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Loving life on the farm

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London Wildlife Trust trainee Morgan Newbold writes about his work placement with the Downlands Partnership

At Downlands Farm in Wallington, run by Surrey County Council's Downlands Partnership, they have lots of land to keep sheep and cows. For many years the farm has supplied London Wildlife Trust with grazing sheep and cows for its nature reserves in south London.

This was where I undertook my Wild Talent placement. Being new to working with grazing animals, I had a lot to learn. On the first day I had a warm welcome from Sean and Conner who run the farm, and they gave me a general rundown of tasks we were to do each day. We checked the health of the sheep on the farm, counted them, and checked the troughs had water and the fences were sturdy.

The Trust works closely with the Downlands Partnership and they let us know when the sheep can be moved to our sites. They keep livestock for conservation grazing and we have their sheep on some of our sites to help us improve the grassland for wildlife. This is achieved by the sheep eating the grass and scrub, which in turn opens up the area, and keeps the scrub down.

One day we needed to move some sheep to another field in Tatsfield. This was not far away but we still had to put up temporary fencing to guide them in the right direction - shepherding, essentially. It also helps to have a few scoops of sheep nuts, which are small pellets made from barley, oats, rice, wheat and

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held, job done.

On another occasion we needed to shear the ewes' hind quarters to keep the area clean for lambing and to allow the farmers to have an unhindered view to see the ewes are healthy and ready to lamb, so one of my jobs was to catch and hold the ewes while they were being sheared. It does get easier the more you catch them!

There are for different breeds of sheep on the farm; Buelahs (cream brown colored), Jacobs (brown and cream), Herdwicks (grey), and Suffolk (black and white). They are all very hardy sheep, but my favorite had to be the Herdwicks, they were very friendly and funny.

The farm has sheep dotted around different areas and these are checked at regular intervals or if the grass has all been eaten then they would be moved to fresher fields, which I enjoyed doing and I'm sure the sheep did too. They also have goats, which are kept at a quarry in Riddlesdown in Croydon, and we had to check their health and feed them - occasionally they jump up on you!

The lambs weren't due to be born on my placement, so afterwards I came back to see all of the lambs and there were quite a few of them bouncing around the field, and staying close to their mums. When I was there we gave the lambs a general health check and I got to hold a few, which I'd never done before - very enjoyable!

I would like to thank Sean and Conner for the excellent experience I had and all the information and help they gave me, and to the volunteers and sheep counters for their hard work - and finally to the sheep! I can highly recommend this placement, it was a great experience, even the weather (a lot of snow) didn't put me off.

About Wild Talent

London Wildlife Trust's Wild Talent programme has trained dozens of enthusiastic recruits eager to learn new skills and start a new career in conservation. It has been funded to challenge the barriers that exclude some people from working in environmental conservation and aims to address skill shortages in the nature conservation sector and increase diversity. For more information go to www.wildlondon.org.uk/wildtalent.

Wild Talent is funded by Heritage Lottery Fund.

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