

Importance of traditional orchards and fruit trees for wildlife

Teachers' Notes (KS2 - Science)

Traditional orchards are fantastic havens for wildlife. They provide a variety of habitats—the older trees providing food and shelter for many species; the younger trees letting light onto the meadow beneath; the grassland itself is often flower-rich, since chemical pesticides tend not to be used in traditional orchards; the boundaries of the orchard (hedgerows, stone-walls) provide shelter within the orchard and are themselves, habitats for many species.

Wildlife to be found in many traditional orchards include—pollinating insects such as moths, butterflies and bees, feeding on the fruit blossom and grassland flowers; bats and birds feeding on the insects and roosting or nesting in the trees. Later in the year the fruit provides food for a wide range of birds and mammals such as mice, hedgehogs, badgers and foxes. The small bird and mammal population in turn support owl populations and the orchard trees provide them with nesting sites.

Link between Bees and Orchards



The decline in the bee population has been increasingly in the news. In part, the decline in the numbers of bees is attributable to the decline in numbers of orchards around the country.

Before rail, road and now air transport made it possible to move fruit around the country and the world quickly - fruit, with its limited shelf-life, had to be grown locally. There were small orchards associated with most farms and large country estates around the country, as well as a good number of commercial orchards, even in the north of England.

Traditionally, every orchard had its own beehive, or beehives. Bees are vital in the pollination of fruit blossom and ensuring a good harvest. In turn, the blossom flowers provide bees with nectar, their food source and the key to their survival.