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HILDERSHAM GARDEN WILDLIFE QUESTIONNAIRE 2022

**INTERIM REPORT**  
OCTOBER/NOVEMBER 2022

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## Hildersham Garden Wildlife Questionnaire 2022

In September 2022, as part of its Nature Recovery Plan, Hildersham Parish Council launched a garden wildlife survey. Initially, the survey was advertised on the village website and in a local village magazine. At the same time, a survey leaflet drop was carried out to approx. ninety properties.

The survey questions requested information on the **habitats** and **wildlife features** present within gardens, as well as the presence of various **animal species/groups**. Basic location information, in the form of postcodes, was also collected to eventually enable a simple mapping exercise of some of the records provided. A copy of the full survey questionnaire is attached.

### Results

Following the September/October leaflet drop, responses have so far been received from twelve households (although some households have indicated that they are hoping to return leaflets when time permits: hence the interim nature of this present report).

Based on the number of households engaged via the leaflet drop, the survey had a 13.3% response rate (similar to other exercises of this sort carried out in other villages).

### Garden Size

<b>Table 1</b>	<b>Garden Sizes</b>
Small	5
Medium	4
Large	2
Very large	1 (6 acres)

### Garden Type

<b>Table 2</b>	<b>Garden Type</b>
Lawn	12
Flower bed	11

<b>Table 2</b>	<b>Garden Type</b>
Meadow patch	7
Vegetable patch	6

### **Habitats and Wildlife Features**

Householders were asked to indicate the presence of four different garden habitats (lawns, meadows, flower beds and vegetable patches) and, using picture prompts, to give a broad indication of how these were managed. They were then asked to indicate which of nineteen additional habitats and wildlife features were also present. Apart from providing an idea about how many features were present in gardens, these questions provided an opportunity to attempt to estimate habitat complexity / heterogeneity by adapting and simplifying a method set out in Young et al (2019).<sup>1</sup>

Below is a summary of the basic facts and figures.

### **Habitats**

Lawns and flowerbeds were the most widespread, with both present in most gardens. Meadows were the least widespread habitat: although it is not necessarily easy to see where a wild lawn ends and a neat meadow begins.

### **Number of Gardens with Types of Habitat**

<b>Table 3</b>	<b>Gardens and Habitats</b>	
<b>Type</b>	<b>Description</b>	<b>Number</b>
<b>Meadow</b>		
	Neat	1
	Intermediate	4
	Wild	4
<b>Lawn</b>		
	Neat	4

<sup>1</sup> Christopher Young, David Frey, Marco Moretti, Nicole Bauer 2019. Research Note: [Garden-owner reported habitat heterogeneity predicts plant species richness in urban gardens](#). *Landscape and Urban Planning*, Volume 185, Pages 222-227

<b>Table 3</b>	<b>Gardens and Habitats</b>	
<b>Type</b>	<b>Description</b>	<b>Number</b>
	Intermediate	4
	Wild	6
<b>Flower bed</b>		
	Neat	2
	Intermediate	3
	Profuse	4
<b>Vegetable patch</b>		
	Neat	
	Intermediate	
	Wild	4

Only four respondents thought their lawns were intensively mown, which is encouraging. Hopefully, as part of the nature recovery plan and “No Mow May” initiative, more people will consider allowing grass (and herbage) to grow a little more.

### **Wildlife Features**

<b>Table 4</b>	<b>Wildlife Features</b>
<b>Feature</b>	<b>Quantity</b>
Bird feeder	8
Bird bath	8
Bird nest box	7
Bat box/house	2
Hedgehog house/Garden access	5
Insect hotel	3

<b>Table 4</b>	<b>Wildlife Features</b>
<b>Feature</b>	<b>Quantity</b>
Bee nests (holes in ground)	5
Wildlife pond	4
Fish pond	1
Compost heap	3
Piles of deadwood	4
Piles of stone/rocks	5
Wild area	
Gravel	6
Small trees/shrubs	12
Large trees	8
Fruit trees	9
Hedges (tidy)	8
Hedges (untidy)	4
Drystone wall	
Other: river (Granta)	2
Toad abode/similar	2

Evidently **birds** are fairly well catered for, with two-thirds of responders having feeders, and just under two-thirds having bird baths and nest boxes.

About two-fifths of respondents are helping **hedgehogs**, but fewer than a quarter of people have **insect hotels** (very cheap, easy to install, and readily available in garden centres, etc.), and only two households had a **bat box**.

One-third of responders had a **wildlife pond**. Nature recovery plans in some other villages highlights these as a key habitat on which to focus efforts.

Three-quarters of responders had **fruit trees**. (Hildersham looked at the question of a community orchard in 2009, but was unable to take it forward).

### Birds nesting in houses

One household had **swallows**, **blue-tits** and **jackdaws** nesting in their roof (or garage). There are also informal observations of **swallows/swifts** nesting in neighbours' outbuildings.

<b>Table 5</b>	<b>Birds nesting in houses</b>
<b>Species</b>	<b>Number of observations</b>
Blue-tits	1
Housemartins (formerly)	1
Jackdaws	1
Sparrows	1
Swallows	1

### Birds nesting in gardens

<b>Table 6</b>	<b>Birds nesting in gardens</b>
<b>Species</b>	<b>Number of observations</b>
Blackbird	4
Bluetits, great-tits	3
Dunnock	3
Pigeon	2
Robin	5
Songthrush	1
Sparrow	1 (possibly)
Wagtail	1
Wren	3

## Birds observed in gardens

(Endangered or struggling species are noted in **red** and **orange**; there might be others).

<b>Table 7</b>	<b>Birds observed in gardens</b>
<b>Species</b>	<b>Number of observations</b>
Blackbird	9
Bluetits, great-tits, coal-tits, long-tailed tits	5
Buzzard	2
Chaffinch	3
Chicken (domestic)	1
Chiffchaff	1
Collared dove	4
Corvids (rooks, jackdaws, magpies)	3
Dunnock	3
Egret	1
Goldfinch	4
Goose	1
Greenfinch	1
Heron	1
House martin	1
Kestrel	3
Kingfisher	1
Mallard	3
Merlin	1
Moorhen	2
Nuthatch	2



<b>Table 7</b>	<b>Birds observed in gardens</b>
<b>Species</b>	<b>Number of observations</b>
Partridge (inc. Red-legged partridge)	3
Pheasant	2
Pigeon	5
Red kite	1
Robin	6
Sparrow	2
<b>Spotted flycatcher</b>	2 ( in the vicinity of Town Green, and the bridge)
Starling	1
Swallow	1
Swifts *	2
Treecreeper	2
Wagtail	3
Woodpecker (Green)	1
Woodpecker (Great Spotted)	4
Woodpecker (Lesser Spotted)	1
Wren	4

\* **Swifts** are in trouble. The UK has seen numbers plummeting, with a 53% decline between 1995 and 2016. Anyone anxious to help them is requested to put up a swift nestbox before the birds' arrival at the end of April.

There are reported problems with former populations of water-birds in Hildersham - such as **moorhens, mallards and coots** – increasingly falling victim to predators such as foxes and domestic cats.

**Owls**, although noted in previous years, did not seem to be mentioned at all. Nor, sadly, were **cuckoos**.

## Mammals

<b>Table 8</b>	<b>Mammals</b>
<b>Species</b>	<b>Number of observations</b>
Badger	2 (and anecdotal evidence of badgers on Back Road near Pumping Station)
Bat (in roost/flying) (rarer)	4
Foxes	2 (1 dead, Town Green)
Hedgehogs (now rarer)	2
Mice	3
Mole	1
Muntjac	1
Otters	2
Rabbits	1
Rats	2
Shrews	3
Stoat	2
Squirrels	4
Weasel	2

Although only two households reported having a bat roost, it was encouraging to see that some had **bats** flying around in their gardens (although fewer than in former years).

Anecdotal evidence reveals that there is no discernible shortage of **mice, muntjacs, rabbits, rats or grey squirrels** (although, sadly, no red squirrels).

**Hedgehog** numbers, reported from the top and centre of the village, and in the vicinity of Town Green, are smaller than in years past. This might be partly the result of increasing

numbers of **badgers** on the Back Road, but perhaps also to changes in horticultural design and practice in some gardens and grassy areas. <sup>2</sup>

### Reptiles and Amphibians

<b>Table 9</b>		<b>Reptiles and Amphibians</b>
<b>Species</b>		<b>Number of observations</b>
Crustaceans (crayfish)		1
Fish (trout, lamprey)		1
Grass snakes (less common)		3
Lizard (less common)		1
Newts (common)		2
Frogs, toads (rare)		5

In recent years, **frogs and toads** have been seen to suffer from various diseases, e.g., ranavirus, that has caused their numbers to decline. Here in Hildersham, they are certainly less frequently observed than formerly.

### Insects

<b>Table 10</b>		<b>Insects</b>
<b>Species</b>		<b>Number of observations</b>
<b>Bees:</b>		
Bumblebee (1 solitary white-tailed banded)	Leafcutter bees	2
Honeybee	Mason bees	
<b>Beetles</b>		2
<b>Butterflies:</b>		

<sup>2</sup> Although it is of note that at least one householder in the area who, trying to reverse recent urban-inspired changes implemented by the previous occupants, is now attempting to replace lost grass and trees.

<b>Table 10</b>		<b>Insects</b>
<b>Species</b>		<b>Number of observations</b>
Brimstone	Peacock	Witnessed by a small number of interested households (mainly, although not primarily, in the vicinity of the river)
Comma	Red Admiral	
Gatekeeper	Skipper	
Holly Blue	Small White	
Large White	Speckled Wood	
Painted Lady	Tortoiseshell	
<b>Dragonflies:</b> Common darter		3
<b>Grasshoppers (rare)</b>		1
<b>Hoverflies</b>		3
<b>Moths:</b>		(1 household practises moth-trapping)
Hawkmoth		
Hummingbird hawkmoth		
<b>Slugs</b>		2
<b>Snails</b>		2
<b>Spiders</b>		2

Relatively few households had **dragonflies** (or **damselies**) in their gardens. Although breeding is linked to water, these insects are very mobile. However, if anything could be done to increase the number of ponds in the village, their numbers might be increased.

One resident has noted an absence of [clegs](#), **thunderflies** and **mosquitoes**.

## **Bees**

Anecdotal observations from a garden in another part of **East Anglia**:

This year we got guinea pigs, and we used them to graze our back lawn rather than mowing. This created different sward heights as we rotated them round the garden, and it allowed more flowers to come through where patches of grass were left undisturbed for longer. In one of these patches there was an old mouse burrow, and

for the first time we had **Buff-tailed bumblebees** nesting in it. In addition, we ended up piling a lot of used guinea pig hay around our compost bins, and we subsequently had two more species of bumblebee (**Early and Common Carder**) nesting in it. Added to that, we rake some of our front lawn bare and then only mow it once a year, and as a result we get nest burrows from at least **four different species of solitary bees**, including **mining bees** and the **nomad bees** that parasitise them. We also have a number of old drill holes in the walls of our house that we've never filled in, and some of these get occupied by **mason bees** and **leafcutter bees**. Leaving bits of our garden scruffy really does seem to work.

**Grasshoppers** were recorded in only one instance. These insects are more closely associated with habitats that have suffered less disturbance (less intensively mown lawns, wilder flower beds, scruffy corners, etc.)

### **Further general observations:**

From Cambridgeshire & Bedfordshire Wildlife Trust:

... there are three SSSIs, Furze Hills, Hildersham Wood and Alder Carr, as well as three County Wildlife Sites, Shelford-Haverhill Disused Railway Line, Furze Hills roadside verge and the River Cam. The river and disused railway form the main corridors through the parish. Looking at neighbouring parishes there are not many sites that connect to [Hildersham] sites. Overall, the parish is approx. 617 Ha and the SSSIs / CWS cover 22 Ha, which is only 3.6% of the area. This is only just over about half of the county average.

1. **Three SSSIs:**

- [Furze Hills](#) (on an esker ridge):
- [Hildersham Wood](#)
- and [Alder Carr](#) (see [the website.](#))

2. **Three County Wildlife Sites:**

- **Shelford-Haverhill Disused Railway Line** - it is believed that this refers to the line running across the (gravelled) road on the Abington side of Hildersham some few hundred yards off the Pampisford Road corner, and before Windpump Cottage, CB21 6AY); possibly the old railway line might be the continuous line of banking/hedging/trees visible on Google Maps.
- **Furze Hills roadside verge** - locally called the Back Road. ([PRV list link here](#) - scroll down. The Hildersham Protected Verge is S21, pg. 1 TL552 485 - TL550 487).

## Volunteering

A dozen or so residents have indicated an interest in volunteering in connection with the Hildersham Nature Recovery Plan. It is hoped that it will be possible to follow up on this interest.

## Conclusions

Organising the questionnaire has been a useful exercise and it has provided some interesting insights into the garden wildlife present within the parish: although, with only some 13% of properties responding, meaningful conclusions are more problematic. (We realise, of course, that some residents might still complete and return questionnaires: in which case revisions will be made to the report in tandem with future findings on verges, etc.)

Nevertheless, the overall picture has become a little clearer. There is a surprising variety of **birdlife** (although numbers will be greatly diminished from decades past), some of which figure on the [List of UK BAP Priority Birds \(2007\)](#). There is also a variety of **mammals**, some appearing on the [List of UK BAP Priority Terrestrial Mammals \(2007\)](#) (although, again, numbers will be down from what they were even at the end of the last century).

Obviously, there is still much work to do before further conclusions can be reached, and an informative map produced. In order to widen the database available to the HNRP, we are now proposing to try and gather further information and data in connection with **public land** (verges, greens, etc.), and with **larger areas of land** in private ownership not normally accessible to the public.

Meanwhile, we would continue to suggest that, in line with [Government rulings on the duty of public bodies towards biodiversity](#), strong weedkiller not be used; and invasive procedures such as grass-cutting in public areas be kept to a minimum.

## Acknowledgements

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Mike Horne, Project Co-ordinator, [PECT](#)

Finally, thanks to Cllrs. Mark Logan and Darren Long of Hildersham PC (and also to Mrs. Paula Harper, Clerk) for administrative help with producing the questionnaire.

**\*\*STOP PRESS\*\***

From a neighbouring village (The **Linton News** (November 2022) ([pg. 5, Country Matters](#)):

A **Natural History GCSe** will be available in September 2025 ...

Pupils will have the opportunity:

1. to study the detail of specific organisms and their environments
2. to develop knowledge of the forms, functions and behaviour of wildlife through the study of real plants and animals across a range of settings
3. to develop an understanding of critical interdependencies and relationships with other species and between specific organisms and their environment, locally, nationally and internationally

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(HNRP volunteers, Garden Questionnaire respondents, and [J.M. Kelly](#))

E. & O.E.