

Carmarthenshire Nature Recovery Plan

Here Farmland habitats include hedgerows, arable field margins and traditional orchards.

Carmarthenshire's agricultural landscape is one of the defining features of the county. **Species-rich hedgerows** with mature hedgerow trees are a significant landscape and historic feature. They can be important habitats for butterflies, moths, birds and small mammals. West Wales (Ceredigion, Pembrokeshire and Carmarthenshire) appears to be the most richly endowed region of Wales in terms of ancient and/or species-rich hedgerows.

Some hedgerows were created when land was enclosed in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century; others are much older, perhaps formed from woodlands as these were cleared for agriculture. There are peculiarities, such as the laburnum hedges of mid/north-east Carmarthenshire or the seemingly resurgent English elm hedgerows of the coastal flats.

The current condition of hedgerows in the county is very variable. Many have been restored in recent years through the various agri-environment schemes, others continue to decline through lack of management – this has caused increased gappiness, decreased height, a loss of the ground flora associated with the hedge and an increase in the presence of exotic species.

Modern arable agriculture is largely a monoculture with very little to offer wildlife. In the past, before the intensive use of chemicals and increased mechanisation, wild flowers grew amongst the crops and offered more potential for other species as food and cover. **Field margins** were especially important as these less productive areas were an important refuge for small mammals, particularly when the field crop was harvested. These more natural edges can have benefits to the farm as well, encouraging insects like ladybirds, which prey on some crop pests.

At present, there is very little arable habitat of note remaining in the county – in contrast to the past when every local farming community had its share of grain or root crops. This decline of arable along with the disappearance of many associated weed species and a decline of insect food have contributed to the massive decline of the tree sparrow (and other seed-eating birds such as yellowhammer and linnet). Where they remain arable areas (often just a few fields on a farm), can give rise to a distinctive group of arable-associated annual plants such as cornflower and annual knawel as well as specialised mosses.

Traditional orchards are managed in a low-intensity manner, using little pesticides and inorganic fertilisers. The trees are relatively long lived and the grassland under the trees is usually grazed by cattle, sheep or cut for hay. Orchards are generally considered to have five or more trees and to have the crown edge of the trees spaced within 20 m of each other. Orchard trees can be very good as a habitat for rare lichens

Farmland habitats

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Benefits of farmland habitats:

- Agriculture – fruit, vegetables, grain, meat, employment
- Culture – locally valued landscapes
- Hedgerows act as windbreaks, help prevent soil loss, reduce flooding and link habitats
- Arable field margins host natural pest control insects and pollinators
- Wild food – blackberries, nuts, game animals

Why are farmland habitats changing (from the *State of Nature* report

www.rspb.org.uk/stateofnature/)?

- Changing farming practices.
- Loss of habitat.
- Chemical input.
- Fragmentation of habitats.

Associated priority species

(NB this may not be an exhaustive list):

Birds

Common linnet
Yellowhammer
Spotted flycatcher
Common bullfinch
Common cuckoo
Hedge accentor
Song thrush

and invertebrates and are an important part of our heritage and landscape. They have often occupied the same piece of land for centuries.

Traditional orchards are rare in Carmarthenshire. Those that remain are often in poor condition with a requirement to plant replacement stock to ensure the continued viability of the habitat. More information is needed on the extent, type and condition of traditional orchards in the county.

The Tywi Valley seems to have been historically important for orchards. Research shows that this area was once known for its spring blossom with over 100 orchards shown on the 1905 OS map between Llandovery and Llandeilo. There are three historical varieties of apple tree local to Dinefwr alone: Margaret Nicholas, Afal Pig yr Wydd and Tin Wydd. Saint Teilo, after whom the town is named, is called the patron saint of apples.

Carmarthenshire has yielded a number of previously 'unknown' indigenous apple varieties.

Herring gull
House sparrow
Grey partridge

Associated priority species (continued)

Common starling
Northern lapwing
Kestrel

Mammals

Bat spp.
Harvest mouse
Polecat
Brown hare
Dormouse
Hedgehog

Invertebrates

Brown Hairstreak
White letter Hairstreak
Cinnabar moth

Herpetofauna:

Common toad
Grass snake

Plants/lower plants

Deptford Pink
Annual knawel
Cornflower
Bastard Balm
Fragrant orchid
Scarce turf-moss
Portuguese pocket moss

Vision statement and objectives

These farmland habitats support a range of species, some now rare and uncommon, and contribute to the landscape character of the county. The overall vision for this plan is to maintain, restore and extend these habitats in the county and the **priority** species associated with them. The cultural importance of hedgerows and orchards also provides an opportunity to work with communities to look at the historical significance of these habitats within a community setting. Any action would seek to meet one or more of the following objectives:

- ▶ To positively manage of these farmland habitats in Carmarthenshire and connect and expand where possible
- ▶ To maintain and expand the range and/or population of species associated with these habitat types
- ▶ To identify and record priority areas of these habitats within Carmarthenshire
- ▶ To raise awareness of the biodiversity, landscape and cultural importance of our farmland habitats and their appropriate management

Useful links:

[Hedgelinek](#)

[PTES Orchards survey](#)

www.biodiversitywales.org.uk/Enclosed-Farmland

www.wildlifetrusts.org/wildlife/habitats/farmland

