Feeling Inspired about Arable?

Why not tell us what you have discovered? We would love to see what you have found. Share your photos on social media tagging @naturebftb and @love_plants, email colourinthemargins@plantlife.org.uk or log it on iRecord.

Do you want to know more?

You can find lots of resources about arable wildlife, for all ages and abilities, at plantlife.org.uk. Try developing the skills you have learnt by downloading the Rare Arable Flowers App.

BACK FROM THE BRINK

Colour in the Margins

We are a Back from the Brink partnership project working to conserve the wildlife unique to arable farmland.

We want to raise the profile of England's threatened arable habitat by inspiring people to discover and celebrate it with us!

Find out more by visiting naturebftb.co.uk

HERITAGE FUND

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Awarding funds from POSTCODE GREEN TRUST

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BACK FROM THE BRINK

Friends in the Fields

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

Where can I find Friends in the Fields?

All living things need somewhere to survive 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.

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

More habitats → **More biodiversity** → **More friends to lend a helping hand**

Habitat
The different natural environments where an animal lives

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

What Farmland Habitats will I find?

When you are wandering through the countryside, especially in arable fields, 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.

©Cath Shellswell

Flower and seed rich margins. These are often along field edges and contain native flowering plants as well as some rarer specialists. Having different types of flowers can encourage lots of different types of farmers friends, including pollinators.

©Suzanne Burgess

Low-input crops. These often flowery crops are important for all of the invertebrates with native flowers that are visited and home to many farmers friends. Other arable farmland features include, wild bird seed mixes, skylark plots and beetle banks.

©Dave E Smith

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.

©Gary Rogers CC BY-SA 2.0

Wet ditches, streams and pools. These habitats provide homes for many farmers friends to complete their life cycle and can be the most diverse spots on farmland for invertebrates.

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?

©S. Falk

Skylark

©Cath Shellswell

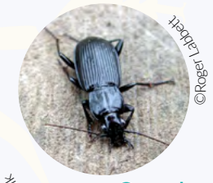
Crop margin

© Sascha Kohlmann - CC BY-SA 2.0

Aphids

©S. Falk

Marmalade Hoverfly



©Roger Lubbock

Ground beetle

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 and **crickets** like to eat grass and are food for some insect predators like beetles and birds. 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

Arable farmland is not just about growing crops! 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 can spot any of invertebrates in the different habitats?

Crop


©Katja Schulz CC BY 2.0

Blue Rove Beetle


©CC BY 2.0

Ladybird larvae


©S.Falk

Marmalade Hoverfly


©S. Rae CC BY 2.0

Aphids

What is pollination?

It is an important part of a plants lifecycle to make more plants. 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.

Flowery margins


©Andrew Whitehouse

6-spot Burnet Moth


©S.Falk

Grey-spotted Hoverfly


©CC BY-SA 2.0

Common Red Soldier Beetle


©Peter Hayes

Thick-legged Flower Beetle

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!

Flowery meadow


©Matt Shardlow

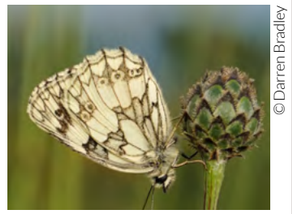
Bloody-nosed Beetle


©S.Falk

Common Carder Bee


©S.Falk

Honeybee


©Darren Bradley

Marbled White

Beetle bank


©John Walters

Brush-thighed Seed-eater


©Pjon Mold

7-spot Ladybird


©Frank Kohler

Mellets Downy Back Beetle


©Matt Shardlow

Pill Woodlouse

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 mosquitoes 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 cocoa, and a primary food source for many other invertebrates, birds and mammals.

Field boundaries - hedge


©S.Rae CC BY 2.0

7-spot Ladybird larvae


©S.Falk

Common Scorpion Fly


©Dan TP

Gatekeeper


©Björn S - CC BY-SA 2.0

Tree Bumblebee

Wet ditch and ponds


©Dan TP

Tiger Hoverfly


©Scott Shanks

Pond Mud Snails


©Darren Bradley

Emerald Damselfly


©S.Falk

Dance Fly