



Wildlife

We are lucky to have such a wide variety of wildlife in Dorset. However, people have been noticing that important habitats, which different species depend upon for food and shelter, are disappearing or are in need of management. What is happening to the wildlife of your parish?

A few facts

Our wild heritage

Dorset is outstandingly rich in wildlife, supporting 80% of all British mammal species, 90% of bird species and 80% of butterfly species. Knowing that our local area supports so much wildlife adds to our enjoyment and quality of life and can even help the economy by supporting more sustainable 'green tourism'.

Under threat

Even in Dorset wildlife is at risk. Over 80% of Dorset's chalk grassland – an incredibly rich habitat for wild flowers and butterflies – has been lost. Once common species like the tree sparrow have all but disappeared and even the gardener's friend, the hedgehog, is declining.

Human practices in recent decades have caused some wildlife species to decline. For example building development and intensive agricultural practices that have reduced habitat by using pesticides and removing hedgerows.

Back from the brink

Recent successes show what can be done to bring wildlife back from the brink. The otter suffered substantial declines in the 1960-70s but with cleaner rivers and improved habitat it is now recovering well in the county.

Local action

Local areas around our parishes and even our gardens can provide important refuges for wildlife. Your local area is probably teeming with wildlife and you may find it in unexpected places. Streams, ponds, woods and flower rich grassland may be the obvious places but often churchyards, barns, old trees, road verges and gardens are just as popular.

Lots can be done to help wildlife and being involved in wildlife conservation can be very rewarding. It is often fun, keeps you fit and teaches you new skills at the same time as improving your local environment.

Tackling the problem of wildlife decline both locally and nationally needs teamwork from everyone. The Dorset Biodiversity Partnership, a group of organisations brought together with the common aim to reverse the decline of biodiversity in Dorset, is successful at guiding local action so that it contributes to a global effort.

What you can do

There are so many ways to get involved in wildlife conservation on your doorstep; from wildlife gardening and pond restoration to parish planning and educational work. These 4 easy steps are designed for you as a parish or community based group, to help wildlife in your local area. Its really important to find out what you've got and where first, so that the work you do benefits wildlife effectively. It is up to you how much time you spend on each step – you may find you want to quick step through some bits more than others!

• Step 1 – Check what information on the wildlife of your parish already exists

This may come from records kept by wildlife organisations on particular species. Memories of what the parish used to be like are really useful to developing a full picture too. Be confident that you do not need to be an expert. You can find help to fill your knowledge gaps – someone in your parish will be interested in wildlife. Local knowledge can go a long way.

Who can help: DERC

Information: The 'MAGIC' website shows the nationally important sites in your area

Things to be aware of: Sometimes it takes a bit of time to get the info you need.



Courtesy of Andy Fisher

• Step 2 – Take a good look at where wildlife lives in your parish



There may be many more habitats apart from those found in churchyards, old trees and village ponds. You could try walking the parish for wildlife in an exercise known as 'ground-truthing' – checking to see if the recorded information that has been gathered is correct.

Who can help: Dorset Wildlife Trust

Things to be aware of: Respect privately owned land, always check with the landowner before carrying out survey work.

• Step 3 – Make a wildlife map of your parish

Use a map base to record your observations in step 2. To be part of the global picture it is important to make sure the wildlife interest is noted in your parish plan. Your wildlife records will be welcomed by the Dorset Environmental Record's Centre too. Parish wildlife maps can also be turned into works of art with the help of a local photographer, artist or handicraft group.

Who can help: Ordnance survey, DERC

Things to be aware of: If you are using hand drawn maps, check you are not infringing Ordnance Survey copyright.

• Step 4 – Take action

There are many ways to do this. What you choose will depend on what you have found in steps 1-3. Dorset Wildlife Trust run a number of initiatives that can support you. For example Wildlife on Your Doorstep, the Living Streams or Living Churchyard Projects, and Dorset New Naturalists (which gives identification training to suit all needs).

However there might well be other practical management projects more relevant to your area such as pond creation, hedge restoration or wildlife gardening. Get advice before you start and you may need to draw up a plan of action if applying for grants

Who can help: Dorset Wildlife Trust

Funding: Dorset Biodiversity Grant, AONBs Sustainable Development Fund, District Council landscape grant.

Things to be aware of:

Respect privately owned land.

Be aware of health and safety issues, particularly if you aim to carry out any practical work. A risk assessment might be necessary to identify potential hazards.

Wildlife map of your



• Contribute to established Dorset-wide and national surveys

There are a number of initiatives aimed at finding out about local wildlife - why not make your local efforts a part of these? For example the BBC run their Spring and Autumn Watch and more locally Dorset Wildlife Trust run a 'Wildlife on Your

Doorstep' project, asking for your observations of a selection of species found in the local area.

Who can help: BBC, Dorset Wildlife Trust

on!

Get advice on what work is suitable for volunteers and what is best done by professionals. Try not to disturb wildlife. Some species are protected by law. Try not to 'over tidy' green spaces. Untidy scrub, brambles and nettles are useful for food and shelter for many species of wildlife. If you are planning to cut things down, do this between November and February while the sap is low and birds are not nesting.

• Planning for wildlife

If you are concerned about a planning application in your area affecting local wildlife:

Dorset Wildlife Trust (DWT) & English Nature have general leaflets on this subject, but it is worth noting that different organisations can help you with specific issues relating to planning. Here are just a few:

For specific details relating to the planning issue you are interested in - contact your Local District / Borough Council.

For issues relating to trees, contact the Local Authority Tree Officer.

If the issue affects a species protected by law you will need to contact English Nature or the Environment Agency (and the Herpetological Conservation Trust for reptiles and amphibians).

If you think bats are in the building, contact English Nature who have a free bat warden system. Water vole issues can be dealt with by DWT Rivers & Wetlands

officers. If it is a big development, the developers themselves should have an ecological survey carried out by consultants.

If the area in question is part of a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) - try www.magic.org.uk to find out - you should contact English Nature.

If it is part of a Site of Nature Conservation Interest (SNCI), Dorset Wildlife Trust should be contacted

A number of leaflets can help on specific species, For example: 'Badgers in developments', 'Focus on bats', 'Water Voles - guidelines for developers' from Dorset Wildlife Trust website.



Courtesy of Giles Nicolson



Courtesy of Andy Fisher

Who can help

Dorset Wildlife Trust

People & Wildlife Team
01305 264620
enquiries@dorsetwildlife.co.uk
www.dorsetwildlife.co.uk

Dorset Environmental Records Centre

01305 225081
www.derc.org.uk/general/welcome.htm

English Nature

01929 557450
dorset@english-nature.org.uk
www.english-nature.org.uk

Environment Agency

General enquiries 08708 506 506
www.environment-agency.gov.uk

Herpetological Conservation Trust

01202 391319
www.herpconstrust.org.uk

Ordnance Survey

For maps old and new contact Ordnance Survey's helpline 08456 050505
or visit: www.ordnancesurvey.co.uk

Funding

Dorset Biodiversity Partnership

Funding for community groups and landowners. Eligible projects may range from creating, restoring and managing wildlife habitats, specific species initiatives, or information and educational projects. Between £100 and £1000 for up to 75% of the total project cost

c/o Dorset Wildlife Trust
Andrew Pollard
01305 217978
apollard@dorsetwildlife.co.uk

AONB Sustainable Development Funds

Dorset AONB 01305 756780 or k.wright@dorsetcc.gov.uk
Cranborne Chase AONB 01725 517417 or
davidblake@cranbornechase.org.uk

Heritage Lottery Fund

The Heritage Lottery Fund gives grants for projects which encourage people to be involved in their heritage, conserve and enhance heritage or improve understanding, access & enjoyment to their local heritage. They encourage would-be applicants to contact a Development Officer at the earliest possible stage for advice.
01392 223950, carolp@hlf.org.uk
www.hlf.org.uk/English/In Your Area/SouthWest

West Dorset District Council Countryside & Conservation Grants

01305 252386 or local.policy@westdorset-dc.gov.uk

Further information

Dorset Wildlife Trust

Has packs of specific information on:

- General wildlife – species and habitat management
- Wetlands, ponds and streams
- Wildlife gardening
- Living Churchyards

DWT website also has informative website with A-Z of species / frequently asked questions / facts

01305 264620
enquiries@dorsetwildlife.co.uk
www.dorsetwildlife.co.uk

Magic website

Shows the nationally important sites in your area.
www.magic.gov.uk



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Ideas for Action

Know what you've got

People are often surprised at how much wildlife there is on their doorstep. Taking a really close look at what wildlife you have locally can be fascinating. Woodlands, ponds and meadows may be the obvious places to look but what about your churchyard, old barns, ditches and hedgerows? Piece together the information from records, wildlife walks and good memories ... every bit helps.

Make a wildlife map

It's really important to record what you find about local wildlife. Only when you put it all together will you see what you've got, what connects up and perhaps what's missing. A simple map will do and this will be useful to the parish or community plan. However, why not bring your findings alive with a work of art – paint, photos, textiles .. an interesting project for a school to get involved with and a great way of celebrating your local wildlife 'treasure'.

Hands on

Lay a hedge, build a dry stone wall, make a wildlife garden, plant trees, clean up a stream, build a new pond, rescue an old one, clear scrub, plant an orchard ... the possibilities are endless! Using your survey and map as a starter, find a keen landowner, get some advice, draw up a plan of action and you'll be hooked.

Keep your eyes open

If you are good at noticing plants and animals, try joining in with a national or Dorset wide survey. All information is used for conservation purposes and input from local people is vital. You can use your findings locally too – as a benchmark to see how wildlife changes in your area over time. Keep an eye out for planning applications in your area too and if you are concerned about wildlife in the proposals, make your voice heard.

If you want to take up any of these ideas, there's a lot of help available. See over for how to get started.

Case study

St Marys Churchyard, Beaminster

Joan Holland from the Churchyard Working Group explains how they made a wildlife haven of their local churchyard.

"Our Churchyard Working Group got together in the early 1990s. It began when a small area of the churchyard was set aside for wildflowers to grow and now most of the churchyard is part of our management plan – even the manicured space has become wildlife friendly.

We find that local people are surprised and interested to see what we have done – the grassy 'maze', the herb garden, the flowery mead, butterfly garden and the spring and summer meadows.

We have enjoyed entering the Dorset Wildlife Trust Best Managed Churchyard competition over the years and have won various awards and have had valuable support from Dorset Wildlife Trust. We are about to embark on a recruitment campaign, finding word of mouth often works best!

The churchyard is not used for burials nowadays but there is an area used for the interment of ashes – we do always remember that this is a holy and sacred place and have created a peaceful haven where people can sit and quietly contemplate if they wish."

If you are interested in taking up any of these ideas in your local area, we have more detailed information to help you.

For each topic in this pack, you can request our additional sheets which include more actions, a guide to who can help with advice and support, sources of funding available and things to be aware of before you start. These are all free and updated regularly.

For your free copy, contact the Dorset AONB Office:

01305 756782
dorsetaonb@dorsetcc.gov.uk
www.dorsetaonb.org.uk

