

Managing Land for a Wilder Kent

Land Management Advice Summary for smaller
landholdings in Kent

This quick guide aims to provide you with the best land management advice tailored to Kent's landscapes so that you can evaluate and make decisions on how to manage your land sensitively for wildlife. This information has been compiled by Kent Wildlife Trust in consultation with Kent Landholders Assisting Wildlife (KLAW).



What do I need to do to manage land for wildlife?

You don't necessarily have to 'do' anything to help wildlife on your land. Where a good ecological balance exists, then sometimes non-management is as good as management. However, for some species or habitats there are specific things you can do to encourage a broader range of habitats and support more wildlife. Usually a balance between managing areas of your land sensitively, and leaving other less disturbed areas, is best for wildlife.



What is the difference between traditional conservation and Wilding?

Wilding is about creating the conditions for natural processes to thrive, where ecosystems are able to be dynamic and habitats can shift and change over time. Wilding is often driven by introducing large herbivores and other key species such as beaver into an area. However, a range of factors may also mean it is not appropriate or possible to introduce new species or livestock to an area, in which case more active human management can act as a proxy for these activities. Wilding can be a sliding scale, and is more about embracing the wild, allowing habitats to shift, watching and working with nature, rather than fighting against it.

In some circumstances, where very rare species or a habitats are present, then a more traditional conservation approach may be best. It's about identifying the best approach for your land, whether that is through Wilding or not.

Further reading

Read more information on Wilding and natural processes, in the Book of Wilding

 bloomsbury.com/uk/book-of-wilding-9781526659293/



What do I have on my land now?

Determining your biodiversity baseline is an important starting point. It provides something to refer back to if you do begin to make changes and helps determine the level of intervention you might want to make. This could be through a formal survey, with help from a consultancy or citizen science project. Or via your own recording of the plants, animals and habitats present on the site. Inputting data collected on platforms such as i-record means that others can access this data too.



Consultants can be found through the Chartered Institute of Ecology and Environmental Management (CIEEM) directory [cieem.net/i-need/finding-a-consultant](https://www.cieem.net/i-need/finding-a-consultant)



ADONIS BLUE ENVIRONMENTAL
The Kent Wildlife Trust consultancy service, Adonis Blue Environmental, can, for a fee, provide surveys and management plans.
AdonisBlueEnvironmental.org.uk | 01622 662012

Where does my land sit in the wider landscape?

As well as getting a good understanding of the wildlife and habitats on your own land, it is important to consider your plot in the context of the wider landscape. What is the soil type? Are you connected to other pockets of land e.g woodland or meadow? Are there any existing conservation projects happening nearby?

Google maps or google earth is a great starting point, using the satellite view to see roughly how the land looks nearby.

-  Further information on rare and protected species and habitats can then be found from the Kent & Medway Biological Records Centre (KMBRC) [kmbrc.org.uk](https://www.kmbrc.org.uk)
-  Protected areas are displayed through Magic Maps magic.defra.gov.uk/magicmap.aspx
-  Kent Landscape Information System (KLIS) kwtdg.uk/KLIS



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What species and habitats should I look out for?

Good habitats to look out for include; ancient woodland, species rich acid or chalk grasslands, natural wetlands, wet woodland, reedbeds, saltmarsh, heathland, chalk grassland, ponds, natural rivers and chalk streams. The presence of certain species may help you understand more about the habitats on your land, for example...

- Silver washed fritillary and white admiral butterflies are good indicators for woodland connectivity.
- Kingfishers and brown trout are indicators of good wetland habitats.
- Dragonflies and damselflies indicate good water quality.
- Healthy numbers of coots and moorhens (and if you're lucky, water voles) may indicate the absence of the invasive predator, American mink.
- Barn owls like to hunt over tussocky grasslands and their presence often indicates good populations of small mammals and a lack of pesticide pollution.

Further reading

More information on Kent's unique range of habitats and key species can be found in the Kent Biodiversity Strategy kwtg.uk/biodiversity-strategy

Best practice land management advice at kwtg.uk/management-best-practice

Is there a good time to manage my land?

Yes there are times in the year when certain activities will have less of an impact on wildlife.

Trim hedgerows

Trim hedgerows in autumn and winter outside bird nesting season, (Feb – Aug) preferably late Jan to early Feb so that birds can eat fruits and berries through winter. Sept/Oct is the next best time if this is not possible.

Cut hedges

Cut hedges on rotation so only some are cut in any one year. Laying a hedge can also create a denser area for nesting species. Visit hedgeline.org.uk/guidance or ptes.org/hedgerow to find out more.

Clearing out ditches or ponds

Clearing out ditches or ponds is best done in October.

Coppicing

Coppice between October and January.

Mow meadows

Mow meadows cut early (as the first growth comes through, usually late Apr) or a cut late in Jul/Aug after bird nesting season & flower seeding has occurred. Or both if you need to reduce the nutrients and thatching in the grass.

Manage watercourses

Manage watercourses in Sep/Oct to benefit water voles.

Graze meadows

Depends on the type of meadow:

- For **wet meadows**, reduce stocking density from Apr-Jul to avoid nest trampling. More livestock can be brought on from late summer/autumn to reduce grass down before winter.
- **Dry meadow** management is similar but may have slightly different timings. More detail can be found here kentwildlifetrust.org.uk/sites/default/files/2018-06/KWT%20Land%20Mgt%20Advice_Sheet%205%20-%20Choosing%20livestock%20for%20conservation%20grazing.pdf and here: <https://www.kentwildlifetrust.org.uk/climate-change/conservation-grazing>

Survey your land in May and/or Jun/Jul, you can find more info here: kwtg.uk/recording-wildlife

Land management calendar

Use this handy reference calendar to quickly see what time of year to manage your land in a way that will have the least impact on wildlife.

Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
	Trim hedgerows								Trim hedgerows		
									Clear ponds		
										Coppice	
							Mow meadows				
								Manage watercourses			
											Graze wet meadows
											Graze dry meadows
											Survey your land

Working on your land

When do I need permission to carry out work on my land?

- If your land is in a protected wildlife area, e.g a SSSI, visit Magic Maps to find out: magic.defra.gov.uk/magicmap.aspx
- If any work you want to do is within 8m of a main river channel, or involves earthworks, construction or tree planting in river floodplains.
- If you are involved in an Environmental or Forestry grant. You may need a derogation from the grant giving body if you wish to diverge from your original agreement.
- If you know, or suspect that there are rare or protected species on your land (see guidance from KMBRC kmbrc.org.uk/conservation.)
- If the work you will be doing could affect any of your neighbours, particularly for flooding.
- If your local County or District Council requires planning permission i.e. for the construction of a pond or large butterfly bank. This applies particularly if the land is not residential in classification.

Nature Recovery Networks

Wildlife does not recognise the boundaries of your land. Working with your neighbours and local parish can help connect patches of habitat. If neighbouring land is managed well there will be more wildlife on your land. Farmer Clusters are a good way to work collaboratively with neighbouring landowners, so it is worth finding out if there is one near you by checking our cluster map kwtg.uk/farmer-cluster-map

In towns, creating wildlife gardens, urban tree lines and parks, and reducing the use of chemicals can help wildlife to flourish by connecting the wider landscape through these green corridors. Have your say on the delivery of nature recovery and environmental improvements in Kent through the Local Nature Recovery Strategy makingspacefornaturekent.org.uk

The threat of development

We recommend that local people map all the species and habitats in their parish and send them to the Kent and Medway Biological Records Centre (KMBRC) or submit them on i-record. Once mapped, ecologists have easier access to evidence of the value of the habitats in a local area and can use this to properly inform people of the potential risks to wildlife from development. For more on Kent Wildlife Trust's planning and policy position, check out kwtg.uk/planning-development

General rules to follow for a wilder land holding

Go organic

Try not to use chemicals, even slug pellets can be fatal to hedgehogs and birds (and even cats and dogs). Using insecticides, herbicides or fungicides, kills the food of the wildlife you are trying to encourage.

Natural regeneration

Natural regeneration by using the local seed source takes longer, but the scrub growth and slow development of trees creates new habitats and a whole range of opportunities for other species. Woodlands created in this way will provide habitat for nightingales and turtle doves that would otherwise miss out.

Go native

If you are planting trees, plants or meadow species, plant native species which are common to your local area. They are generally much better for your local wildlife in the long-term.

Create a pond

This is one of the single most beneficial things to do for wildlife, larger ponds may need planning permission and soil type is also a crucial factor in how expensive or challenging a pond will be to create (areas of land in heavy clay won't for instance need any plastic pond liners). A non-lined pond that only holds water for half of the year is still very valuable.

Connect hedgerows

Hedgerows are very important for birds, insects, butterflies, amphibians and reptiles, and mammals such as dormice and bats. Creating more quality hedgerows will help wildlife move around on your land more easily.

Use buffer strips

Strips of permanent vegetation on field margins, surrounding hedges and next to watercourses allow connectivity and provide a physical barrier against pollutants and run off.

Let dead wood rot

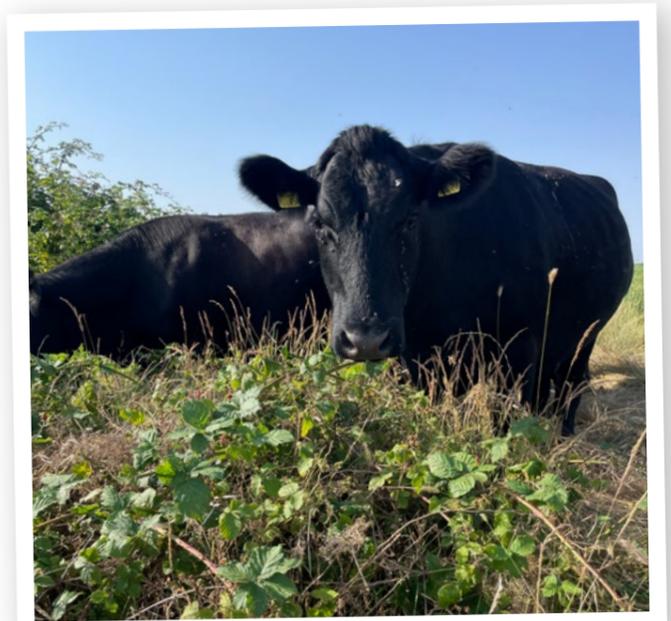
Fallen and standing deadwood is fantastic for woodpeckers, bats and all kinds of insects. Wood piles can create refuges for wildlife such as hedgehogs. Compost heaps are also great for keeping wildlife warm.

Berry important

Any native tree or plant which yields seeds or berries is important food for wildlife. If pruning or cutting back, try and leave some areas uncut with the nuts and berries still visible.

Introduce grazing and rootling animals (or mimic this!)

Dynamic systems with a mosaic of habitats are vital for wildlife. Species like turtle dove need rootled areas with exposed soil to pick up small annual seeds. Deadwood is essential for many beetle species and scrub is often a missing habitat which many birds need for nesting. Find out more at kwtg.uk/grazingstrategy



Financial help and grants

Can I get financial help or grants to realise my aims? The simple answer is yes, although some grants can be complicated and you may only be eligible if your land is in a target area.

Defra Environmental Land Management Scheme (ELMs)

This scheme is only offered to land holdings of 5ha+ that are eligible to enter into an ELM scheme which are split into three types:

- **Sustainable Farming Incentive (SFI)** – SFI offers payments to farmers to carry out farming activities in a more environmentally sustainable way. This is aimed at regular farmers where food production is a core activity.
- **Countryside Stewardship (CS)** – various options are available to manage land for wildlife, with 5-10 year agreements. Catchment Sensitive Farming Officers and Natural England Advisors can help in navigating these options.
- **Landscape Recovery** – available to a collective of landowners through a competitive application process. This is for long term conservation projects of 30 years plus.

Farming in Protected Landscapes

This is another Defra grant scheme, but is Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) focussed, although they will accept applications from landholdings near to the AONB border. Projects can be submitted for £5k to £250k.

- 📍 For Kent, contact either the Kent Downs AONB kwtg.uk/kent-protected-landscapes
- 📍 Or High Weald AONB teams kwtg.uk/highweald-protected-landscapes

Woodland Trust

- 📍 This advice is available for both woodland creation and agroforestry, as well as free trees. kwtg.uk/tree-pack

Forestry Commission

- 📍 Forestry Commission offers various grants including the £1000 woodland planning grant kwtg.uk/woodlandgrant

Sussex Lund Fund

- 📍 Sussex Lund Fund supports small-scale, practical projects that improve the landscape and ecology of the High Weald AONB and the towns, hamlets and villages on its fringes. It also supports projects that help people to experience and celebrate the landscape and build connections to it kwtg.uk/sussex-lund-fund

Local Authority Grants

- 📍 There are lots of different funding opportunities available to community organisations, or anyone leading a project with a public benefit. kwtg.uk/local-grants



The Do's

- ✔ Do ask for advice from a number of different people.
- ✔ Do review old maps to find out what used to be on your land and what the important historic or archaeological features might be. Tithe maps are useful (circa 1840's). They can show you where old woodland, meadows, ponds & hedgerows used to be. Google Earth provides freely available satellite imagery, with a historical imagery time slider tool.
- ✔ Do take a look at your site from the air – it can tell you interesting things about your land e.g. where old river channels are. Google Maps and, within appropriate licensing and permissions, drone images can be a great resource for this.
- ✔ Do check if your land includes protected areas, species or habitats using the Magic Map tool magic.defra.gov.uk/magicmap.aspx
- ✔ Do consider and incorporate the things that wildlife needs for survival i.e. food, shelter, nest sites, water.
- ✔ Do consider retaining water on site, by creating a pond, scrape or leaky dam kwtg.uk/ponds-lakes
- ✔ Do try to create a mosaic or patchwork of habitats. Don't just manage for one species or habitat.
- ✔ Do look at the natural characteristics of your land and support what is already there rather than trying to create something new that would not naturally occur. For example don't drain a good piece of wetland to plant a woodland, or create a wetland where it wants to be dry.
- ✔ Do think about seasons, and what resources there are for wildlife on your land particularly in winter and early spring (food, water, shelter etc).



The Don't's

- ✘ Don't manage your land because it looks untidy. Some of the untidy, unmanaged areas are the best bits for wildlife.
- ✘ Don't re-invent the wheel. Many experts already know the best type of management for your land and there are some good existing sources of information.
- ✘ Don't introduce non-native species to your land. Invasive plants and animals can quickly take over your land and out-compete native species. If you find any, keep on top of them and seek professional advice about how to manage and remove them.



- ✘ Don't be unrealistic. Some species and habitats may just not occur naturally in your area and they will never turn up on your land. This doesn't make your land any less valuable for wildlife.
- ✘ Don't assume that areas that look 'dead' like old silted ponds aren't good for wildlife, they may be home to rare and specialist species.



Useful organisations and links

Please see below a list of useful organisations and links to support you to manage your land for the benefit of wildlife.

For detailed advice on specific habitat types visit: kentwildlifetrust.org.uk/learn/wildlife-advice

KLAW members are smaller landholders who are managing their sites primarily for wildlife. They share their experience and knowledge with each other through visits, webinars and their website. Visit: klawonline.co.uk/index.html

Find out more about why nature needs help in Kent, check out the State of Nature in Kent report 2021 kentnature.org.uk/state-of-nature

Kent based organisations and groups worth knowing about:

Kent Wildlife Trust kentwildlifetrust.org.uk/learn/wildlife-advice

Kent Ornithological Society kentos.org.uk

British Dragonfly Society (Kent page) british-dragonflies.org.uk/areas/united-kingdom/england/kent

Butterfly Conservation Society (Kent & SE branch) butterfly-conservation.org/in-your-area/kent-and-se-london-branch

Kent Moth Group kentmoths.org

Kent Reptile and Amphibian Group (KRAG) kentarg.org

Wild About Gardens kentwildlifetrust.org.uk/wilder-gardens

Kent Bat Group kentbatgroup.org.uk

Kent Mammal Group kentmammalgroup.org.uk

Small Woodland Owners Group swog.org.uk

Kent Landholders Assisting Wildlife (KLAW) klawonline.co.uk/index.html

Kent Farmer Clusters kwtg.uk/farmer-cluster-map

West Kent Badgers group wkb.org.uk

East Kent Badgers group eastkentbadgergroup.org.uk

East Kent Beaver Advisory group beavers@wildlifegateway.org.uk

South East Rivers Trust southeastriverstrust.org

Kent Countryside Partnerships kentcountrysidepartnerships.org

South of England Hedge laying society sehls.weebly.com

Adonis blue environmental consultants adonisblueenvironmental.org.uk

CIEEM directory of environmental consultants cieem.net/i-need/finding-a-consultant

National Organisations:

Buglife buglife.org.uk

Floodplain meadows Partnership floodplainmeadows.org.uk

Royal Society for Protection of Birds rspb.org.uk

Freshwater Habitats Trust (previously pond conservation) freshwaterhabitats.org.uk

The Mammal Society mammal.org.uk

Permaculture Association permaculture.org.uk

People's Trust for Endangered Species ptes.org

Hedge Link hedgelinek.org.uk/guidance

RSPB Farming for Wildlife rspb.org.uk/ourwork/farming/advice

British Trust for Ornithology bto.org

River Restoration Centre therrc.co.uk

Statutory bodies:

Natural England
enquiries.southeast@naturalengland.org.uk

Environment Agency environment-agency.gov.uk

More detailed Habitat management advice leaflets

Kent Wildlife Trust Advice leaflets on specific habitat management kentwildlifetrust.org.uk/learn/wildlife-advice/habitat-management

Live in Sussex?

This summary guide was based on an equivalent guide by Sussex Wildlife Trust, available here: sussexwildlifetrust.org.uk/what-we-do/landowner-advice



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Kent Wildlife Trust Guidance

Managing Land for a Wilder Kent

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KLAW

Join Klaw, the network for conservation landholders in Kent

Kent Landholders Assisting Wildlife (also known as KLA^W), is a network of people that care about protecting wildlife in Kent. It is run by its members, for its members, on a voluntary basis. Joining KLA^W provides opportunities to meet fellow enthusiasts, exchange ideas and practical advice on what to do (or not do).

Membership is free. Joining is by completing an online form, available using the following link:

klawonline.co.uk/join.html

KWT supports the KLA^W network with advice and guidance.

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Wilder Carbon
Native habitats. Natural solutions.



kentwildlifetrust.org.uk/learn/wildlife-advice