

## **PRESS RELEASE: Hill Farmers play an important role in combatting climate change and increasing biodiversity**

The conservation charity, the Exmoor Society, confirmed recently that support for hill farmers is part of the solution to climate change and increasing biodiversity in National Landscapes such as Exmoor. For nearly two decades it has argued that climate change posed the biggest threat to the national park. However, it was also aware that some environmentalists wished to blame hill farmers. 'We do not agree,' said Chairman Rachel Thomas, 'On Exmoor, the hill farmers and land managers are part of the solution to increasing biodiversity and helping greater resilience and adaptation to climate change. We have given our full support to the Exmoor Hill Farming Network and the ENPA for working together in search for new agri- environmental schemes, called ELMS, that will fit Exmoor circumstances. Indeed, the Society has also been at the forefront through its commissioned research from Rural Focus called "Towards a Register of Exmoor's Natural Capital". We were inspired by Dieter Helm's speech to our 2017 annual Spring Conference whom, I quote, "envisaged a new role for national parks such as Exmoor with many natural assets and a strong sense of place of much beauty". The Register was used as a case study, the only one from Exmoor, in the 2019 Landscape Review (Glover Report). There is still much to do to take forward ELMS where payments for the cultural elements part of ecosystem services are limited. Landscape character and quality, aesthetic and perceptual values, wildlife and cultural heritage are missing yet part of the bedrock of national park status and inspiration. It has been said that 40% of hill farmers will not survive with the proposed new ELMS payments. It would be ironical if traditional farming practices and communities were lost here, so much part of Exmoor's special qualities, and as a result of not looking at the bigger picture of our national park heritage.'

Further, the Society recognised that Exmoor was facing radical changes in relation to rural policy dealing with the environment, farming and the future role of national parks. This has led to a period of much uncertainty and anxiety amongst these deeply rural communities. The charity will continue to search for solutions by gathering evidence to influence rural decision-makers both locally and nationally.

It was with great sadness that the Exmoor Society heard of the death of its President, Sir Antony Acland, on 8 September. His obituaries had appeared in national newspapers and outlined his stellar career rising to become "diplomatic service head who stood his ground with Mrs. Thatcher and became ambassador to the US". Rachel Thomas said, 'Sir Antony has been our President since 2007. We have been honoured, that for 14 years, he has been very active within the Society, attending most

of our Trustees meetings, numbering at least 107, listening to debates, giving his views on issues, such as the importance of tourism, modestly and diplomatically. He was occasionally firmer and influenced sensitive decisions when the society campaigned nationally.'

The Society has held him in great affection. He came to all its annual events, such as the Spring Conferences, AGMs and Society Christmas lunches, often accompanied by Lady Acland, spending time with Society members, drawing out their own stories with his charm and capacity to listen. He enjoyed presenting the prestigious Awards such as the Pinnacle for Young Entrepreneurs and encouraging children to read out their poems before an adult audience. His foreword in the History of The Exmoor Society, published last year, spoke of his love for Exmoor where his family roots are, and his pride in being President of The Exmoor Society. He will be greatly missed and the Society will reflect further on his deep appreciation for Exmoor, its people, landscape, wildlife and sense of history and continuity of things that are good and beautiful.

Rachel Thomas, Chairman, Exmoor Society.

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Images: Sir Antony at 80 in the Jubilee Hut – photo by Mike Sherwin  
Hill Farming on Exmoor – photo by Anne May



