

The Chilterns Environment Award

Case studies of past winners

These case studies are from previous years when separate Conservation and Woodland Awards were offered.

Mays Farm, Nuffield, South Oxfordshire Winner of 2008 Conservation Award

Mays Farm, farmed by David Passmore, is a traditional mixed farm, now increasingly rare in the Chilterns, and is a great example of how commercial farming and conservation can go hand in hand.

A traditional organic style rotation forms the backbone of the farm system and provides large benefits for a variety of wildlife. In spring the pastures are sown with a mixture of grasses and legumes (clovers and trefoil) underneath a crop of spring barley. Very limited herbicides can be used on the barley to avoid damaging the grass and legumes underneath. This allows broadleaf arable 'weeds' to survive, including wildflowers such as prickly poppy, Venus's looking glass and the nationally-scarce dense-flowered fumitory. Wildflowers attract insects and combined with limited use of insecticides means there is plenty of soft 'chick food' – essential for newly hatched farmland birds such as skylark, corn bunting and grey partridge.



Once the barley is harvested in August the stubble is left untouched with all its flower and insect life intact as the field is now developing a grass crop for next spring. This 'weedy' stubble is full of winter bird food and large flocks of birds including finches, fieldfares, starlings and redwings thrive here through autumn and winter. Birds also find a useful source of food in the form of hay seeds and grain from the feed put out for the cattle which remain outside during the winter.

The following spring the sheep, lambs, cows and calves move on to the new pasture.

After three years the grass is ploughed up and winter wheat is planted. The legumes in the grass mix which provided a high protein diet for the livestock have also returned nitrogen to the soil reducing the amount of fertiliser required. The presence of grass has also helped eliminate damaging weeds in the crop reducing herbicide use. These methods are similar to those employed on mixed organic farms and would have been commonplace years ago.

Woolman's Wood, near Bourne End, Bucks

Winner of 2007 Woodland Award

Woolman's Wood at Hedsor, near Bourne End, owned by Mr and Mrs Rushworth, was praised by the judges of the 2007 Woodland Award as an exemplar of how to replace conifers with broadleaved trees on an ancient woodland site.

Woolman's Wood is scheduled as an ancient semi-natural woodland, which means that it has been woodland since at least 1600. Before its present owners bought it in 1990 much of the wood had been planted with conifers. It was neglected and had little value as a home for wildlife or a place for people to enjoy.

Since 1990 the Wood's owners, Mr and Mrs Rushworth, together with forestry consultant Rik Pakenham, have worked hard to return the Wood to more of a native broadleaved character. They have also increased the variety of wild plants and animals in it, produced high quality timber and created permissive paths so that the public can enjoy walking around it.



Chalk grassland at Saunderton railway cutting

Winner of 2007 Conservation Award



This unusual site is an area of grassland on a narrow piece of land between the north and south tracks of the Chiltern Railways line from High Wycombe to Princes Risborough. It is owned by Ken and Julia Wise who have done much work to remove trees and scrub and restore it to short, flower-rich chalk grassland.

What really impressed the judges was the Wises' commitment to the site, which is an awkward shape and some distance from their house. It would have been very easy just to abandon it to nature

where it would have reverted to woodland. However with the right advice, some funding from Natural England and plenty of hard work they have transformed it into an oasis for wildflowers and butterflies.

The site is a real sun trap which benefits the 20 species of butterflies that have been recorded there. These include the rare and declining butterfly the Duke of Burgundy which is breeding on the site. The restoration work has also allowed bee and pyramidal orchids to return.

**Nippers Grove, Checkendon, South Oxfordshire
Winner of 2004 Woodland Award**

Nippers Grove, a 30 hectare wood, is managed by Paul Billin of Tilhill Forestry Ltd, and owned by Mr E Walters. The Woodland Award judges praised the owner and manager for the high quality thinning, clearance of invasive rhododendron understorey and signing to encourage the public to visit the wood.

John Morris, manager of the Chiltern Woodlands Project and one of the judges, commented at the time: 'this is a hard time for owners with timber prices at an all time low, so it is good to see a woodland that is being managed actively to improve its condition for the future and to offer public benefits.'

