

Homes for Wildlife 2008 results

54,451 people registered to take part in Homes for Wildlife (plus 135 from overseas countries, including Argentina, the Cayman Islands, Indonesia, Madagascar and Taiwan!).

The table below gives the participation by region. Just over 26,000 of these people actually took actions in their garden.

Table 1: participation by region and country

Region/country	Registered	Participated
South-west England	5765	2751
South-east England	11348	5454
Eastern England	8019	3703
Midlands	12290	5587
Northern England	9906	5146
England	47328	22641
Northern Scotland	308	161
Eastern Scotland	1307	673
South-west Scotland	1969	1039
Scotland	3584	1873
Wales	2574	1215
Northern Ireland	906	435
Channel Isles	59	33
UK	54451	26197

Your gardens

Participants reported on gardening actions and wildlife from a wide variety of gardens.

Most had large (43%) or medium (40%) sized gardens, with 16% having small gardens and a small, but notable, proportion taking actions on their balconies (0.7% - 167 in all).

Only 12% lived in urban areas (48% suburban, 40% rural). 86% reported that they feed birds in the summer, with 97% feeding birds in winter.

Unsurprisingly, the commonest features already in gardens were lawns (92%), shrubs (91%), trees and flowering plants (both 88%).

Of those features participants did not have already, a water feature was the one that the largest proportion (51%) would consider creating – 30% would consider making a pond.

All of the participants expressed an interest in improving their gardens for some aspect of wildlife. We're pleased to report that almost all – 99.4% - wanted to improve it for birds, with the next most popular being insects (95.4%), followed by mammals (83.5%) and then amphibians (81.9%).

However, some participants had home improvements planned that could be harmful for wildlife, including extensions (7.6%), roofing work (7%), creating hard-standing (10.6%) or replacing/repairing fascia or soffit boards (7.7%).

Taking action

The 26,197 participants were provided with links to advice sheets - each with a number of Homes for Wildlife actions. A total of 3,420,822 separate actions were offered to these participants through the advice sheets – an average of 124 per participant, with some being offered up to 159 of the total of 162 available.

In total, 309,147 actions were taken and reported to us: 9% of those offered, an average of 11.8 per participant, although a few reported that they'd followed 132 of the actions recommended to them.

The most popular was providing seed mixes for house sparrows (note this was more popular than the identical action for starlings!), the least popular adding solar heating panels. The table below gives the ten most popular gardening options (i.e. after removing 'lifestyle' options such as recycling).

Table 2: most popular HFW gardening options

Action	Advice offered	Action taken	% action taken
Provide seed mixes, particularly sunflower hearts and millets-seeds	26195	4805	18.3
Provide plants/shrubs of different sizes, shapes and ages	26177	4341	16.6
Grow a range of plants	26194	4289	16.4
Provide flowering plants as a source of nectar	26159	4175	16.0
Grow plants attractive to insects	25692	4067	15.8
Retain dead flower stems and heads over winter	26174	4013	15.3
Maintain any beds with a good layer of ground cover, shrubs and herbaceous plants	26166	3984	15.2
Provide a nestbox or build your own	26041	3789	14.6
Provide dense, thorny bushes for cover	26167	3703	14.2
Prune trees, shrubs and climbers during January or early February	26176	3689	14.1

3564 participants did some aspect of the wildlife survey: while some did all elements, most did not do everything (for example, 1,857 told us about nesting birds).

Bird survey

Participants were asked to count four species of birds once a week in April, and to tell us whether they were nesting in their gardens.

Unsurprisingly, blackbird was the most commonly seen bird, and the one most frequently found nesting: 76.4% of correspondents reported blackbird nests. However, it was not the commonest species: that honour fell to house sparrow.

The table below gives average counts per garden and frequency of nesting for the four species in RSPB regions and countries.

Table 3: bird results by region and country

	Average per garden				% of gardens nested in				
	P'pants	B'bird	H. sparrow	S.thrush	S'ling	B'bird	H.sparrow	S. thrush	S'ling
SW Eng	199	2.90	5.22	0.40	3.16	78.2	60.3	9.8	26.4
SE Eng	326	2.41	3.63	0.39	3.44	74.1	42.7	12.2	40.8
E Eng	257	3.42	4.90	0.62	5.33	80.1	51.1	11.2	45.3
Mids	361	2.93	5.26	0.43	4.26	77.3	56.7	10.8	41.2
N Eng	319	3.19	5.38	0.53	4.74	77.9	56.6	12.9	44.0
Eng	1462	3.0	4.9	0.5	4.2	77.3	53.1	11.5	40.4
N Scot	10	3.3	7.0	0.8	3.5	58.3	50.0	25.0	33.3
E Scot	54	3.6	6.6	0.6	5.7	74.3	60.0	17.1	42.9
SW Scot	68	2.8	6.0	0.4	4.8	62.3	53.6	8.7	36.2
Scot	132	3.1	6.3	0.5	5.0	66.9	56.0	13.4	38.7
Wales	87	2.76	7.16	0.42	2.83	80.0	65.9	10.6	34.1
N Ire	25	2.67	6.19	0.68	9.85	55.6	27.8	22.2	44.4
ChanIs	1	1.00	4.63	0.13	5.75	50.0	50.0	0.0	0.0
UK	1707	2.95	5.07	0.47	4.29	76.4	53.4	11.7	40.4

Swift and house martin survey

In addition to surveying those four species, participants were also asked to tell us about swifts and house martins (in July). 780 people did so, of whom most saw house martins (64%) or screaming parties of swifts (71%).

Swifts were seen less frequently in the north, whereas house martins were recorded more frequently in the north and west, and were notably less likely to be nesting on houses in South-east England.

Table 4 gives the breakdown by region. Swifts were reported nesting in less than 6% of properties, with 65% accessing nests through the eaves, 20% through roof tiles, 10% through brickwork and the remaining 5% nesting in specially provided nesting boxes.

Table 4: Swift and house martin results

Region	Responses	Swifts		House martins	
		% seen	% nesting	% seen	% nesting
South-west England	83	69.62	5.13	85.19	18.75
South-east England	131	70	3.88	40	5.43
Eastern England	126	78.69	12.30	56.56	22.22
English Midlands	152	73.65	5.52	58.74	15.07
Northern England	165	77.91	3.73	69.33	18.52
England	657	74.45	5.97	60.47	15.80
East Scotland	28	57.69	7.69	89.29	46.43
South-west Scotland	47	42.55	4.44	73.91	30.23
Scotland	82	50.00	5.11	81.19	32.85
Wales	34	65.63	6.06	81.82	31.25
UK	780	71.09	5.84	63.93	18.64

Note: North Scotland and Northern Ireland results were not available due to small sample size.

Amphibian survey

In May, participants reported on amphibians in their gardens – frogs, toads and newts – including signs such as spawn and tadpoles. Three-quarters of gardens had frogs. Newts were half as frequent, and toads were only found in a quarter of gardens.

Table 5: amphibian results by region and country

	Participants	Toad	Frog	Newt
South-west England	137	38.1	73.0	40.3
South-east England	219	21.2	68.0	43.7
Eastern England	182	32.8	73.1	37.2
Midlands	252	25.7	81.0	36.0
Northern England	230	22.2	83.9	24.4
England	1020	26.9	76.4	35.8
North Scotland	8	37.5	62.5	50.0
East Scotland	19	36.8	63.2	11.1
South-west Scotland	32	28.1	62.5	10.0
Scotland	59	32.2	62.7	15.8
Wales	47	33.3	66.0	28.3
Northern Ireland	9	0.0	77.8	44.4
UK	1135	27.2	75.2	34.6

Interestingly, newts (all three species combined) show a reasonably clear north-south gradient, with reports becoming less frequent further north through England into Scotland, perhaps because smooth newt, the common species in the south, is more of a garden pond-dwelling species than palmate newt, commoner in the north (please note this is a complete guess!).

The take-up on invertebrate surveying was considerably lower than for other elements of the surveys. Just 790 participants surveyed invertebrates in May, 420 in June and 428 in August.

Invertebrate survey

Table 6: invertebrate results, UK

Survey date	Species/group	% of gardens	Average count
			4.34
May	Bumblebees	96	
	Ladybirds	60	3.51
	Large red damselfly	21	0.70
	Orange-tip	28	0.66
	Snails	94	12.37
June	Bumblebees	98	7.08
	Beetles	69	2.20
	Blue damselflies	35	1.26
			2.38
	Ladybirds	68	
	H'bird hawkmoth	5	0.07
	Marmalade hoverfly	46	1.35
August	Painted lady	23	0.39
	Spiders	91	6.72
	Bumblebees	98	8.50
	Common darter	39	0.77
			1.14
	Craneflies	41	
	Grasshoppers	33	0.95
	H'bird hawkmoth	11	0.22
	Ladybirds	66	2.73
	Painted lady	39	0.89
	Red admiral	64	1.91

Snails were the most common invertebrate, found in 94% of participating gardens and averaging over 12 per garden.

Of the insects, bumblebees were the commonest, and increased through the summer from 4 per garden in May to 7 in June and 8.5 in August. Conversely, ladybirds were commoner in May than later in the year.

Unsurprisingly, although hummingbird hawkmoths were three times as common (and twice as frequent) in August than in June, they remained the uncommonest species.

Although the small sample size limits our ability to look at patterns across the UK, some can be detected.

Ladybirds were commoner in the south and east, with fewer in the west and north, for example.

Overall, gardens in the East of England had the highest number of invertebrates, with an average of 78 counted across the three surveys (the UK average was 60).

Mammal survey

HfW surveyors were asked to look for nocturnal mammals in July.

810 participants looked for bats on a total of 8,103 occasions, whilst 808 for Hedgehogs 9,016 times in all.

Table 7 shows how frequently bats and hedgehogs were seen, by region. Bats were seen more frequently than hedgehogs, but even the latter were seen on over 40% of occasions.

Table 7: mammal survey results, by region

	% occasions bats seen	% occasions hedgehogs seen
South-west England	54.27	43.51
South-east England	48.88	47.21
Eastern England	56.34	41.64
English Midlands	54.71	37.49
Northern England	60.47	42.15
England	55.29	42.53
East Scotland	47.31	49.62
South-west Scotland	52.20	25.22
Scotland	51.97	29.00
Wales	70.42	33.83
UK	55.98	41.34

Note: North Scotland and Northern Ireland results not available due to small sample size.