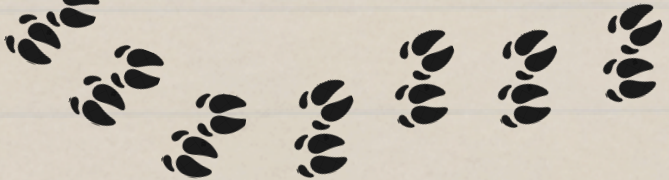


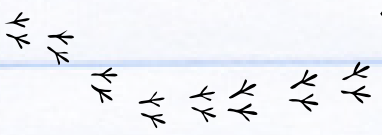


Knepp Estate Expedition Journal





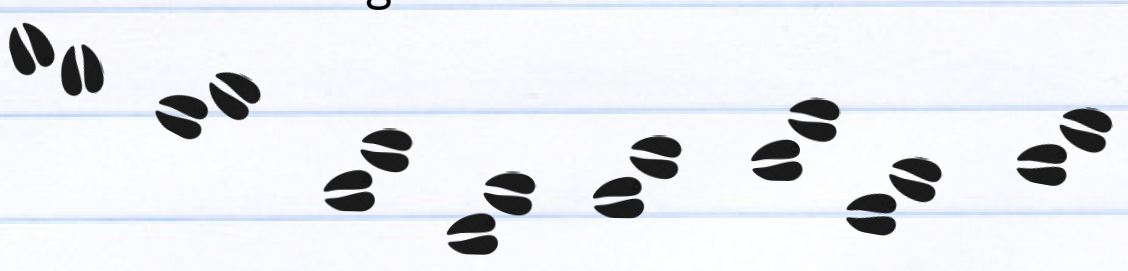
Introduction



Stepping Into the Wild



Knepp is a place where the land speaks in more than one language. It is in the scrape of a pig's snout through the soil, the flash of a deer between trees, the staccato clicks of bats in the dark. I came here to learn about species, but quickly realised I was learning about stories, the stories that landscapes tell when they are allowed to recover, and the skill of listening well enough to retell them. This journal is my attempt to capture not just what I saw, but how Knepp showed me the power of letting nature lead.



Day 1 -

Invertebrates



Invertebrate Investigations

We opened the week with the smallest architects of Knepp's food webs. Using sweep nets moving in a figure-of-eight, we drew tiny lives out of the grasses and brambles, then transferred them with pooters (those careful "bug-suckers") into vials. After humane euthanasia, we identified specimens under the microscope; wing venation, antennae, segmentation; before pinning representative individuals for the Natural History Museum in London. Seeing those minute structures up close turned "insects" into indicators, a precise, living readout of ecosystem health.



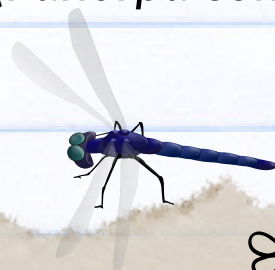
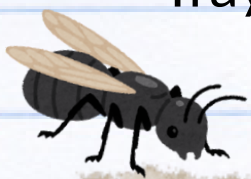
Tachinid fly
(*Tachinidae*)



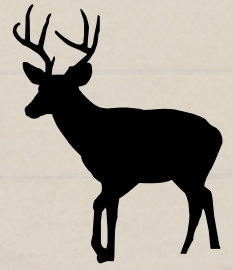
Tray of Invertebrates



Scorpionfly
(*Panorpa communis*)



Day 2 - Mammals



Majestic Mammals

From micro to macro, we shifted our attention to Knepp's giants. Before heading out we studied antlers from red deer and fallow deer, two of the Knepp Big Five, reading the tines and burrs like relics forged from passing seasons. In the field binoculars traced slow arcs across the pasture: English Longhorn cattle moving steadily through a mosaic of scrub and grassland, fallow deer browsing at the woodland edge, red deer moving like whispers between oaks. It felt less like spotting and more like witnessing a system that has been given room to breathe.



Fallow Deer (*Dama dama*) Antler (right),
Red Deer (*Cervus elaphus*) Antler (left)



Herd of Fallow deer stag
(*Dama dama*)



Camera trap



Red Deer Hind
(female) (*Cervus elaphus*)

Day 3 - Bats

Echoes in the moonlight

As dusk thinned into dark, we tuned our senses to the night shift as we headed out for a walk. Head torches low, bat detectors high, we followed a ribbon of clicks and chirps that mapped invisible flight paths overhead. Each frequency hinted at a different species, a different way of making a living after sunset. Seeing one up close, light as a leaf, all delicate architecture made the soundscape suddenly personal.



Common Pipistrelle
(*Pipistrellus pipistrellus*)
striking a pose if bats
could say cheese, this one
just did.



Bat detector

Day 4 - Herps

Secrets Beneath the Surface

From micro to macro, from aerial to subterranean, this was the day of herps. We moved between the survey trays, each one like opening a cookie jar and holding your breath to see if a treat was inside. One tray lifted to reveal a grass snake, curled tight, its body cool and alive, a silent question mark pressed into the earth. To hold it was to feel a pulse that was not my own, strength wrapped in stillness. Another tray offered treasure: a slow worm shining like buried bronze, smoother than stone, steadier than metal. In my hands it felt ancient, as if the soil itself had decided to take shape and breathe.



Slow worm
(*Anguis fragilis*)



Grass Snake
(*Natrix helvetica*)



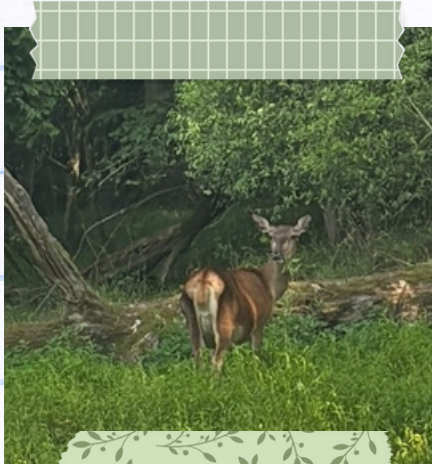
Day 5 - Habitats

Habitat Wonders

Guided by Team Wilder, we crossed heath, scrub, and woodland in search of the Knepp Big Five. We found Tamworth pigs churning the soil like living ploughs, fallow deer drifting in loose, alert groups, and English Longhorn cattle moving across the pasture with an easy kind of certainty. The Exmoor ponies stayed hidden, the one that got away. Above us, white storks kept watch from their high nests, and the gnawed stems and quiet dams spoke of beavers working out of sight. This was rewilding made visible: the processes leading, the species telling the story as they went.



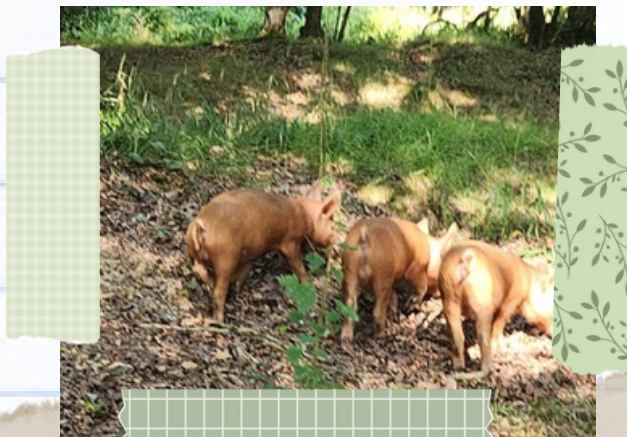
A mustering of White Storks
(*Ciconia ciconia*)



Red deer
(*Cervus elaphus*)



Longhorn cattle (*Bos taurus*)



Tamworth pigs
(*Sus scrofa domesticus*)



Day 6 - Carbon

Carbon in numbers

In the woodland, conservation turned into calculation. We learned how to measure DBH with a forestry tape, use allometric equations to turn trunk diameter into biomass, and translate that biomass into stored carbon and CO₂e. It was methodical work, the kind you might expect from a consultant, with clean data leading step by step to results that tied a single tree to the global carbon ledger. Numbers here felt like a second language for the landscape.



Measuring the circumference of an **Ash tree** (*Fraxinus excelsior*). I promise I am checking its growth, not its waist size! 🌳📏

Day 7 - Birds

Echoes of Dawn

By 5 a.m. the day had already begun, the light new and the air still. With mist nets set and call lures running, we worked bird by bird: identify, age, sex, wing length, mass, adding a ring to the unringed and noting the number for those already marked before a careful release. Holding a great tit for a heartbeat (and feeling its heartbeat) carried the same message the data did: connection builds understanding, and understanding guides protection. (From the echoes of the night on day three to the echoes of dawn here, the rhythm of the wild carried on.)



Great tit
(*Parus major*)



Wing
measurement



Lesser white throat
(*Curruca curruca* (formerly *Sylvia curruca*))



Robin
(*Erithacus rubecula*)



The Final Night

Embers and reflections beneath the Stars



On our last evening, we let the pace slow. The forest kept its own soft conversation while we shared ours, with laughter, stories, and the kind of quiet that says you have been part of something real. As the stars came on and the fire settled, it felt less like an ending and more like a handover; carry this experience forward, and let it change how you speak for nature.