

Hedgerows

Introduction

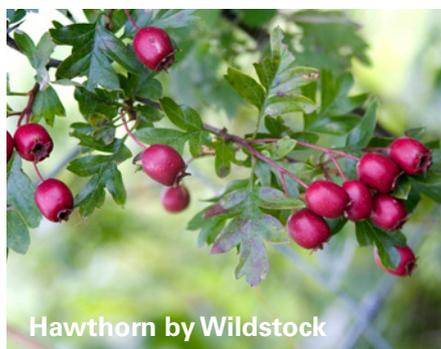
Hedgerows are fantastic for wildlife, providing food and shelter for many species of birds, mammals and butterflies, and often providing vital natural corridors linking small areas of woodland. More than 30 of our bird species nest in hedges.

Hedgerows: an important churchyard habitat

Some of our hedges, particularly those bordering churchyards, can be hundreds of years old, marking the position of ancient boundaries. Many hedges were grubbed out in the decades after the Second World War when agricultural mechanisation led to larger fields and fewer field boundaries. Norfolk has lost nearly half of all its hedges. Fortunately, the importance of hedges for wildlife is much better recognised today.

Thick hedges with a number of different native trees and plants are like miniature woodlands for wildlife. Hedges and the grassy areas at the base are one of our most wildlife rich habitats. At the shady bases of hedgerows, woodland flowers like primroses, violets and cuckoo pints can be found. Small mammals enjoy sheltering, nesting and feeding here. The nectar from the hedge's flowers is great for insects, and in turn these insects and seeds are good food for birds, as are the hedgerow berries.

Hedges protect soil from erosion, and provide shelter for buildings, graves, monuments and people from extreme weather. One of their most important roles is as a natural corridor helping wildlife move safely from one habitat to another. Hedgerows around churchyards in more suburban and urban areas can provide a vital refuge for our town-dwelling species.



Hawthorn by Wildstock



Bracon Ash churchyard
by Emily Nobbs

Hedgerows and the law

The Hedgerows Regulations 1997 was introduced to control the destruction of hedges in rural settings. The full text of the legislation can be obtained from the UK Government website (www.gov.uk). However, in simple terms, a landowner who wishes to remove a hedge of greater than 20 metres in length must first apply to the local planning authority (usually the district council) for planning permission. If the hedge is shown to be significant in terms of its age, environmental or historical importance, then the planning authority can refuse such permission and take further measures to protect the hedge. For fuller information on hedges and planning permission please contact your local planning authority.

It is illegal to remove, destroy or damage the nest of any breeding bird when it is being built or used in a hedge.

How to survey a hedgerow

Typically older hedges with multiple hedge species tend to be more wildlife rich than newer, typically single species hedges. Ancient hedges (i.e. pre-1700) and more recent hedges are normally very different in appearance. There are a number of features that can be looked at to help determine the age. Below is a list of typical ancient hedge and modern hedge features.

Ancient hedge features

- Irregular often twisting shape, on a relatively large bank.
- Old coppice stools or pollard trees (the basal width of hawthorn in old hedges will be at least 60cm if not more).
- A great variety of woody species, with as many as 10 or more in a 30 metre stretch. Species like hazel, field spindle or maple often indicate an old hedge.
- A relatively rich variety of wildflowers at the base of the hedge like bluebells, red campion and greater stitchwort.
- Woodland relict hedges in particular often include species such as small-leaved lime, hawthorn, wild service tree, yellow archangel, wood anemone and woodland snails.

Modern hedge features

- Straight shape, either on a small bank or no bank at all.
- May have timber trees but not old coppice stools or pollards.
- Few woody species, usually with just hawthorn, its base being less than 30cm wide.
- Fewer interesting wildflowers at the base of the hedge.

When surveying a hedge you must record the tree species the hedge contains, the shrubs in the hedge and the wildflowers at its base. Prior to carrying out the survey it is worth looking at old and recent maps showing hedge boundaries. Most of this information can be found on Norfolk County Council's Historic Norfolk Interactive Map Browser (www.historic-maps.norfolk.gov.uk/). For full details on how to survey a hedge please see DEFRA's Hedgerow Survey Handbook (www.gov.uk).

Certain plant species may also be a clue to the hedge history. Hedges containing one species, normally hawthorn, were often planted as a result of the eighteenth century parliamentary Enclosure Acts.



How to help

Don't use any herbicides, pesticides, slug pellets or insecticides on or near the hedgerow.

Don't mow up to the base of the hedge. Keep a strip at least one metre wide of longer grasses for small mammals, amphibians and reptiles to shelter and feed, and low growing hedge plants to flourish. Part of the grass margin should be cut short once a year, October time, and that part rotated year on year to leave an uncut area over winter for sheltering species. Grass cuttings should always be raked up straight after the cut.

Trim the hedge every two or three years, preferably in January or February, or cut half the hedge one year and the other half the next, and keep up this rotation. This gives birds and other animals as long as possible to feed on the berries and fruit. Some hedge plants will only flower on 'old wood' i.e. the previous summer's growth. These need at least two years between cuts to flower.

For further information please visit the NWT website or contact:

NWT Churchyard Team
Norfolk Wildlife Trust
Bewick House
Thorpe Road, Norwich
NR1 1RY

Tel: 01603 625540
Email: churchyards@norfolkwildlifetrust.org.uk
Website: www.norfolkwildlifetrust.org.uk

