

## Caring for the Countryside

All farmers spend a lot of time conserving traditional landscapes, encouraging natural habitats and protecting wildlife.

Farmers look after the hedges in the countryside. If those hedges were placed end-to-end, it would be more than enough to cover the distance between the earth and the moon! Farmers spend about 2½ weeks every year managing stone walls and hedgerows.



The average farmer spends about 250 hours a year looking after the landscape.

Many wildlife species thrive in grassland habitats including red deer, voles, shrews or mini-beasts such as beetles and butterflies.

Cows and sheep are good lawn-mowers! They help keep the grass short by grazing and this also encourages wild flowers.



Animal manure on the land is an excellent natural fertiliser. The manure also has other environmentally friendly uses such as composting.



Some farms have traditional orchards which provide valuable habitats for birds, mammals and insects. Sometimes the orchards are used to graze animals.

Horticulturalists (farmers who grow vegetables, fruit, plants and flowers) also provide an environment where bees thrive. By visiting up to 100 flowers in each trip, bees help pollinate flowers and they also produce honey.



Potato growers manage water needed for their crop by building ponds and reservoirs. These also attract many wildlife species, such as frogs and ducks.



### **Activity**

Farmers do so much for our countryside. What could you and your family do to encourage wildlife in your garden? Or what could you do to encourage wildlife in your school grounds?

Here are some ideas:

- 1) Make a nest for ladybirds and lacewings by tying a bundle of cow parsley stems together and placing it in the nook of a tree or a crack in a wall.
- 2) Preserve old walls and sheds. The spaces beneath old roofing tiles and naturally occurring holes in bricks or soft mortar are used as nesting sites by mason bees which pollinate fruit trees. Attract other useful solitary bees and wasps by drilling holes into a timber post in a sunny position for them to lay their eggs.
- 3) Build a log pile - it's the ideal habitat for small mammals, amphibians and all manner of insects.
- 4) To attract hedgehogs, make a tepee-shaped log pile. Remember to always check for wildlife before lighting a bonfire.



- 5) Leave piles of fallen leaves undisturbed in damp, shady corners of the garden - frogs, toads, newts and slug-eating centipedes thrive on decay. Dead wood left on the tree could become a home for bats, birds or invertebrates.
- 6) Make a pond - possibly the single most useful element for wildlife. But make sure it has shallow edges to allow easy access for frogs and newts. Pond plants are important to provide shelter for frogs, newts and other creatures. Make sure you keep your pond clean.



7) If you have a fence, remove a small section to allow hedgehogs and frogs into your plot. If you are worried about foxes or badgers, make the hole no bigger than a CD case.

8) Take a clay pot, fill it with leaves, straw and a little cotton wool and place upside down in a sheltered spot. A bumblebee prospecting for an over-wintering nest may well take up residence.

9) Plant a native hedgerow of hawthorn (*Crataegus monogyna*), blackthorn (*Prunus spinosa*), field maple (*Acer campestre*) or hazel (*Corylus avellana*) to replace a wooden fence. The hedge will provide nesting sites and berries, nuts and hips that will be invaluable winter food for hungry wildlife.

10) Plant roses, honeysuckle or clematis against walls or fences. As well as scenting the air and softening 'hard' features, these make ideal nesting habitats.

11) Plant some trees. In a small garden, plant a Malus 'Red Jade' with a height of 2m (6½ft) and similar spread. Its crab apples are a great food source for wildlife. Larger gardens could accommodate an oak, handsome in its own right but also a haven for wildlife, large and small.

12) Put up bird feeders. Everyone wins - you enjoy birds and the birds get a good feed.

13) Encourage bees by planting pollen- and nectar-rich plants such as hardy *salvia*, *rudbeckia*, lavender and *nepeta*.

14) Make a living willow fence. Not only will it reduce carbon, and look beautiful, it will never need painting with nasty preservatives.



15) Put up bird boxes that suit the birds in your area. Sparrows, for example, nest communally and so prefer a 'terrace' type box.

16) Make a hedgehog hibernacula. This can be as simple as a log pile or a specially made box. Line the box with newspaper then fill with dry bedding and leave it undisturbed all winter.

17) Hedgehogs like cat and dog food, dried fruit and cooked vegetables. Milk and bread can make them very ill.

18) Bin as many chemicals as you can. Even if used sparingly, their manufacture and disposal cause problems.

19) Cut down on digging and let the worms, bugs and beetles keep the soil healthy.

20) Put off the autumn cutback of perennials until early spring. Wildlife will love the seed heads and hiding places, and you will benefit from their beauty.

21) Don't worry about 'perfection'. The most beautiful gardens aren't sterile or overly manicured - they are dynamic, alive with wildlife and brimming with vitality, just like a natural landscape.

22) And finally, for the future: encourage children to take an interest by investing in a set of child-size tools.

