of being in and being with nature. The story enables me to appreciate better the relationship I have with my garden and I can now see that I am as much a part of this new ecosystem as the oxeye daisies, for without my help as an enabler the wildflower meadow ecosystem would not have come into existence. Not only am I connected physically to this space and time I am connected in a necessary symbiotic way to the living ecosystem.