

**Farmer: Henry Edmunds**  
**County: Wiltshire**  
**Farming system: Mixed organic**  
**Farm size: 1,600HA**

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

### **Birds**

The organic system helps provide an abundance of invertebrate life during the breeding season, with thick species-rich hedgerows and strategically placed wide grass margins providing nest sites for many species including yellowhammer, corn bunting and grey partridge, and providing good hunting for the many barn owls and raptors on the farm. Strips of wild bird food mix are situated between arable crops and hedgerows and, along with scattered home-grown oats, provide essential over-winter food for corn bunting, linnet and yellowhammer, vast flocks of which are regularly seen through winter.

Areas of arable reversion are targeted to compliment and enhance areas of species-rich chalk grassland providing valuable feeding and breeding habitat for quail and skylark. Fallow ground is prepared in early spring especially for lapwing and the two or three pairs of stone-curlew that regularly breed. These areas are protected by electric fencing, and in combination with clover leys and adjacent sheep grazed grassland provide safe nesting and feeding areas for chicks. As a result, lapwing numbers have increased to 8 pairs and a mixed flock of 60 adults and young in 2012. A breeding bird survey in 2008 recorded 11 Red listed species including 47 pairs of yellowhammer, 30 pairs of skylark, 27 pairs of song thrush and 17 pairs of bullfinch, along with spotted flycatcher, turtle dove, corn bunting, grey partridge, house sparrow, linnet, lapwing, stone-curlew and two pairs of raven.

### **Butterflies**

Hedgerows are sympathetically managed especially for brown hairstreak, which only occur here and in a couple of other places in Wiltshire and Hampshire. The farm hosts an extraordinary number of butterfly and moth species, with 34 breeding butterfly species including Small and Adonis Blue, Dingy and Grizzled Skippers. Working with local conservation groups just over 450 moth species have been recorded, nearly 10% of which are classed as UK rarities.

### **Plants**

The Estate has its own variety of the forage legume Sainfoin which has been shown by the Game & Wildlife Conservation Trust to be more important for invertebrates than any other crop, in a study partly funded by the Estate. On the boundary of Salisbury Plain, the farms chalk grassland, both natural and reverted, creates a landscape scale link assisting the spread of species into the farmed landscape. Many fields currently under restoration are already showing positive results, with species such as Pyramidal Orchid and Fairy Flax present in the sward. The management plan to close-off areas of fields to grazing, add seed and reduce nutrients through taking hay cuts in others should see an increase in wild flowers in coming years.

Arable flora is similarly represented by chalk loving species; Fluellens, Small Toadflax, Corn Gromwell, Cornflower, Rough and Prickly Poppy, Fine-leaved Fumitory, Dense-flowered Fumitory and Red Hemp Nettle all flourish; seed of which Henry has sent to the Millennium Seed Bank. Martin's Ramping Fumitory was recently identified by Plantlife; as the largest population in the UK. Management of fallow plots and arable margins will ensure the spread of these species. The farm is also a trial site for the reintroduction of the endemic Interrupted Brome and Rye-Brome.

### **Other wildlife**

The grasslands, areas of nectar flower mix and floristically enhanced margins provide valuable sources of pollen for many insects, attracting 18 of the 23 species of bumblebee. The farm has a very good population of Hornet Robber-fly, which is common across the whole farm on cow dung as a result of the organic status. The large pond teems with wildlife, with nesting little grebe and masses of toads that gather to spawn every year creating a seething spectacle. Harvest Mice are present with Brown Hare common across the arable fields and the Common Lizard has recently seen a resurgence after few sightings for many years; a likely result of changing grazing management.

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

Henry's deep passion for the environment means that farming is always undertaken with wildlife in mind, and is carefully worked out so that no crops are sold off farm; this is the essence of sustainability. Fodder crops grown for the dairy cattle provide a rich display of colour and nectar throughout the summer of sainfoin, clovers and vetches. Winter oats suited to the organic conditions, suppress weeds and are grown as whole crop silage with vetch. The oats are also used as a nutritious supplement feed for the sheep in winter, where they are spread in the fields huge flocks of buntings and yellowhammers gather. Spring barley is grown as a fodder crop, with grain stored and rolled so it can be fed to the cattle, with enough grain usually stored to feed for a year, and the straw baled and used for bedding. Henry has developed the 'Cholderton mix' of grasses, plantain and clovers as good grazing for the cattle. This has recently begun to be supplemented by a wild flower mix providing a good crop of colour and pollen and nectar for many insects.

While the commercial entity comes from the dairy cattle the farm has to produce enough income to support the large number of staff working on the farm, playing a part as Cholderton always has done, in helping to create jobs for local people. Diversification has occurred with a woodland burial site, rented grazing, provision of rented premises for light industry and a farm shop all helping to boost the local economy.

### **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?**

Henry was closely involved in the HLS application process, ensuring the correct location of the options assisted by his vast knowledge of extant wildlife on the farm. Being the landowner and farm manager he is careful to ensure that the farm workers understand what needs to be done and why, every effort is made to ensure that species thrive; where corn buntings are nesting Henry will ensure that a wide area of crop is left for them.

Being an expert lepidopterist, keen ornithologist and all round naturalist, Henry's enthusiasm for nature is contagious. Henry has encouraged many local naturalist groups onto the farm, many of which undertake repeat visits to survey plants or insects.

Henry is dedicated to raising lapwing numbers to that of the distant past. Fallow ground created especially for lapwings is located adjacent to sheep grazed pasture, with grazing planned to coincide with when lapwings have chicks. Hours of watching these birds has given Henry great insight into their movements and needs, enabling him to time grazing to be most beneficial. To prevent ground predation of both lapwing and stone-curlew chicks Henry has protected nesting areas with electric fencing which he maintains is essential in the early days of conservation of a ground nesting species. Both species are increasing on the farm.

The programme of chalk grassland restoration has been targeted at delivering links across the wider landscape and this approach has benefited many species as shown by the increasing numbers of many species on the farm.

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

The downland reversion fields have been created by removing grazing during the summer months, ensuring a good balance of scrub and grassland to maintain species that depend on both and through the addition of wild flower seed. Keeping a close eye on the species that have been establishing, has allowed the addition of species sometimes missed from seed mixes. Where rabbit grazing of the downland, whilst good for some species, has hindered the establishment of others, Henry has developed his own method of ensuring their growth. Chicken wire panels framed with wood are put down over plant plugs to ensure their protection, several of these are deployed across the field and this has proved very successful for species such as Horseshoe Vetch, Wild Thyme and Devil's-bit Scabious; the latter hoping to attract Marsh Fritillary butterflies that are present nearby on Salisbury Plain.

Management this past winter has seen clearance of woodland glades and chalk hillside scrub and planting primroses and cowslips. This was targeted in areas of the farm where Henry knew of Duke of Burgundy Fritillary as a boy. Through painstakingly planting and watering to nurture the larval food plants; this butterfly has now been recorded in three separate areas across the farm.

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

Henry is keen to ensure the ongoing maintenance of the wildlife of the farm but is always striving to do more. Management effort will now turn to the woodlands to encourage more woodland butterflies such as Pearl-bordered and Silver-washed Fritillary, whilst continuing with the Duke project.

Work will also continue on the introduction of Barberry Carpet to the farm where existing stands of Barberry include what is thought to be the oldest bush in the UK.

The farm has regular contact with various wildlife experts and monitoring will ensure the management undertaken for HLS is proving successful or whether it requires adaptation. This

includes monitoring the target species and the increases in biodiversity brought about through the management. Should this management not appear to be working then advice will be actively sought.

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

Henry has always been a keen advocate of the stewardship schemes that he says have helped him to maintain and increase numbers of many farmland birds that are declining elsewhere. He is also keen to promote the ethos of sustainable and organic farming, and loves nothing more than to show people around Cholderton teaching them how they can make a difference on their farms. Visitors, from schools and colleges to wildlife trusts come from far and wide to enjoy the variety of habitats and wildlife; staff from the South Downs National Park were so inspired they are implementing some of the management they saw.

A very good website has been created ([www.cholderton-estate.co.uk](http://www.cholderton-estate.co.uk)) for use as an educational tool; the reader can learn about the history and wildlife of the estate, about what has been done for species and how it has helped, and also about what works in organic farming.

The success of the farm in maintaining an abundance of wildlife while running a commercial dairy unit and managing to maintain the important and rare gene pool of both Hampshire Downs sheep and the Cleveland Bay stud is testament to Henry's dedication, he encourages others to step up for nature as soon as they meet him.

Designated as a Site of Nature Conservation, Hampshire County Council used Cholderton to launch its Biodiversity Action Plan. The Estate was also used as a case study of only two farms selected in the book by S Burchett that states that 'the wildlife is as diverse as the farm business' in *The Introduction To Wildlife Conservation in Farming* (2011).