

Your local Environment

Your questions Answered

Why don't we provide litter bins?

Many of our sites are in very rural settings and it can be difficult to ensure that we have the staff resources needed to empty litter bins on a regular basis. It has been found that, in general, people who would normally put their litter in the bin will not drop it on the floor if there are no bins and those people who carelessly dispose of their litter will continue to do so anyway, bins or no bins. The majority of our sites do not have refreshment outlets or anything that would generate litter on site. Therefore, we are keen to encourage people to take their own litter home with them and perhaps consider how we may all reduce the amount produced in the first place.

Why do we discourage the feeding of wildfowl?

Whilst feeding the birds is an activity which people enjoy, it does keep the numbers of birds in an area artificially high. This means that where a pond or lake may naturally only support a few geese and ducks the extra food which is being provided means that more of them will stay around to be fed. This may seem a good thing, however, when the food providers have gone home (particularly in the winter) the birds are left to find food for themselves and often find there is not enough to support their numbers. Overgrazing of the plants which live in and around the ponds/lake then becomes a problem causing the site to become even more degraded, and so continues a spiral of degeneration which can have

knock on effects for all the other creatures, great and small, which depend on the pond/lake. Also, when the birds are fed great quantities of the wrong type of food (more often bread) they fill up on this junk food and don't eat enough of what is good for them – (for anyone with kids this may sound familiar). Malnourishment and even death can result from eating too much nutritionally poor bread. In addition to all this, think of the effects of all that poo..... need I continue?

Who provides dog bins?

Dog Bins are installed and maintained by the Environmental Services Department of Shropshire Council. Most Countryside Heritage Sites have them at or near the car park or main entrances. They are emptied either once or twice a week depending on the level of use. Dog mess can also be bagged and placed in litter bins.

How should I manage my hedges for wildlife?

Hedgerows are immensely important for wildlife in our landscape so it is important to manage them well in order to make the most of them

The best hedge for wildlife has a variety of native hedge plants, (such as hawthorn, blackthorn, holly, hazel, guelder rose, dog rose and field rose) is left to grow tall and wide (2m+ tall and 2m wide) with hedgerow trees (oak, ash, field maple, wych elm, crab apple) every so often (40m).

The hedge should be trimmed every 3rd year. If you have a network of hedges try to arrange for a third of them to be cut each year between Nov and Feb. Hedges will only flower and produce fruit if left uncut for a year, these berries are a vital food source for over-wintering birds. Avoid cutting hedges from March to August as this is the main bird nesting season. An 'A' shaped hedge with a wispy top appears to be best, the taller the better, especially on roadsides, these force birds of prey such as barn owls to fly over the height of motor vehicles.

If the hedge is becoming gappy or over-mature it may need to be laid or coppiced in order to improve its structure.

Leave corners and junctions untrimmed as they are often difficult anyway and add variety.

Leave a fringe of undisturbed vegetation, at least 1m wide, next to the hedge, if possible, as a corridor for mammals.

Ultimately you should develop as wide a range of hedge heights and widths as possible to appeal to a wide range of animals. If possible allow some hedges to grow free for long periods then manage them by coppicing or laying. Find and tag tree saplings such as oak or ash so that the hedge cutter avoids cutting them, alternatively plant trees into hedge gaps and protect them, enabling them to reach maturity.

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Why do conservationists cut down trees?

Trees are one element of an extensive and complex mesh of life which supports the multitude of species in our countryside. Not all species benefit from the presence of trees and yet some are totally dependant upon them. As conservationists we need to manage habitats for the benefit of the maximum number of species or an individual species if it is endangered.

The RSPB has recently launched a campaign to assess why our woodlands are experiencing a drop in bird species. It is strongly suspected this is because of a reduction of tree felling activities such as coppicing and glade creation. Even a woodland relies on having a variety of habitats within it to increase its biodiversity.

Where a tree is found to have a high amenity value and is important to a community then alternatives to felling the tree will always be sought. Ultimately management of trees in the landscape is a complex issue and requires the consideration of many factors for the benefit of people and wildlife

Some habitats which support a valuable range of plants and animals can also be threatened by the invasion of trees. For example heathland, wildflower meadows and raised bog and mosses are all invaluable Shropshire habitats that can be lost to invasion by trees.

In areas where the public have significant access, some trees

need to be cut down or reduced because they have become too unsafe.

How should I manage my pond for wildlife?

Dig a new pond next to the old one and leave the old one to carry on as it is!!

There are a variety of ways to manage a pond depending on what you want to encourage (insects, plants, amphibians, etc) and what assets it already has. Make the most of the habitats you have rather than eliminating them to create others.

It is also important to remember that ponds that look tidy and attractive are not the best for wildlife and therefore some compromise may be necessary.

Often the best thing that can be done to encourage wildlife is to leave the pond alone. This is a perfect example of the proviso, "If it ain't broke don't fix it". If management is needed this should be gentle and should not disturb more than a quarter of the pond.

In general a good wildlife pond should have plenty of gently shelving shallows, other areas with water of varying depths can also be valuable. Areas 1-2cm deep are usually the richest part for pond animals.

A variety of native plants that grow at various levels in the pond is also important, emergents, floating and submerged plants. In fact grasses straggling out into a pond can be

one of the richest habitats. The majority of pond animals live in the shallows and amongst the roots and stems of plants. The areas of open water are avoided by almost all insects and animals.

Muddy areas called the draw down zone, where the mud is constantly covered and uncovered as the water level rises and falls, are also very valuable to insects, plants and small mammals.

Things such as dead logs under the water and other submerged structures are valuable to insects and other animals as cover, food and egg laying sites. Rotting willow exudes tannins into the water which help prevent algal blooms, acting in the same way as barley straw

Importantly, ponds are **very susceptible** to pollution, particularly from fertilisers used on farm fields. A margin of at least 10m should be maintained around wildlife ponds. Pollution is the biggest threat in terms of a wildlife pond.

Common pond myths

"Ponds need dredging to prevent them being choked with vegetation"

Extensive removal of vegetation can damage a ponds wildlife value. Ponds of high conservation value might be described as 'overgrown' not the picturesque, chocolate box image.

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"Ponds need cleaning out regularly"

'Cleaning out', 'deepening', 'dredging' and other such management are damaging to wildlife ponds.

"Drying out is disastrous for a wildlife pond"

Ponds that dry out occasionally are very valuable wildlife sites. They support an important range of species and the lack of fish makes them particularly rich in other species.

"All ponds need deep, open water"

Deep water isn't a requirement for a good wildlife pond. Having said that newts, for instance, require some deep water.

Where can I volunteer?

Follow the link to our 'Getting Involved' page to find out about volunteering with the Countryside Service. Other parts of the County Council such as the Library Service, Museum Service and Archives also have opportunities to volunteer. Try putting 'volunteer' into our search box.

Contact your local volunteer bureaux for more opportunities.

Alternatively, establish your own group in your parish to take on a specific project such as a churchyard conservation plan or a tree planting project or a school wildlife garden, support is available through the Council to take this forward and seek funds.

What should I do about injured animals & birds?

If you think the bird or animal is clearly injured or sick contact the nearest vet or the RSPCA helpline on 0870 55 55 999.

In many cases where people bring birds to us the animal is not injured. The baby birds are known as fledglings, they have grown most of their feathers but haven't got the ability to fly. They often leave the nest and are able to move in the undergrowth, the parents then feed the young on the ground. The most simple advice is look but do not touch the parents may not be far away. Do not try and return the fledgling to its nest it may disturb its brothers and sisters. If you do find a baby animal please take a look but do not touch, go back in a hour or so it will have probably moved or the parent will have returned.



Shropshire
Council

Parks & Countryside Sites Team
For Further Information
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