

**Farmer ROBERT KYNASTON**  
**County SHROPSHIRE**  
**Farming system LOWLAND MIXED**  
**Farm size 97HA**

**What key conservation measures have been undertaken on the farm and what evidence is there of benefit for wildlife?**

**Birds**

Deep consideration has gone into the wild bird seed mixtures used on the farm. Robert has used a variety of mixes sourced from a local seed supplier to suit the species on his farm. He opted for a kale based mix to try and encourage partridges on his farm. He also used a sorghum and fodder radish mix as he was advised that fodder radish holds its seed longer into the winter than other crops. Finally a generic mix was used to make sure that the more common species as well as the declining ones can find food during the winter.

Robert demonstrated a good understanding of the management of his wild bird seed mixes. They are managed as a crop and he is keen to maximise their yield as he is proud of what he produces on his farm, be it food or wildlife.

The farm has over-winter stubbles that follow a low input crop providing an additional weedy seed source through the winter for the birds to feed on. Robert is very conscious of the food gap in February/March once the hedgerow berries have been eaten.

The farm has pollen and nectar mixes in place and floristically enhanced margins to increase the habitat to support increased availability of insect food for birds. Robert demonstrated a good understanding of the management and value of these options for wildlife.

**Butterflies/Moths**

Moth surveys have been carried out on his farm; he is waiting for the results so has not got a complete species list yet, as there were a few species that could not be identified in the field.

**Plants**

A moss and lichen survey was conducted on his farm and 2 red listed mosses were found to be present. He has a traditional hay meadow field, with meadow barley, which is locally rare. He aims to increase his botanical biodiversity and is looking into sourcing flowers from a local habitat to improve the quality of his meadow. A local college regularly uses his hay field (which is in reversion) to train its students in plant identification.

**Other wildlife**

There is a range of wildlife found on the farm, e.g. great crested newt eggs have been found in one of his 8 ponds (cleared annually in rotation) and there is evidence of water vole. Management around the pool edges is rotational to leave undisturbed areas. Coppicing around pool edges is carried out to prevent the pools becoming too shaded. The pools have all been tested for water quality and nutrient levels are extremely low, indicating little nitrogen run-off from arable fields.

A survey found that 14 different species of water boatman were present on his farm, including some that rely entirely on cow manure.

**Is the farm a well-run commercial operation and on what basis has this been assessed?**

The farm is family owned, 4th generation now – part of Loughton Estate back to 1720. It's a mixed farm with a closed herd which helps maintain a high level of biosecurity. He uses farm yard manure and slurry on the fields, so buys in little extra fertiliser. Applications decreased by over 80% following nutrient mapping. Most of his arable crops are grown as forage for the herd, negating the need to buy extra. This fits in well with environmental stewardship and low input crops. Robert has been quick to temporarily exploit the market in selling wheat when the price is high and buying in cheaper feed. The milk has a high protein content and all goes to a cheese farm in Shropshire. He has added some compound fertilisers this year to help improve yield further.

Robert states that environmental stewardship fits in well with his farming system and has great benefits for wildlife. He cannot understand why some farmers claim they can't afford to do it.



## **How has the farmer demonstrated they understand how the conservation action benefits the wildlife on the farm and shown enthusiasm for the conservation work undertaken?**

Robert put together his own application for HLS and carried out his own Farm Environment Plan. He consulted a range of organisations to determine what wildlife species are present on his land. Robert then talked with Natural England advisors and local seed suppliers to choose the options that will do best on his farm, rather than those options that are popular and pay better than others.

Whilst on a visit to the Allerton Project in Loddington, Robert came across a system to clean water using willows. He observed the techniques and then adapted it to work on his farm using reeds. A reed bed is used to clean water – water which drains from roofs and external yard goes downhill to a holding pool and then reeds remove nutrients. Reeds behind are noticeably 1-2 feet shorter and water visibly cleaner.

In one of the fields cut for silage Robert is working to improve its benefits for birds. Half is cut, a quarter is grazed and the whole field is monitored over winter to see what birds use it. The data are used to improve the quantity of food available for birds. He is keen to continually learn and adapt the options to gain maximum yield for birds and other wildlife.

Spring barley has been grown as an alternative to forage maize – yield as a forage crop was lower but numbers of nesting birds increased – further investigation is ongoing in order to find a viable balance in the future.

A range of nectar and pollen and wild bird mixes are located around the whole farm in order to form a mosaic of varied habitats.

## **How has the farmer been successful in maintaining, restoring and creating habitats on the farm?**

Robert fought hard to be accepted into HLS when funding was very low in his area - due to his belief that he could make a difference on his farm for wildlife.

All hedges on the farm are in ELS, enhanced ditch and hedge management and are internal cut every 3 years. Floristically enhanced margins (located on the south facing slopes) are controlled with spot treatment on weeds but the need for control has decreased over time.

Robert has placed pollen and nectar mix in soils which have a low fertility and manages them by cutting half and clearing half. Local students come to learn and help with the cutting and removal of pollen and nectar mix. The mixes work well in the farming practices as they square up the fields, and they have taken well as they are located in the right areas of the farm. Mixtures are varied in composition as one mix does not suit every soil type in each area of the farm.

Robert has created good feeding habitats for birds to use, used fertiliser to help grow wild bird seed mix as they are “a crop and should be treated like one”. He had a few issues with docks and thistles, and spot treats them if they become an issue otherwise he is happy to leave them for caterpillars and other wildlife to utilise.

Spring bean fields are undersown with clover and grass in order to minimise soil erosion once the crop is cut.

## **What future improvements does the farmer plan to make to further enhance the wildlife value of the farm?**

Robert would like to do more for lapwings and feels that one of his fields that is a temporary grassland for his cattle could be used better for lapwings. The field holds water and attracts lapwings both in winter and spring, and he is planning to install scrapes.

He would like to create more pollen and nectar mixtures now that he has had 6 years experience and feels he can manage more on his land.

Robert aims to thin out a woodland (removing fir) to create more light on the floor and replant with native species – ash, hazel and oak. He aims to create a ride through this woodland to enable visitors to observe another habitat and its benefits for wildlife.

Robert is investigating harvesting rainwater from the farm building to support his arable crops following a farm audit by LEAF in 2010 that indicated more work is required on water auditing and energy usage. He may also drill a bore hole in order to support his farms' water needs. He has also taken part in the CLA's CALM CO<sub>2</sub> project – again highlighting a need to reduce energy usage in the future. CO<sub>2</sub> level is high due to the cattle's methane production. He aims to tackle this by improving breeding and reducing time for calf-to-calf production.

Robert would like to re-install bee hives on the farm, because past colonies were destroyed by the Varroa virus.

## **Has the farmer demonstrated a willingness, and/or ability to successfully promote the conservation messages of their activities to others?**

The farm is a registered LEAF demonstration farm and Robert is hugely enthusiastic to promote what can be achieved on a mixed farm in his area. He hosts demonstration events for local farmers, RSPB dairy training courses and gives advice on cross compliance. Permissive access exists on the farm.

Robert continually promotes conservation by working with his local college and Harper Adams University. He gives talks to students about environmental management on farms and woodland management as he has woodlands on the farm.

Both primary and secondary schools visit the farm, and teacher training courses cover topics such as compiling risk assessments and teaching aspects of the curriculum on a farm. Robert promotes visits to other farms in the area.

He is the regional co coordinator for Open Farm Sunday and has taken part in this for the last 5 years, this year holding his event 2 weeks late due to other commitments. He is continually adapting and improving his own event in order to keep interest high and widen his appeal to the local population.

He is involved with the Let Nature Feed your Senses, a project aimed at getting disadvantaged groups to visit farms such as blind/deaf/dementia sufferers/wheelchair users who otherwise would not dream of visiting a farm. He finds these visits hugely rewarding.

The net area of overwintered stubbles on the farm is above the area prescribed by CFE – he uses these areas to showcase to other farmers as demonstration plots. He believes CFE has offered an opportunity to farmers to show they can be trusted to support wildlife, but is mindful that compulsory measures may return in the future.

In a year he hosts around 15–20 visits to his farm from various groups.

### **Summary (100 words max)**

Robert is very proud to “be a dairy farmer and be able to create habitats for wildlife on the farm”. He strongly believes that there is room for wildlife on a farm as well as production. The farm is diverse with a large range of different habitats supporting rich and varied wildlife. There is permissive access on the farm and people are actively encouraged to visit. Field sizes have changed little in the last 100 years and the hedgerows are rich and varied. Robert demonstrates a huge interest in farming and wildlife and is enthusiastic for farmers to get involved in ELS/HLS. He incorporates his own ideas into the management of the farm and considers wildlife when choosing the options available to him.