

Hedges

Which hedges are important for wildlife?

Traditional hedges in Devon are different to those in other parts of the country. Devon hedges consist of an earth wall, faced with either turf or stone, on top of which hedge shrubs usually grow.

Hedges are important for wildlife for a number of reasons:

- they provide suitable habitat and cover for many plants, birds, insects and small mammals
- they provide a rich food resource for animals
- they provide corridors between isolated habitats.

Many rare and threatened species are associated with Devon hedges, including greater horseshoe bats and cirl buntings (in South Devon), the dormouse and the brown hairstreak butterfly. Of greater importance, though, is the value of hedges for a vast range of more common wildlife species.

Whilst all hedges are important, some hedges are of particular importance. This is determined by a number of factors. Hedges are likely to be important if they:

- are old
- are part of a dense network of hedges or linked to other habitats
- contain protected species
- are well-managed and in good condition.

What are the statutory requirements for protecting hedges?

Protection is given to hedgerows under the [Hedgerows Regulations 1997](#). It is an offence to remove a hedgerow in contravention of the Regulations.

If a land manager wants to remove a hedgerow – either in whole or in part, they must first notify the local planning authority, setting out their reasons for wanting to remove the hedge.

This notification system applies to all hedgerows which:

- are 20 metres or more long, or which meet another hedgerow at each end
- do not form the boundary of a house, ie garden hedges are not affected.

Any activity which constitutes ‘removal’ must be notified – this includes uprooting or other destruction. **All permitted development must be notified.** There are, however, certain exemptions including works approved by planning permission, flood defence or land drainage work.

The local planning authority will usually refuse consent if the hedgerow is important, ie, if it is at least 30 years old and has significant archaeological, historical, landscape or wildlife value. This assessment is based on a series of standard criteria. A refusal of consent is called a hedgerow retention notice.

Where a planning application is required for a development, consideration should be given to its implications for hedges, in the light of relevant development control policies. In general, these policies seek to conserve hedges as an integral element of a development wherever practical, and if not to replace them with new boundary features.

Hedges are an important habitat for nesting birds. It is therefore vital that statutory requirements relating to nesting birds are met. [Click here](#) for further information.

What opportunities are there for mitigation and additional wildlife gains for hedges?

Every effort should be made to incorporate hedgerows within development schemes by retaining them as part of the landscaping. If hedges can not be retained, it may be practical to translocate them.

Hedges require management involving periodic maintenance. More significant restoration works are required where a hedge has become overgrown, 'gappy', or the bank is in a poor state of repair.

Good hedge trimming is an important part of the management regime. In particular, hedges should be cut:

- every 2 or 3 years. Do not cut the same hedge every year except where necessary for road safety. This is because if they are cut every year, they provide very little food for insects, birds and mammals.
- as late as possible – preferably during January and February. They should never be cut during the nesting season – mid-March until the end of July.

Restoration of hedges can be undertaken in a variety of ways, including casting-up, bank repair and gapping-up. Hedges need laying (or steeping) or coppicing when they become thin at the base.

New hedge trees can be established to replace the diminishing stock of mature trees which are important to Devon's wildlife and landscape. This can be done by encouraging existing hedge saplings to grow on to maturity, or planting a new tree.

There are important benefits from establishing new hedges. These include reducing the visual impact of new development, providing wildlife links and recreating former landscapes. Planting should be done in the winter and should incorporate a mix of native species (such as hawthorn, blackthorn, hazel, oak and holly), with occasional hedge trees.

Where should I go for further information?

The Hedgerow Regulations can be downloaded from [HMSO's website](#)

Information on hedges is available on [DEFRA's website](#)

Department of the Environment. 1997. The Hedgerows Regulations: Your questions answered.

Department of the Environment. 1997. The Hedgerows Regulations 1997: A guide to the Law and Good Practice.

Devon County Council and Devon Hedge Group. 1998. Devon's Hedges: Conservation and Management. Tiverton: Devon Books.

[Devon Hedges website](#)