

ENCOURAGING NATIVE WILDLIFE



LAND

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WHY?

Watchers of Springwatch, or David Attenborough programmes, will know that wildlife around the world is in trouble, and that includes native wildlife in the UK. Exponential population growth and increasing consumption means that we, as a species, have taken land away from habitat for wildlife and into cultivation for food or other uses.

The result, a major loss of biodiversity, is not only poor stewardship of God's creation, but also contributes to loss of ecosystems which ultimately affect our ability to breathe, eat and drink clean water: <https://www.theguardian.com/news/2018/mar/12/what-is-biodiversity-and-why-does-it-matter-to-us>

UK churches can play a part in abating or reversing this trend. Many are privileged to have outdoor spaces which have been relatively undisturbed for centuries, but even if they are small, let's encourage native wildlife and share these areas with them.

HOW?

To encourage wildlife, think about habitats and food! Are there places they can live or take shelter? What is available to eat and drink?

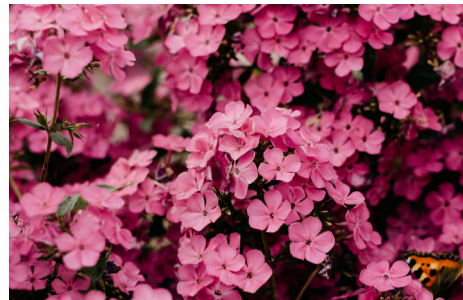
- Make sure that there is always something flowering. On a warm day in February or March some bees may be enticed out of hibernation and will urgently need nectar to survive. In the autumn, birds and mammals need seeds, berries and nuts, whilst bees, butterflies and moths need plants that have pollen or nectar they can access throughout the year: <https://www.rspb.org.uk/birds-and-wildlife/advice/gardening-for-wildlife/plants-for-wildlife/>



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- Grow plants with simple pollen bearing flowers that insects can access. There are many beautiful flowers which are so multi-layered with tightly packed petals that insects can't get into the food which may be there. (e.g., some roses, chrysanthemums, or peonies). You can clearly see the difference here:



- Feed the birds all year round. With the loss of many of their traditional food sources like wildflower/hay meadows, birds need our help to build up reserves to survive the winter and energy to feed their young in the spring.
- Water. However small an offering, providing water is the best thing you can do to support wildlife. You could go for a full-blown pond. If that is not feasible, then just sink an old washing up bowl into the ground and fill it with rain-water, a bit of gravel, some stones and a few small aquatic plants. Larger stones are useful near the edge to act as a ramp for mammals and amphibians. You will be amazed how quickly it will attract a range of amphibians and insects. Provide clean water for drinking all year too, and if possible somewhere for birds to bathe. Keep bird baths clean to prevent disease spread: <https://www.wildlifetrusts.org/actions/how-provide-water-wildlife>

<https://www.rspb.org.uk/birds-and-wildlife/advice/how-you-can-help-birds/birds-and-water>

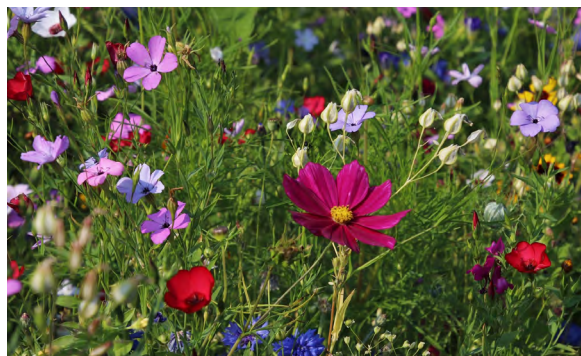
- Fit water butts. Rainwater is best for ponds, plants and as drinking water for birds.



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- Don't be too tidy! Twigs and fallen leaves provide nesting materials and shelter for birds and small creatures like our seriously endangered native hedgehog. Leaving a pile of twigs and small branches at the back of a flower bed or in a hidden corner will encourage a variety of wood-boring beetles and other invertebrates. They will then be dragged by worms into the soil for food, where they also improve the condition:
<https://www.wildlifetrusts.org/actions/how-make-log-shelter>
<https://www.edenproject.com/learn/for-everyone/how-to-build-an-insect-home>
- Maintain natural boundaries like mixed hedges, where birds and other creatures can find shelter and food. Dry stone walls are a wonderful habitat for small rodents like field mice as well as a variety of beetles, snails and other invertebrates:
<https://www.wildlifetrusts.org/actions/how-build-mini-stone-wall-0>
<https://www.rspb.org.uk/birds-and-wildlife/advice/gardening-for-wildlife/plants-for-wildlife/garden-hedges/>
- Allow hay/wildflower meadow areas to develop in your churchyard. This can be a contentious issue, as some people like a neat churchyard, but if you can leave parts of yours to grow, you will find all sorts of wildflowers there too, and will be doing a great service to the birds and insects that need the flowers and seeds. Caring for God's Acre on Grassland Management: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=svrNrJwEVyk&t=29s>





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- Put up bird and bat boxes. Numbers of many of our familiar garden species are in serious decline, and a little bit of help would be helpful!
<https://www.bto.org/how-you-can-help/providing-birds/putting-nest-boxes-birds/make-nest-box>
<https://www.bats.org.uk/our-work/buildings-planning-and-development/bat-boxes>
- Build a bug hotel. Children absolutely love doing this, using old pallets and a huge variety of natural materials – canes, pots, twigs, straw, dried leaves, stones, fir cones, etc.
<https://www.rspb.org.uk/get-involved/activities/nature-on-your-doorstep/garden-activities/build-a-bug-hotel/>





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LONGER READS & OTHER RESOURCES

See the separate paper by Pam Martin of St John's Church, Levens, where she gives us her top tips about useful plants for wildlife.

A Rocha UK reflections on the 2019 State of Nature report: <https://arocha.org.uk/enews-stateofnature-timeforaction/>

Some advice from the Church of England on managing churchyards for biodiversity: <https://www.churchofengland.org/resources/churchcare/advice-and-guidance-church-buildings/biodiversity>

CASE STUDIES

St Cuthberts Church in Cumbria have undertaken projects covering nearly every section of this land resource – from providing homes for hedgehogs, bats and swifts, to creating wildflower meadows, building a bog garden to encouraging use by the local community. Tanya St Pierre from the 'Get Cumbria Buzzing' Wildlife Trust project sent us a report – see the separate case study.

STRATEGIC DEVELOPMENT GOALS

Taking action on this topic will contribute to these UN Strategic Development Goals: