

## FOCUS ON BIODIVERSITY J HAWLEY AND SONS

Located just outside Melton Mowbray, Leicestershire, Julia and Ian Hawley have created an [oasis for wildlife](#). With only minimal investment they have adapted their farming strategy to be as environmentally friendly as possible, with new projects always on the horizon. By sharing their farm with visitors and local interest groups, their approach can be used to teach the community of the importance of looking after our countryside. In this case study, Julia talks about their award-winning work...



- 300 acre farm near **Melton Mowbray**
- Farm home to River Eye **SSSI** and several Local Wildlife Sites, as well as rare plants
- Nearly **100 bird** species recorded on the farm
- **CSS**, now **HLS** contributions to cost
- **40** groups visit each year

THE DETAIL

### What is your background in farming?

I didn't grow up on a farm, although I was very interested in land management so did a BSc (Jt Hons) in Agriculture and Forestry at Bangor, backed up with several years of mixed farming work. I was lucky enough to marry a farmer - Ian's family have been here since the 1880s. I worked off-farm as a farm consultant for 14 years, but fitted in conservation work on the farm around that.

### What is your farming ethos/strategy?

To practice science based modern food production alongside sensitive environmental management - and to enjoy it! We have two sorts of farming - a small but high input/output Holstein herd which requires high quality silage leys for cutting and some aftermath grazing, but much of the farm is managed on a more extensive basis, working with the heritage and wildlife that we have here.

The farm has the River Eye SSSI running through it – our river meadows are too far away for the milkers and water is impounded on some of the land to protect Melton Mowbray from flooding. Most of the old grass is unfertilised and is grazed by sheep and our Angus



cross cattle, as well as the dairy heifers and dry cows, with 12 acres of old hay meadows.

### **Why do you think it is important to protect and promote wildlife on the farm?**

Wildlife is very vulnerable if it is restricted to isolated pockets - it has to have a wider range of habitat and farmland can provide a lot of this. Most of the countryside is commercial farmland not nature reserves and if we all do our bit for wildlife on our patch it makes a massive difference on a national basis. I don't want to live in a countryside bereft of birdsong, butterflies and hedges and I don't expect anyone else to either.

### **How do you increase and maintain biodiversity?**

My starting point was to safeguard the existing natural assets which my husband's family had retained. As well as the SSSI, we have several Local Wildlife Sites, a number of rare plants and nearly 100 species of birds have been recorded, due to the large range of habitats on our 300 acres.

I work on the basis of understanding the requirements of different species and then doing my best to provide it. So we have some open grassland areas where meadow pipits and skylarks nest, but also smaller 3-5 acre fields with a range of hedgerow heights and cutting regimes for yellowhammer, bullfinches and others.

We have then created additional habitat, for example, rough grassland and wildflower margins, bird seed areas, small field corner shrub and tree plantings, and bird boxes.

### **What financial inputs are required to maintain a wildlife-friendly farm?**

As little or as much as you want! We have been very fortunate in being supported initially through Countryside Stewardship and now HLS. It has definitely enabled us to do more of the costlier options, for example, bird seed and pollen/nectar areas which are replacing wheat and capital work such as hedge laying - many of our hedges are very old and species rich.

But other things take little if any financial input and as long as someone is interested and can spend a bit of time then can be easily achieved - for example growing my own plug plants from home-saved seed to

enrich the flora in the hay meadows, leaving the berries on the hedges for birds and changing the cutting to ensure plenty of blossom for pollinating insects.

### **Do you see any financial return on your investment?**

There are some elements where there probably is a benefit but it is hard to quantify, for example, a healthy invertebrate population helps with pest control in the wheat. The amenity value of our farm will also have increased significantly. There is no value that can be put on the satisfaction of seeing, for example, barn owls using a nest box you have put up, or butterflies in the hay meadows.



### **How important is it to teach the fundamentals of wildlife and farming to local groups and the community?**

I engage with about 40 groups a year and see it as essential - we manage the countryside that produces the food we all eat and a landscape that is seen by millions every day. We also receive public money and I have yet to meet a member of the public who is unhappy with some of that being spent on wildlife and landscape conservation.

Most are amazed at how complex land management is, how scientifically we approach things, how we have to balance what may be competing needs. Many are also very badly informed through the media on farming and food production issues and on how farmers manage environmental assets and are genuinely delighted that a working farm can support such a range of wildlife.

**For advice and information on how to apply this approach to your own farm, take a look at [FACTSHEET 22: FOCUS ON BIODIVERSITY](#)**

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