



Knepp 2022



Camp Wilding



Knepp – a walk on the wilding side

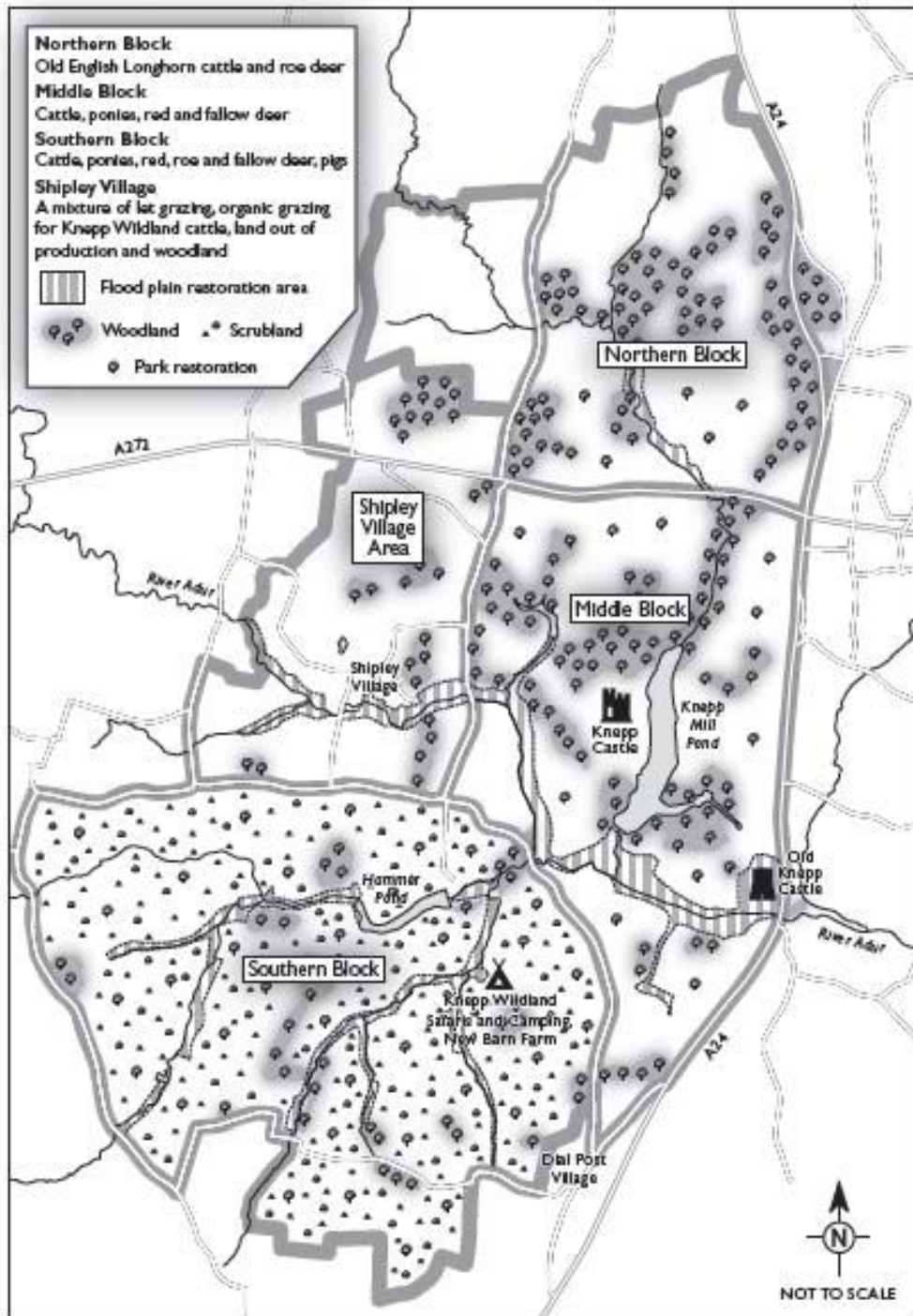
In 1987 Isabella Tree's husband inherited the 3500 acre Knepp Estate from his grandparents. The farm was losing money and despite efforts to improve the farm the losses continued. After a visit from Ted Green an Oak tree consultant to Windsor Great Park, they realized that the land was not able to support intense farming and in a brave move around 2001 they decided to establish a bio diverse wilderness – rewilding:



Rewilding transformation of Knepp estate (change from 2012 to 2020)



Steve was correct when he supposed that there's more to it than just not cutting the lawn and letting the weeds grow. From 2002 Knepp introduced fallow deer, longhorn cattle, Exmoor ponies and Tamworth sows. In 2016 thirty-four white storks from Poland were introduced.



There is a book by Isabella Tree all about this rewilding project: [Wilding](#). In fact Ann had already read this book and this was the inspiration behind our mini expedition to camp at Knepp and join a midnight tour to listen to nightingales.



ONE DAY (Friday 20th May 2022)

2 head to Knepp for a walk on the wilding side

We arrived at the spacious Knepp campsite in the afternoon and booked in at reception. It was quite informal – just take a barrow for the camping gear and pitch your tent anywhere.



Antler arch entrance to the campsite

With the barrow loaded up we made our way through the antler arch to the campsite and chose a pitch with easy access to the public conveniences.

In the distance we could see a mastering of those Polish storks who were gliding around in circles making good use of lift from thermals generated above hot ground.



Gliding storks



Barrow boy Brown reporting for duty



Fortunately we did not have to dig a hole for the toilet – the site was equipped with facilities in keeping with the rustic surroundings.



Ann inspects the rustic (rusty) campsite loo with a view



100 yards dash

Yes, that red spec on the horizon was our tent – or to be more accurate it was Matthew's tent that he had let us use as long as it was not trampled on by wild animals. Let's pop over and see how Mrs AB is settling in to her luxury five star accommodation....

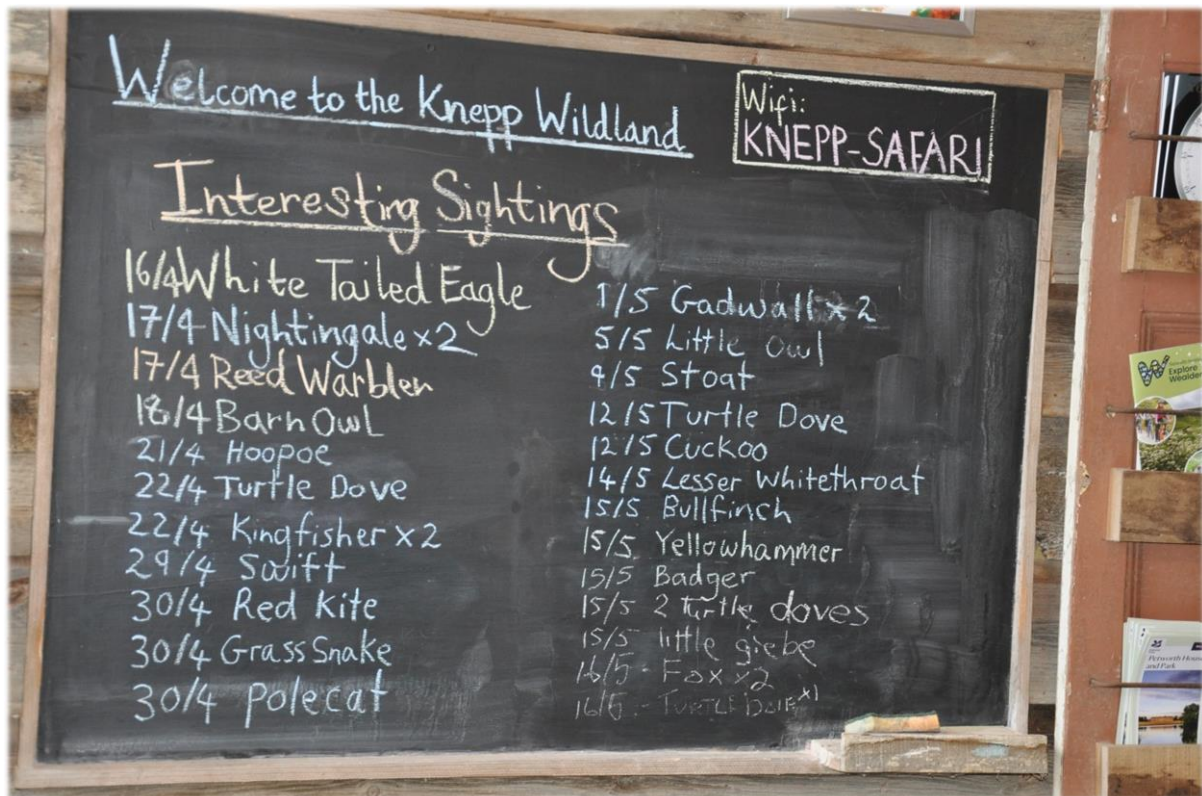


Luxury accommodation ... was not available for this trip

It was such a nice day we decided to walk around the estate following a path indicated by regular red marks.



A tour of the Knepp estate



No Mick, this is not the menu!

In the rewilding world, there are no insecticides killing off the ecosystem. As a result the cow pats were delicious.



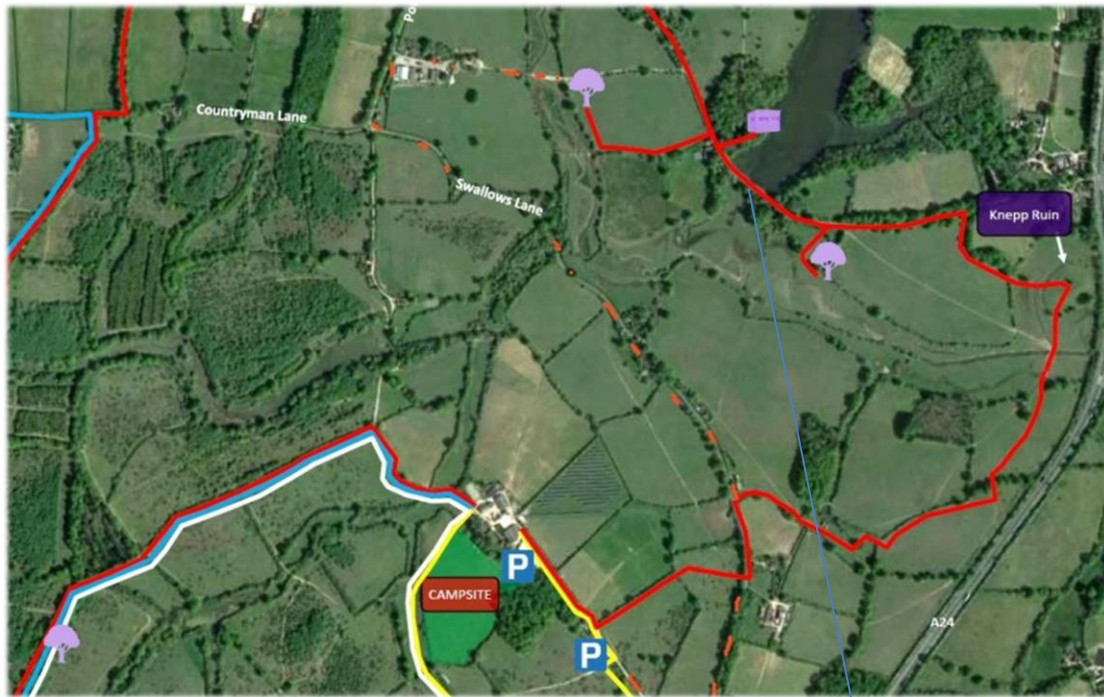
Yum! (crap feedback from the local insect population)



“Excuse me – have you been taking crap photos again?”



Only one horse power vehicles allowed on site



Red route (part)



We were booked in and eagerly anticipating an evening meal, a talk about Nightingales and a late night walk to listen to them with our expert guide Sophie Trice.



Cow Barn – venue for evening meal / talk

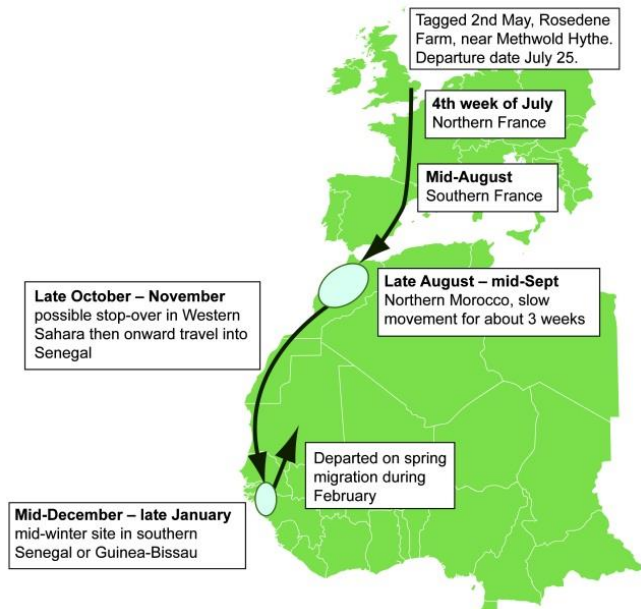
Nightingales are long distance migrants over wintering in sub-Saharan Africa they come to Europe in the spring to breed. The UK is at the most northern edge of the Nightingale's range.

This bird has seen a 91% decline over the past 50 years – we only have five to six thousand individuals left. Knepp is proving to be a key refuge – they nest in dense scrub close to the ground and the rewilding approach at Knepp provides this habitat and abundant insects as a food source.

The voice of a nightingale can reach 95 decibels, way above the levels requiring industrial workers to wear ear defenders. Only male nightingales sing. They sing both night and day whilst trying to attract a mate, but it is at night that their song can be disentangled from other birdsong. They will often be competing with other male birds in neighbouring territories. They will sing an elaborate and varied song and then listen briefly for any other rival songs. So far this year 36 territories have been located at Knepp showing a steady increase in the number of Nightingales over the years.

With no cameras allowed I resorted to a sound recording on the phone and managed to also capture our guide answering questions about Nightingale behaviour.

Click here for the night time sound recording: [Nightingale song](#)





We were out tracking down competing male Nightingales until after midnight, after which we made our way back to the tent trying not to wake the other sleeping campers in the process.

We could still hear the Nightingales as we drifted off to the sound of distant birdsong.

Later that night Ann decided that she really needed to make that 100 yards dash – but two factors were conspiring against this urgent need; she had left her torch outside the tent and could not find the zip to open the door; and suddenly she suffered painful cramp in her shins. I was woken from my slumber by desperate pleas for help and handed her my torch. She managed to extricate herself from the tent without having an accident (I'm sure that would probably have broken one of the terms and conditions of Matthew's tent loan).

The next morning Ann was up with the lark (now there's an appropriate phrase) and we went in search of our basket breakfast. On the way we encountered some deer who did not seem concerned by humans.



Who said it was two deer to stay here? – wildlife on your doorstep



“Is that the one making corny captions?” “Yes deer”



The basket breakfast turned out to be a loaf of bread with butter and jam and some bacon and eggs. Unfortunately our cooking facilities did not stretch to fried egg and bacon but the bread and jam went down well.

All in all a great place to stay for a wilding weekend!



A Stork nest with a view

The End