

**BACK
FROM THE
BRINK**



Friends in the Fields

A companion guide to help you explore habitats while wandering through fields

Do you want to know more?

You can find lots of resources about farmland wildlife, for all ages and abilities, at plantlife.org.uk including more about magnificent meadows on the Meadows' Hub meadows.plantlife.org.uk. You can find out more about invertebrates by visiting buglife.org.uk.

Try developing the skills you've learnt about cornfield flowers by downloading the [Rare Arable Flowers App](#) or keep track of your wildlife sightings on [iRecord](#).

Design/illustrations by evansgraphic.co.uk



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Where can I find Friends in the Fields?

All living things need somewhere to live with food and shelter. Different plants live in different places. Animals, including invertebrates, have adapted to specific **habitats**. Together, the plants and animals make-up an ecosystem.

Farms can have lots of different habitats such as crops, flowery margins and fields, grass fields, hedgerows, ponds and ditches. These different habitats can support lots of wildlife with many different species making them **biodiverse**.

What Farmland Habitats will I find?

When you are wandering through the countryside, here are some of the habitats that you will see where **farmers' friends** live.

How many can you see? Tick them off when you recognise them.



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Flower and seed rich margins. These can be found along field edges and containing flowering plants as well as some rarer specialists. Having different types of flowers can encourage lots of different types of **farmers' friends**, including pollinators.

Wild flower meadow. These flower-filled grasslands are important for all invertebrates and are home to many **farmers' friends**. They can provide pollen and nectar from spring to autumn depending on the types of flowers present.

Boundary features. Hedgerows, dry stone walls and banks are important to connect habitats together providing homes for many **farmers' friends**. The grass margins underneath can also provide a refuge when crops are being harvested.

Wet ditches, streams and pools. These habitats provide homes for many **farmers' friends** to complete their life cycle and can support a wide range of farmland wildlife.

Habitat

The natural home, or environment, where a plant or animal lives

More habitats

More biodiversity

More friends to lend a helping hand

Biodiversity

The word is a short version of biological diversity and means the variety of plant and animal life in a habitat or landscape

How do Habitats Help?

Habitats within and around fields connecting different parts of the farm together encourage various types of **farmers' friends** to call them home. They do essential jobs like predation, pollination, parasitism and composting. In any habitat there are different **food chains** that are linked together to form food webs.

Food chain

A network of links between organisms that eat one another transferring nutrients and energy

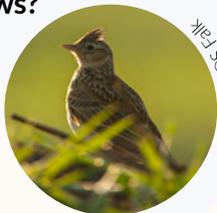
Can you link the **farmers' friends** in this simple arable food chain below using arrows?

Ground beetle



©Roger Labbeitt

Skylark



©S.Falk

Marmalade Hoverfly



©M.F.S

Aphids



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Crop margin



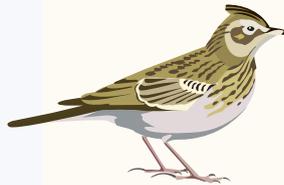
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Noisy Neighbours

Farmland and arable fields with different habitats will have a colourful variety of farmers friends throughout the year. Spring and summer are the best times to discover them.

Take a few moments to stand still on your wander.

How many different sounds can you hear? Do you think it could be one of these?



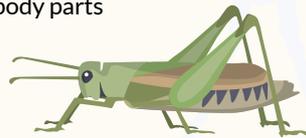
Skylark feed on the seeds and leaves of flowering plants as well as crops and insects. They sing their long song while flying up to hover and back down again!

Hoverfly adults pollinate and some of their larvae predate aphids that can damage crops. They can be seen most of the year and sound a bit like the hum of bees.



Bumblebees are fabulous pollinators. Watch them visiting flowers gathering pollen to feed their larvae. They have a distinctive buzz when flying.

Grasshoppers eat mainly plants and seeds while **bush-crickets** are mostly carnivorous or omnivorous. Their calls are produced by rubbing body parts together and can sound like a squeaking bicycle. Their sounds are also ultrasonic and can be picked-up on echolocation detectors!



Finding Farmers' Friends in the Fields

Abundant and diverse habitats contain a healthy variety of farmers' friends, supported by a wide variety of plants. Some of which are rather rare and special.



On your wandering through the fields, can you spot any invertebrates in the different habitats?

Crop



Blue rove beetle



Ladybird larvae



Marmalade hoverfly



Aphids

What is pollination?

Pollination is essential for plants to produce fruit and seeds. Flowering plants produce sticky pollen that clings to the bodies of insects. The insects transfer the pollen to other plants of the same species and the pollen fertilises the ovary producing a seed which can grow into a new plant.

Beetle bank



A ground beetle *Harpalus affinis*



7-spot ladybird



Millet's downy-back beetle



Pill woodlouse

Field boundaries - hedge



7-spot ladybird larvae



Common scorpion fly



Gatekeeper

Arable margins



6-spot burnet moth



Grey-spotted hoverfly



Common red soldier beetle



Thick-legged flower beetle



Garden bumblebee

Flowerly meadow



Bloody-nosed cecite



Common carder bee



Red-tailed bumblebee



Marbled white



Beautiful bumblebees

Bees have actually got 5 eyes! Two either side of their head and three mini eyes on top! They see in patterns which helps identify plants and other bees. They also have a superpower of not just seeing colour but also ultraviolet light. This makes certain flowers stand out and attractive encouraging them to visit them!

Plants are perfect

Flowering plants use different methods to encourage insects to visit them. Some have attractive colours that attract insects, others have an obvious 'landing target' inviting them to land, or are strongly scented. Can you find flowers or plants that are similar?



Marvelous and midges!

Occurring in almost every continent and habitat these insects are vital components of our ecosystem. They are aquatic composters, important predators, pollinators, including cocco, and a primary food source for many other invertebrates, birds and mammals.

Wet ditches and ponds



Tiger hoverfly



Pond skater



Emerald damselfly



Dance fly



Tree bumblebee