



# Your Community Guide to Taking Action for Insects



#ActionForInsects

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## What is causing insect declines?



Loss and fragmentation of habitat



Routine and unnecessary use of pesticides



Climate change

## Action needed to reverse declines



The government must set **ambitious pesticide reduction targets**



Stop routine and unnecessary use of **harmful chemicals** in our communities and daily lives



Government, communities and individuals working together to create a **Nature Recovery Network**

# Taking action for insects where you live



**I**nsects are amazing! Some are beautiful, others fascinating – but all are important, as they pollinate our food crops, provide food for much of our loved and cherished wildlife (from robins to bats) and dispose of our waste! Yet 41% face extinction. It's not too late to bring them back, but urgent action is needed.

## Action for Insects

Action for Insects is a campaign led by the Wildlife Trusts and supported by a range of partners who are determined to reverse the alarming declines in insects and help nature recover across the UK.

The Wildlife Trusts hope to inspire and help people take action for insects where they live and work. We want policy makers to know that people love insects, and want to see changes to our laws to better protect them.

We can all help by reducing our use of harmful chemicals and by calling on the government to set an ambitious pesticide reduction target. We need to start building a Nature Recovery Network by creating insect-friendly habitats in our gardens, towns, cities and countryside that are bigger, better protected and more joined up.

## How can you help?

This guide contains lots of useful information to help your community reverse insect declines. Everything you do will also help other wildlife where you live. An insect-friendly community is a wildlife-friendly community, and one that is better for people too!

The scale of a challenge like this can seem overwhelming, but by coming together as a community and focusing on a few small actions to begin with, you can start to build momentum and help make a big difference.

Get others involved and share the things you do on Facebook, Twitter and Instagram using **#ActionForInsects**. We'd love to hear from you and your actions can provide a great source of ideas and inspiration for others.

# Making space for insects



**P**arks, churchyards, school grounds, village greens and road verges can all be excellent places for insects if managed in the right way – and for other wildlife too!

Your community is bound to have lots of places where wildlife could thrive, if better managed and joined up to create insect havens and highways. Just imagine if everyone in your community managed their own gardens, balconies or outdoor spaces for insects.

**There is enough space for nature if we do it in the right way...**

**250,000 miles of road verges**

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**430,000 hectares of gardens**

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**27,000 public parks**

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**The UK has fewer than ten green bridges**

## **Wild places near you...**

In the UK, 80% of us live in urban areas. This means the green spaces in our towns and cities, including our gardens, are really important. Urban areas are growing too - in 2018-19, we built 240,000 new houses. We need to be making sure new developments like these are wildlife-friendly.



Photo: Nick Upton / 2020VISION

- **Parks** – these come in varying shapes and forms and are often managed for enjoyment over everything else. They may include allotments, play areas, sports pitches and cycle paths. Managed in a wildlife-friendly way they can become nature havens and form part of a network that connects up suitable habitat for our insects.
- **Greenspace around public buildings** – often traditionally managed to look tidy, with tightly mown grass and shrubs of little value for wildlife. These spaces could be great wildlife refuges. And it can be cheaper to manage these areas less intensively as well!
- **School grounds** – as in parks, school grounds serve multiple uses. But schools are increasingly recognising the value of wild areas and gardens where children can learn about nature and benefit from having easy access to it.
- **Churchyards** – these are often tranquil, reflective places, many of which have native trees in abundance and even traces of ancient wildflower-rich grassland. Increasingly, local churches are choosing to leave some areas a bit wilder to encourage wildlife.
- **Road verges** – provide a huge opportunity to connect up wild places, creating natural corridors. According to Plantlife, verges across the UK support over 700 plant species (this is 45% of our native flora). This is especially important given the loss of 97% of the UK's wildflower meadows since the 1930s.
- **Roofs and walls** – on public and other buildings could be turned into greenspace using green wall pocket netting and green roofs.



Photo: Paul Hobson

Photo: Yorkshire Wildlife Trust



***The UN Convention on Biological Diversity calls for at least 30% of land and seas to be covered by wildlife-rich habitat in order to tackle the climate and ecological emergency. We've a way to go to reach this, but if you start to think about the amount of space available in your community that could be more wildlife-friendly, it starts to feel more achievable!***

## Get others involved



**A** small group of passionate individuals is all you need to start! But to make big changes, you will need people with a range of backgrounds and interests.

**Here are some steps that you might find helpful:**

**1. Organise a community meeting or workshop:** Involve landowners and key decision makers; try to get people of all ages involved too. Talk about why taking action for insects is important. Develop a shared vision for your community, one that recognises that it will look different for different people. Gather ideas and listen to people's concerns, then establish priorities for change that everyone can agree on. Next, get your core action group together that will take plans forward. Agree on at least one project to start with and watch the momentum rapidly build!



### **Go pesticide-free:**

This is a great first step and tackles one of the key causes of insect and wildlife declines. Check out Pesticide Action Network UK (PAN UK) for advice on moving away from using chemicals in your green spaces. You can also see if there is a Pesticide-Free Towns campaign running in your area or get support to start one if not.

Take a look at [www.pan-uk.org](http://www.pan-uk.org) for case studies of people and communities choosing to go pesticide-free.



Photo: Nick Upton / 2020VISION

## Find out what's there already!

**Wildlife is in trouble, and whilst we need to create new spaces for nature, we also need to look after what we've got. As a first step, your community may want to carry out a bit of an audit. Here are some places to look for information:**

- There are a number of free online tools that can give you information about the natural environment around you:
  - **MAGIC - an interactive mapping tool** (<https://magic.defra.gov.uk>)
  - **Environment webpages and sites hosted by your Local Authority**
  - **If you live by the coast, use Explore Marine Plans** (<https://explore-marine-plans.marineservices.org.uk>)
- Contact your Local Environmental Records Centre (LERC) to request a data search - [www.alerc.org.uk/lerc-finder.html](http://www.alerc.org.uk/lerc-finder.html). There may be a small cost involved, but you'll be provided with a much more detailed record of wildlife sites and species than is available through the free tools. Your LERC can often provide other services for local communities too, so chat about what you are trying to achieve.
- Check if your county has an Ecological Network Map or Nature Recovery Network Map – these are usually held by your LERC. This will show you the best places to focus your efforts for nature's recovery.
- Get out and survey your communal spaces, particularly if they do not appear on any of the maps or searches above. There are plenty of resources out there to help you, for example:
  - [www.opalexplorenature.org/identification](http://www.opalexplorenature.org/identification)
  - [www.field-studies-council.org/product-category/publications/](http://www.field-studies-council.org/product-category/publications/)

Make sure you have the landowner's permission before you begin to survey. And don't forget that there may be experienced ecologists in your community, so ask around and make use of their skills.

Once you know what you've got, you can figure out what to look after and where you can create new habitats or expand and link existing ones, without losing what you've already got.

## 2. Make your plans

Put everything you know on a map. This doesn't have to be a work of art or totally accurate! It should just be a way of looking at all the habitats and wild places in your community to help you see how they connect (or don't connect) to each other. Once you have the existing habitats on a map, gather everyone together to start thinking about where your community could start to build its insect recovery network. Here are some key things to consider in your plans:

- Making a commitment to stop the unnecessary use of harmful chemicals in your community. We will not halt insect declines and put nature into recovery if we are routinely using pesticides and other harmful chemicals in our homes, gardens and communities when we don't need to. Go to [pan-uk.org](http://pan-uk.org) to find out more.



Photo: Tom Marshall

Follow the principles of:

- **Bigger habitat patches** – expand the habitats you've already got and when creating new habitats make them as big as possible
- **Better management of existing habitats** – make sure there is good understanding of what each area or site could or should have and work towards that
- **More habitats** – create new high-quality wildlife-rich spaces wherever you can
- **Joined up** – link up wild places to help insects and other wildlife move between them

These principles underpin The Wildlife Trusts' conservation work and are integral to a fully functioning Nature Recovery Network ([wildlifetrusts.org/nature-recovery-network](http://wildlifetrusts.org/nature-recovery-network)). Buglife's B-Lines initiative also follows these principles to establish wildlife corridors that enable insects to move through our countryside.

**To find out more, see 'Further advice'.**

**“By joining up wild places and creating more across the UK we would improve our lives and help nature to flourish - because everything works better when it's connected.”**

## Some things to think about

- Wherever possible, plant native species that are locally sourced or grown and try to create and connect a variety of habitats – the right ones for where you live! Worried about invasive species? **The Great Britain Non-Native Species Secretariat** ([www.nonnativespecies.org/home/index.cfm](http://www.nonnativespecies.org/home/index.cfm)) has factsheets on most UK invasive non-native species including advice on what to do if you find them.
- If your community's plans involve meadow creation or tree planting, try to use UK-sourced seeds and plants wherever possible. Imported seeds, plants and animals can accidentally bring diseases into the country such as Ash Dieback, which is likely to lead to a loss of 90% of our ash trees.
- Try to blend habitats in your community together rather than creating sharp boundaries between them. These blended edges are vital for many species. For example, creating a scrubby edge between woodland and grassland means birds and insects can hide, feed and live in this area, while taking advantage of the habitats on either side.
- Think about 'structural diversity' when creating, enhancing or connecting habitat. In most habitats, a mix of foliage heights is best for wildlife. Grasshoppers are a good example. They need small amounts of bare earth and short turf to bask (soak up heat from the sun) but they also need clumps of taller grasses to hide from predators and survive the winter.

See more **Top Habitat Tips** later in this guide...



Photo: Paul Harris / 2020VISION

### **Water Matters**

Water is important. Aquatic and marine habitats support huge numbers of insects but are more susceptible to pollution and climate change. Create a buffer around watery habitats that can slow down the flow of water and filter out soil, chemicals and fertiliser. Think about creating grassland, woodland or more wetland in this buffer zone to help. For example, placing a reedbed upstream of a sensitive watery habitat can create a great filter for the water entering the site.

### **Shine the (right) light**

Think about how you use artificial lighting in your community, particularly in and around your wild spaces. Lighting can have a BIG impact on insects and on our wildlife. Nocturnal insects, including many moths, can become disoriented by it and light pollution is thought to be partly to

blame for the decline of glow-worms.

Evidence suggests that all forms of artificial lighting (including LEDs and halogen) can impact on wildlife and though moths and other night-flying insects may gather around lights, they don't feed or mate while they are there and may circle the light until they drop. They're better off left in the dark.

Try and have some degree of separation between wildlife corridors and paths/cycleways to avoid disturbance and lighting. The simplest approach is to place paths away from wild areas or to one side of a green corridor – rather than down the middle. This will minimise the effect of lighting/disturbance on the other side. Wherever possible, lit sports pitches and industrial lighting should be placed well away from wildlife areas and well screened. Talk to your Local Authorities – encourage them to adopt wildlife-friendly schemes for street lighting (such as 'switch-off' schemes).





Photo: Mark Hamblin / 2020VISION

### 3. Make your plans happen

- Get as many people involved as you can! The more people you can get to help, the more you'll be able to achieve. There are jobs to suit everyone and you should all reap the benefits, whether community seed sowing, tree planting, digging, fencing, managing, surveying or recording!
- Encourage individuals to take action for insects in their daily lives. Share the pledge to take Action for Insects with The Wildlife Trusts and they'll receive a free downloadable guide to help them in their homes and gardens.

Find out how your Wildlife Trust and other partners can help and what projects and initiatives are running in your area – see the 'Further advice' section of this pack.

- Record what you've done and survey your community periodically. Let your Local Environmental Record Centre know what you've found and get involved in 'citizen science' activities and projects near you.

### 4. Share what you are doing

Whether you are on Facebook, Twitter or Instagram use **#ActionForInsects**. We want to build momentum and let policy makers know that we care about insect declines. One of the best ways to encourage other people to act is to raise awareness and let them know what you are doing.

#### Don't be overwhelmed!

If executing a community plan on this scale feels overwhelming, pick one thing and start there. Become a pesticide-free community, focus on getting your local park more insect and wildlife-friendly or, if you are a school governor, get your school involved. The main thing is to make a start!



# TOP TIPS for insect and wildlife-friendly habitat management in your community



## Community meadows

- When cutting grass avoid following concentric circles into the middle as this traps insects and other species so they can't escape the cut. Instead cut back and forth from one end to the other, gradually pushing animals towards an edge.
- Wherever possible let grass and flowers grow for longer to allow flowering. Cut using a strimmer or finger bar cutter. Leave for 3-7 days before removing to allow insects to move around, then remove and compost the cuttings.
- Cut grass after the main flowering season around mid-summer. Spring and autumn cuts are also fine. If you require shorter grassy areas, cutting every 6-8 weeks will allow low growing nectar-rich plants such as clovers and self-heal to flower.

## Community wetlands

- Where possible remove drains and ditches to let places get wetter. Talk to anyone in the surrounding area to make sure they are happy. 87% of wetlands have been lost around the world mainly through draining to enable agriculture and development. These are vitally important habitats to a huge array of insects, so it's important to reinstate as much as possible.
- Dig ponds, bogs (lower an area by a few inches) and ditches into clayey soils to create more wet areas and dig scrapes (shallow ponds that dry up in summer) to create more open water in wet periods.
- Try to protect all wetlands from pollution and disturbance by buffering with native grassland and/or woodland or reedbed. A minimum buffer of two metres for small ditches and wetlands is needed, but the bigger the better – aim for 10 metres or more if possible.

## Community woodlands

- Where you can, leave deadwood. If the deadwood has to be moved, pile it up as near to where it came from as possible. Deadwood that is standing (a dead tree) or hung-up (dead branches caught up in the canopy) are some of the best insect habitats.
- Many of our woodlands were planted in one go, meaning all the trees are the same height, there is little variety and little grows under their canopies. To bring some variety where more insects and wildlife can thrive coppice and/or pollard some trees. Some of our most precious butterfly species like pearl-bordered fritillary have survived in coppiced woodlands for centuries.
- Extend woodlands by connecting them up using hedges and plant new native broadleaf woodland. Before planting any trees, check what habitat is already there. If there is a good habitat there already (eg. wildflower-rich grassland) don't plant over it and look for an alternative location.

***87% of wetlands have been lost around the world mainly through draining to enable agriculture and development – these are vitally important habitats to a huge array of insects.***

## Hedges and verges

- Wherever possible, cut hedges no more than once every three years. Several studies have shown that a three-year cutting rotation of hedgerows is optimum to provide the most abundant food for insects and birds, especially when cut in late winter (end of February).
- Hedges form insect (and wildlife) motorways across our landscape, but it only takes a relatively short gap to make them impassable. Where there are gaps, 'lay' the hedge or plant new trees to fill, choosing tree species seen in local hedges.
- Road verges are an amazing resource. If managed for wildlife, they will hum with insects and help all sorts of wildlife move and thrive. Contact your Local Authority to find out how they manage verges for wildlife and encourage them to do more.



Photo: Ben Hall / 2020VISION

## Further advice



**T**he Wildlife Trusts have a wealth of information about how to make your life insect-friendly and deliver a whole range of local projects to make where you live wilder.

The Wildlife Trusts have a number of activity and factsheets available to help ([wildlifetrusts.org/actions](https://wildlifetrusts.org/actions)). Or contact your Wildlife Trust to see what advice they can offer you on your patch.

A number of other organisations also have some really great information that you might find useful too!

Garden Organics (formerly the HDRA) is the national charity for organic growing and provides a fantastic range of resources. For further information on growing and gardening without pesticides visit their [website gardenorganic.org.uk](https://website.gardenorganic.org.uk), watch videos on YouTube and listen to their podcasts on Audio Boom.

### [Videos](#)

### [Growing advice](#)

### [Podcasts](#)

**Pesticide Action Network UK (PAN UK)** has a range of resources to help communities and businesses take action to stop the unnecessary use of pesticides. Go to: [pan-uk.org/](https://pan-uk.org/)

**Buglife** works with experts across the country to establish wildlife corridors, known as B-lines, that enable insects to move through our countryside. Buglife continues to encourage communities and organisations to create more insect-friendly habitats.

For more information see:

[buglife.org.uk/our-work/b-lines/](https://buglife.org.uk/our-work/b-lines/)

**Butterfly Conservation** runs a range of monitoring schemes including the National Moth Recording Scheme and UK Butterfly Monitoring Scheme.

Go to: <https://butterfly-conservation.org/>



Photo: Nick Upton / 2020VISION

**Climate Action:** A number of organisations provide advice around helping wildlife in order to tackle climate change. 52 Climate Actions ([52climateactions.com](https://52climateactions.com)) is a good example, with a list of community actions you can take.

**Your Local Environmental Record Centre (LERC)** can help your community find out about existing data and support monitoring activity ([alerc.org.uk/lerc-finder.html](https://alerc.org.uk/lerc-finder.html))

**Plantlife** has produced a guide to verge management working with partners including The Wildlife Trusts – The Good Verge Guide, which contains useful tips: [plantlife.org.uk](https://plantlife.org.uk)

**Plastic-Free Communities** programme ([sas.org.uk/plastic-free-communities](https://sas.org.uk/plastic-free-communities)) is a Surfers Against Sewage initiative helping you reduce the impact of plastics on your environment.





Photo: Paul Harris / 2020VISION

No matter where you live in the UK, there is a Wildlife Trust inspiring people about the natural world. Each day we work to save, protect and stand up for the wildlife and wild places near you. Supported by more than 850,000 members, we take action for insects on our 2,300 nature reserves, through our work with landowners, farmers and policy makers, and by encouraging everybody to look after insects in their area.



### The Wildlife Trusts

[info@wildlifetrusts.org](mailto:info@wildlifetrusts.org)

[wildlifetrusts.org](http://wildlifetrusts.org)



@WildlifeTrusts



/wildlifetrusts



thewildlifetrusts

## #ActionForInsects #WilderFuture

With thanks to the following organisations for their support on this campaign.



**PAN UK** – the only UK charity focused on tackling the problems caused by pesticides and promoting safe and sustainable alternatives in agriculture, urban areas, homes and gardens.

**Garden Organic** – the UK's leading organic gardening charity, helping people to grow in the most sustainable way.

**Buglife** – the only organisation in Europe devoted to the conservation of all invertebrates.