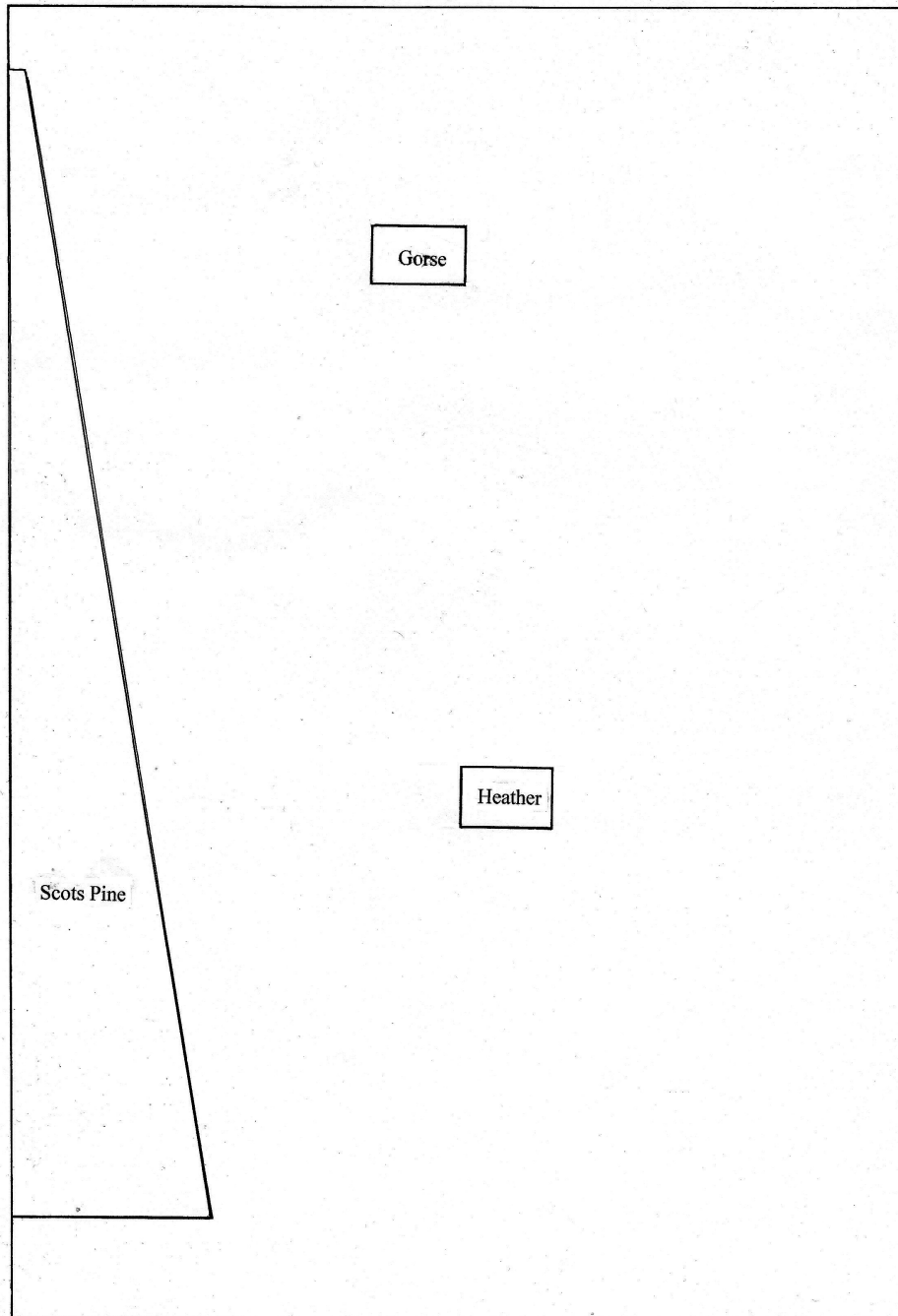


How We Might Create More Heathland

It's a similar idea I had for the Rainforests, buying up land, creating a bit of habitat and making profit to pay for it all. I personally don't eat meat but if I did then I'd much sooner eat something that was creating habitat over here than eating a burger that was destroying it somewhere in Amazonia. It's an idea of how we might create more heathland in the UK. and one I believe that could have some very positive benefits for our existing heaths too. Let's begin in Suffolk over towards the Minsmere and Walberswick nature reserves and explain how this might work. Let's assume we could eventually extend these heaths from the A12 to the coast and all the way up as far north as Lowerstoft but as with all ventures it all has to be paid for and farms aren't exactly cheap. Anyway, you buy up a farm as and when one comes up for sale on the market within that area. The farmhouse itself could be rented out as holiday accommodation or alternatively used as a base for staff members.

Below is a suggested layout of a field on said farm should the idea ever be adopted. The individual fields and enclosures (see the diagram) should all be completely separated off with stock proofed fencing. The wedged shaped enclosure on the left hand side planted with Scots Pine and the others, one sown with Gorse and the other with Heather, completes the layout. This should then be repeated on all of the other fields within the farm's boundaries with or without the Scots Pines but always with the Gorse and Heather.



Having done all of this the object then is to get into Wild Boar farming. Wild Boars are excellent creators of habitat, churning up, making furrows, leaving patches of bare soil and they root up and eat the rhizomes of stuff like Bracken and Fireweed etc., and for this reason they can also be used to help with the management of existing heaths. At the very least they would create some very good habitat for Stone Curlews, far better than anything the RSPB. would suggest, spraying herbicides all over the place. The seeds from each of these garden-sized enclosures would be carried away by birds, ants or whatever else carries seeds off and I guarantee over the years, as these new plants begin to take hold and that at least some kind of heathland habitat would gradually develop.



The boars should be moved to a selected part of the farm throughout the breeding season, end of March through to early August, for the sake of any breeding birds, but for the rest of the year given free range. The thinking by many of those involved with the countryside these days is that all year round grazing should be the order of the day, the argument being that places would soon be overgrown with gorse and brambles if it weren't for grazing, like that would be a problem. The management of the countryside is undoubtedly a good thing but over-management is anything but. A good end of season graze and site clearance every five or ten years for heaths would be far more appropriate.

It has been suggested that with so few species this would hardly count as habitat. These three species however, as the basic building blocks, would in fact go a long way to getting a whole habitat started. Birds and flying insects would move in overnight and they hopefully would bring in seeds of all kinds of other plants. It would at the very least make a great experiment which is why I put the idea forward in the first place and the boars could always be tendered out to help manage the heaths in the surrounding areas. At the moment these habitats are often overridden with Bracken and Fireweed but by allowing Wild Boars to eat up the rhizomes things could be much improved. They are of course one of our missing native species and should've been brought back decades ago.

Heaths by the way come in many forms, wooded heaths where Nightjars occur right through to the more open habitat of bare earth and sparse vegetation, which is the type where Stone Curlews are found. This latter is what I'd expect to materialise with these systems, at least in the early stages, but anything could eventually develop later on. Anyway, thanks to everyone who wrote in with your thoughts.

