



## **Fair to Nature Farmer of the Year 2014**

Graham Birch has been crowned Fair to Nature Farmer of the Year at Birdfair in Rutland Water. BBC's Mike Dilger presented Graham with his award during the Fair to Nature breakfast where conservationists, farmers and wild bird enthusiasts met to hear more about how the best of Britain's farmers contribute to the protection of wildlife at the same time as managing profitable food production

The awards were open to all Fair to Nature farmer members and four shortlisted entrants were put to public vote in an online poll. Presenting the award, Mike Dilger said "It is really encouraging to see modern industrial food production that can also be truly Fair to Nature. All the finalists were able to demonstrate effective measures on their farms that have been proven to protect our natural wildlife habitats."

Fair to Nature farmers are required to manage their farms according to a specific protocol which includes protecting and managing at least 10% of the farm for the benefit of wildlife.

### **The Winner**



**Graham Birch – Dorset**

Graham, along with his farm manager Scott Bagwell, has created and now manages various habitats but he does have some firm favourites on the farm. Perhaps it's no wonder that one of these happens to be the glorious Dorset chalk grassland that's abundant with wildflowers and as a result supports a fantastic array of butterflies and moths.

Beautiful Pyramidal, Early Purple and Bee Orchids are to be found in his wildflower meadows, encouraged by a late hay cut followed by sheep grazing.

Graham rightly believes that butterflies and moths are a good indicator of the health of his farm and has been working with a local representative of Butterfly Conservation to gain an understanding of the health of these insect populations. Graham firmly believes that this is an indication of where his conservation actions are working.

The habitats he's created look very good and this is reflected in the results from recent surveys. 83 moth species have been recorded from light trap surveys on the farm and at least 31 species of butterfly! Notable butterfly species include Dingy and Grizzled Skippers, Green and Purple Hairstreaks, Adonis Blue and Silver-washed Fritillary.



*Adonis Blue*

The wildflower, nectar flower and bird seed plots have all made a noticeable difference to small birds on the farm and winter flocks of Linnets and Corn Buntings can be seen over the plots searching for seed whilst during the summer months Grey Partridge, Corn Buntings and Skylarks can be found foraging in insect rich managed habitats. Barn Owls also benefit from the network of wildflower and tussocky grass margins across the farm along with the erection of numerous Barn Owl nesting boxes.

Graham approaches the conservation work on the farm in the same way he does the regular commercial farming practices and the hard work and commitment of his farm manager, Scott, has been pivotal in the high quality of the wildlife habitats.

Graham takes the opportunity to promote his Fair to Nature practices by opening the farm gates to visitors on Open Farm Sunday.



## The Runners up



### **Andrew Elms – West Sussex**

Nestled in the South Downs, Lordington Lavender ([www.lordingtonlavender.co.uk](http://www.lordingtonlavender.co.uk)) was established in 2002 by Andrew Elms. After selling his dairy herd he was looking for a way to diversify and decided that lavender would be a unique and exciting alternative. The crop is grown with conservation of the environment very much in mind. No fertilisers or pesticides are used on the lavender, and it has become haven for wildlife.

Andrew manages areas of his farm specifically for wildlife through over wintered stubbles (the stems of the harvested crop left in the field over winter) and wild bird mixes to provide food for birds over the winter, and some well managed nectar flower and wildflower areas for insects. He has also created habitats as part of Operation Turtle Dove by sowing plant species that will provide seed food for these endangered birds. Additionally, beetle banks for small mammals, Barn Owls and over wintering insects have been created in larger fields.

Andrew and his team hold annual open days and give various external talks on the value of Fair to Nature farming practices and the need to conserve and enhance threatened wildlife.

Working with the RSPB, who have conducted bird surveys on the farm, Andrew has been delighted to learn his efforts are being rewarded with purring Turtle Dove this year along with Yellowhammers, Linnets, and Skylark. Butterflies and bumblebees adorn the wildflower areas created alongside the insect rich crop of lavender.





### **Ian Crabtree – Derbyshire**

Surrounded by the natural beauty of the Derbyshire Dales, in the quiet, picturesque and historic village of Shirley, you will find Ian's mixed dairy and arable farm.

Wild flower margins and nectar flower plots provide a boon for a variety of insects. On Ian's farm these are located close to unharvested conservation headlands (the outer part of the cereal crop) that receive no fertilisers or insecticides and limited herbicides, providing a haven for many species of insects due to the variety of plants. The area is then left unharvested to feed birds in the winter in addition to areas of over wintered stubbles and specific wild bird seed mixes.

Grassland fields are managed with a strict regime to benefit wildlife by creating variable sward structures that provide food and shelter for small mammals.

Nesting habitats are created for birds in the middle of fields as well as at the edges by cultivating areas that are then left undisturbed over the summer months. These provide nesting opportunities for birds like Lapwings and Skylarks, while giving these birds important access to the crop for foraging.

Tree Sparrows, Grey Partridge and Yellowhammer are regularly found foraging on the stubbles and specifically managed unharvested crops in the winter months, and foraging for insects in the nectar flower and wildflower areas during the summer months. Barn Owls can often be seen hunting in these areas at both ends of the day.

Ian takes an integrated view of wildlife; not only does he appreciate its intrinsic beauty and value but he also recognises its long-term commercial benefits in creating a wealth of predatory insects and birds that can control crop pests too.

Ian promotes the work of Fair to Nature farming practices to other farmers by hosting farm walks and discussing the value of creating and how to manage important wildlife habitats.





### **Charles Porter – Bedfordshire**

Charles manages 181ha of farmland in Bedfordshire and uses contractors to carry out the commercial cropping practices, enabling him to spend more time on the conservation management of the farm. Charles takes great care to ensure that the arable farming doesn't encroach on the wildlife areas and as he states "my conservation margins are sacrosanct" it gives you an indication of the care and effort that Charles happily puts into making the wildlife areas work.

Six separate areas of wild bird seed mixtures, plus a mixture of unharvested crop species provide for farmland birds in the winter months. Additionally, since these can be exhausted of seed late in the winter, Charles also scatters grain within them to provide a further boost to hungry birds.

Insects are encouraged in four blocks of sown nectar flower mixes where bumblebees, hoverflies, butterflies and other insects abound, in turn providing food for insect eating birds including young Corn Buntings.

Along with sown areas of insect rich habitats Charles has created and managed wildflower meadows of 14ha now in their 11th year of reversion and rich in wildflowers.

Adding to the diversity of habitats, ponds have been created or enhanced across the farm with seven ponds now supporting a wealth of life including dragonflies and damselflies, three of the ponds now support Great Crested Newts.

Grey Partridge, Lapwing, Spotted Flycatcher, Linnet, Reed Bunting, Yellowhammer and Corn Bunting can all be found on the farm and benefit from the diversity and quality of habitats.

Each year, Charles hosts several farm walks for interested groups, such as the local Wildlife Trust and Natural History Society, and this gives him the opportunity to explain the work of being a Fair to Nature farmer. In addition Charles also takes this approach on the road by giving talks to various groups about farming and the environment.

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16<sup>th</sup> August 2014

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### Notes to editors

Companies in the 'Conservation Grade' partnership include:

- **Allinson Flour** – accredited Nature Friendly Farming plain and self-raising flours.
- **Jordans** – uses Conservation Grade cereals in 80 per cent of its products including Muesli and Crunchy Oats ranges.
- **The Vitacress Group** – Steve's Leaves product range including Pea Shoots & Baby Leaves, Baby Watercress & Little Leaves, Wild Red Rocket & Milder Leaves, Fennel Tops & Sweet Leaves and Wasabi Rocket & Other Fab Leaves [www.stevesleaves.co.uk](http://www.stevesleaves.co.uk)
- **VHB Herbs** a range of fresh cut and potted herbs
- **Wight Salads'** Isle of Wight range of fresh tomatoes and tomato-based products
- **European Oat Millers** – supplying ingredients to major food companies for nearly 30 years; accredited oats, wheat and barley grown for Jordans is processed at their Bedford mill.
- **Norfolk Quail** - a family-run farming business specialising in high welfare quail meat and eggs
- **Abbotts Farm Eggs** – free range eggs from hens living on Fair to Nature accredited farms
- **Honeychop Horse Feeds** – oat straw used as an ingredient in all feeds.
- **Lordington Lavender** – a range of luxury goods, including essential oils and soaps, all from the French Provençal lavender variety Maillette grown on their own farm.
- **Honeyfields** – a range of wild bird food including grains and seeds grown on Conservation Grade accredited farms
- **ChapelWood** – Conservation Blend wild bird food includes grains and seeds grown on Conservation Grade accredited farms
- **Garden Bird Supplies** – a range of wild bird food including grains and seeds grown on Conservation Grade accredited farms

Conservation Grade is an independent accreditation organisation that facilitates commercial relationships between farmers and consumers on an area rapidly approaching 100,000 acres in the UK through a Fair to Nature system of agriculture that optimises both crop yields and biodiversity conservation. Conservation Grade has developed a truly unique system of sustainable farming, founded on science and commercial viability. It is internationally recognised by The Economics of Ecosystems and Biodiversity (TEEB) study, as well as Natural England and leading NGOs such as the RSPB, for its significant contribution to the conservation of biodiversity through the commercial marketplace.

