



# Wildlife at Racehill Community Orchard



Racehill Community Orchard is home to a vast array of plants, animals and other wildlife such as fungi and lichen. The habitat mosaic of fruit trees, hedges, mixed scrub and open grassland provides ideal conditions for safe sanctuary, food and nesting through the seasons.

## Habitats

### Fruit Trees and Hedgerows

The fruit trees as they mature provide shelter and a rich source of food for insects, birds and mammals.

Bees and other insects feed on nectar in the blossom; birds and mammals eat the fruit – on the tree and as windfalls.

The berries, nuts, small fruits and seeds in the hedgerow trees provide essential food for birds and mice in winter.



▲ Blackthorn blossom



▲ A bee feeding on common knapweed.

### Grassland

The grass in the orchard is left to grow long and cut in the late summer, providing an ideal home and source of food for insects, reptiles and mammals.

The orchard is close to areas of old chalk grassland which is very wild-life rich. Seed was collected from some chalk grassland plants, including Horseshoe Vetch, Knapweed and

Wild Strawberry, to grow in the orchard to attract special downland butterflies.

Relics of old allotments containing garden flowers grow alongside the wild flowers and grasses.

Bramble, thistle and stinging nettle are essential food-plants for newly-hatched caterpillars of many butterfly and moth species.



◀ Hoverfly café! – feeding on 'Cat's Ear' flower.

### Dead Wood

Dead wood is important for many invertebrates (creatures without backbones) such as woodlice and wood-boring beetles. These animals, along with fungi, play an essential role in breaking down rotting material.

## Wildlife in our orchard

### Insects

#### Butterflies and Moths

Our downland is home to special butterflies like the Adonis Blue, Chalkhill Blue, Grizzled Skipper. Look out too for many other butterflies including the Small Tortoiseshell, Comma, Peacock, Red Admiral. Most moths fly at night but some are active in daylight e.g. the Cinnabar and the Silver Y'.



▲ Chalkhill Blue



◀ Cinnabar moth



▲ Comma butterfly

### Bees

In spring blossom appears on the fruit trees. Each flower, if pollinated, can produce a fruit. Bees, hoverflies and other insects transfer pollen from one flower to another while looking for nectar. A bee can pollinate hundreds of flowers each hour. Blossom is good for bees and lots of bees means more fruit for us!

### Ladybirds

These colourful beetles are very welcome in orchards because they prey on aphids which can cause serious damage to young fruit trees.



### Beetles

Beetles are by far the most successful animals ever. If all life on earth was laid out in a line, every 4th species would be a beetle!

◀ Violet ground beetle

### The Orchard's rarest resident

In 2003, a bug expert from the Natural History Museum assessed the area's insect population. He found a type of flightless soldier beetle never seen before in the UK. Hence it was named the Whitehawk Soldier Beetle (*Malthodes lobatus*). It has no wings so how did it get here? Has it been here for thousands of years, before the English Channel separated the UK from the continent or did it arrive more recently?



### Birds

#### Birds of prey

Kestrels hover over the grasslands, preying on insects, mice, voles and shrews. Buzzards soar high above. Sparrowhawks ambush birds such as Dunnocks, Pigeons and even Magpies. After dark, owls hunt for small mammals such as mice and voles.



▲ Young kestrel

### Resident birds

Many resident birds use the orchard for shelter and nesting but also as a food source. Birds such as Goldfinch, Linnet and various Tits must rely on fruit, nuts and seeds to make it through the colder months.



▲ Goldfinch



▲ Bluetit with apple

### Migrating birds

In winter the orchard is an important stop-over site for migrating birds such as Redwing and Fieldfare – species of thrushes.



▲ Fieldfare with apples



◀ Redwing and hawthorn berries

### Mammals

#### Nocturnal mammals

On the night shift, Foxes and Badgers patrol the ground, while bats are out hunting on the wing.

Foxes are mainly nocturnal but are seen in daylight, too ▼

Badgers forage for grubs, slugs, beetles at night ▼



### Bats

Bats make up a quarter of all mammal species on earth. They emerge at dusk, using echolocation to navigate. Flying uses a lot of energy so they need to eat up to 3000 insects in a single night. At least 4 of the UK's 17 native species have been seen at the orchard, including Pippistrelle, Noctule and Serotine.

### Rabbits and Voles

Hundreds of rabbits call the orchard home, acting as micro-sheep to help keep the coarse grasses at bay.

However they also enjoy gnawing on the bark of young fruit trees and voles burrow down to eat the roots – that is why we protect the trees with netting.



### Reptiles

#### Common lizard & Slow Worm

The orchard is great for reptiles such as Common Lizard and Slow Worm, which can be found basking on log-piles or under metal sheets which have been placed around the site.

Slow Worms look like snakes, but they are actually legless lizards. They eat slugs, snails, worms and spiders.



▲ Slow Worm



Common Lizard ▲



For more information visit: [www.racehillorchard.org.uk](http://www.racehillorchard.org.uk) Or call: 07746 185927

Racehill Community Orchard is a project of Brighton Permaculture Trust in partnership with local residents, Brighton & Hove Food Partnership and Brighton & Hove City Council.