



Honeygar in context

Somerset Wildlife Trust has owned and managed land on the Somerset Levels and Moors, primarily in the Avalon Marshes area for over 50 years, since it bought its first land at Westhay Moor. The Trust has continued to look for opportunities to acquire more land in this landscape to create, strengthen and protect one of the UK's most significant wetland habitats for wildlife, and ensure connectivity within and to the wider Somerset landscape. We also know that the rich peatlands that this area is best known for, can be precious wildlife habitats, and vital carbon stores that, when well-managed, can contribute to reducing the impacts of climate change. The best option for nature and the environment for all our sakes, is to keep peat in the ground and keep it wet.

Why have you bought Honeygar?

Honeygar is strategically located in the centre of the Avalon Marshes. Wilded, it can connect existing nature-rich areas to help nature spread across the landscape and the wider county beyond. Restoring the land for nature and allowing natural processes to function will provide significant opportunities for populations of rare and precious species to spread and flourish.

Honeygar still has metres of peat soils across the site. Lowland peat takes a very long time to build up and today it's rare to find a site like this as so much peat has been dug up in Somerset and elsewhere. In fact, it is continuing to be dug today for horticultural use, which is something we are campaigning to stop. It's vital that we preserve remaining peatlands.

Why is it costing so much? It's only 81 hectares.

Our budget includes much more than buying the land at Honeygar. For example, it includes: making changes to the existing hidden infrastructure so we can begin to rewet the peat by raising water levels; establishing regular monitoring of carbon, water quality, habitats and species, across Honeygar so we and others can learn of the impact of the changes we will be making; improving the track and access, including signage to ensure there is more access to Honeygar while ensuring nature and the vital peat is protected; exploring options to develop the existing buildings in a sustainable way and also paying for the ongoing running cost of owning Honeygar; funding staff needed for Honeygar, lead on the wilding and monitoring on site and to support us running our biggest fundraising campaign ever.

£3.4m is a large fundraising target. Where else are you getting money from?

We have had fantastic support from a range of grant givers and philanthropists since announcing Honeygar last year. We hope to secure the balance of the funding needed from a range of sources, including philanthropists, grants and local businesses. Every £1 donated now will also demonstrate to them the wide support there is for our vision for Honeygar and really help us close the funding gap.

What are you going to do with the land? Will it affect your farming neighbours?

At Honeygar we are looking to turn lowland peatlands that have been dried over decades, and hence are now emitting carbon and do not support the range of species they could, into a wet peatland, supporting nature-rich habitats and storing carbon. Currently most of the site is part of a drainage scheme, designed to remove water and maintain a low water table to deliver agricultural practices. We will be raising the water levels over time to enable the peat soils to

recover and, in discussion with our direct neighbours, adjusting grazing and cutting regimes. We have already met with many of the local farmers and neighbours, and will be staying in touch with them as we implement our plans so they are aware of what we are doing and what we are learning as a result of this.

Are you going to farm it?

Honeygar will no longer be a dairy farm but our approach will we believe demonstrate a way for others to generate an income in the future through payments for nature-based solutions, like storing carbon and improving water quality and biodiversity, something the government is encouraging all farmers to do through their new Environmental Land Management Schemes.

What habitats do you think are likely to form at Honeygar once you rewet the peat?

Honeygar is less than a mile from our Catcott nature reserve (SSSI, SPA). The starting point for Catcott was similar to Honeygar, agricultural land with drained peat soils. Our expectation is that similar habitats will emerge. Once the peat soils are wetter, we hope then to see a range of species emerge. We are just going to have to wait and see!

What are you going to do with the buildings?

We plan to develop sustainably at Honeygar and are currently assessing the condition of the existing buildings and starting to explore options to support our vision for wilding Honeygar and to share what we learn. Honeygar is a long-term project and developing the buildings will be a second phase of work over the coming decade which will require a second fundraising campaign.

Can I visit / have a guided tour?

There is a public footpath that runs from the Burtle Road up the drive to the farm and passes around the site of the old farm buildings to join Honeygar Lane. We will over time be adding more footpaths and running events at Honeygar and, as part of our second phase of work, will be creating sustainable buildings to support those who are working and visiting Honeygar. For now, you must keep to the public footpath and keep your dog on a lead as there may be livestock on site and ground-nesting birds.

When will Honeygar be ready?

Honeygar is a long-term project. Our focus for now is getting Honeygar set up so the rewetting and wilding of the site can begin while we also explore options to build in a second phase of the project over the next decade, for which we will need a further phase of fundraising. We will share what we learn with our supporters, neighbours and other conservation organisations and hope by doing this over time others will follow our lead and manage land on the Levels in more nature and climate friendly ways.

What does Honeygar mean?

Honeygar in folk medicine is a mix of honey and apple cider vinegar and has been purported to have health benefits since ancient times. However, our Honeygar seems to have a different derivation.

Historic maps show Honeygar Farm being known as Honeygore or Honey Gore Farm, but more recent ones refer to it as Honeygar Farm. Honeygore as the site's original place name makes sense as gore refer to islands or dry land surrounded by water, and this has most probably been prefixed by a personal name for the Anglo-Saxon owner. The site's name, like many, has evolved over time but we will be keeping with Honeygar for the next chapter in the site's fascinating history.