

# ORCHARDS FOR GREATER HORSESHOE BATS

DEVON  
GREATER  
HORSESHOE  
BAT PROJECT



Traditional orchards provide good foraging opportunities for greater horseshoe bats. These areas are sheltered, and the concentration of small trees enables the bats to move through the area more easily and take advantage of the insect prey from the canopy and underlying grassland. It is important that the grassland habitat beneath the trees is not managed intensively, and that pesticides/herbicides are avoided – this will maximise the availability of insect prey for any bats in the area.

Greater horseshoe bats have a very high frequency call, which is both quiet and directional. This means that it disappears rapidly if it has nothing to bounce back from. Because of this they need navigational features, such as hedges or trees within a few metres of their feeding grounds. This makes orchards perfect for them as they open up larger areas of grassland for them to forage in.



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A traditional orchard is defined as having 5 or more fruit trees that are spaced at less than 20 metres apart. Traditional orchards are more valuable to wildlife than modern, intensive orchards because the trees are usually larger and more widely spaced, and contain features such as dead wood and tree hollows which are used by a range of species such as nesting birds, roosting bats, insects, fungi and lichens. Trees in traditional orchards are allowed to mature and die back, leaving vital deadwood habitat for insects. The underlying grassland in traditional orchards is typically allowed to develop naturally, without the use of fertilisers and pesticides, and is managed by grazing or occasional cutting.

## Managing traditional orchards

In order to maintain a healthy traditional orchard, it is necessary to carry out some maintenance. This will include planting new trees to replace those that are becoming mature or over-mature, which will also provide a different type of habitat for insects to live in. In order to preserve traditional varieties, it may be necessary to take cuttings and graft them onto new root stock.

Annual pruning is often required, particularly if you wish to harvest the fruit regularly. For different types of fruit this is best undertaken at different times of year – for apples and pears pruning should be done in late winter, but some soft fruit like plums should be pruned in early spring or mid-summer to avoid silver leaf disease.

Leave fallen dead wood as homes for insects, if you want to tidy up, leave it in a pile to the edge of the orchard. If possible leave some windfall fruit – this will provide food for small mammals and insects.

Cut the grass as if it were a meadow – removing the arisings, either as hay or to create compost piles, and if possible aftermath graze – but remember to protect the trees from livestock browsing.

For further information about orchards, how to manage them and how to find out about any events in your area, please visit <https://www.orchardslive.org.uk/> and <http://www.orchardlink.org.uk/>.



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