Tamar Valley
National
Landscape

Tamar Valley Hedgerow Heroes

Supporting farmers, landowners and communities to protect, restore and celebrate the hedgerows that sustain wildlife, landscape and people for the future.

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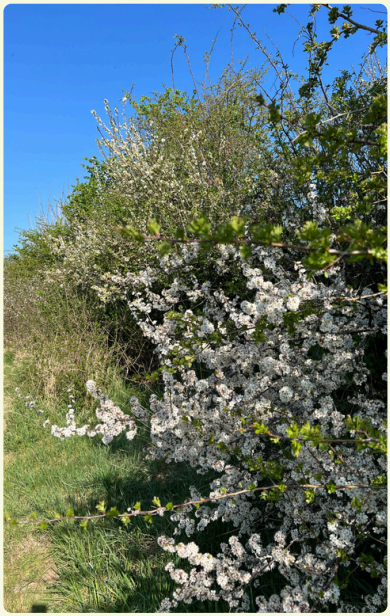
This booklet brings together practical guidance and shared best practice to support farmers, landowners and communities in caring for hedgerows across the Tamar Valley. It includes information on key hedgerow species, explains the benefits hedges provide for farming, wildlife and the wider environment, and sets out how to manage, restore and maintain hedgerows effectively while respecting local Devon and Cornish hedge traditions. By working together to protect, restore and manage hedges well, we can ensure these living boundaries continue to support farming, wildlife and people, now and for future generations.

Hedgerows are one of the most familiar and defining features of the Tamar Valley National Landscape. They shape the look and feel of our countryside, frame fields and lanes, and form a living network that supports farming, wildlife and local communities. For those who manage the land, live alongside it or enjoy spending time in it, hedges are a shared asset that quietly delivers a wide range of benefits.

The Tamar Valley is distinctive in being shaped by both Devon and Cornish hedge traditions. Many hedges are ancient, dating back hundreds of years, and reflect generations of skilled land management. Devon hedges are typically earth banks topped with shrubs and trees, while Cornish hedges are built with stone-faced banks, carefully constructed and capped with soil and vegetation. These working boundaries are part of the area's historic character and sense of place, as well as being practical features designed to suit local soils, livestock and weather.



For farmers and landowners, well managed hedgerows are an integral part of a productive and resilient landscape. They provide shelter for livestock, reducing wind chill, heat stress and exposure to driving rain, and can help protect crops from wind damage and soil loss. Strong hedge banks contribute to stock control and can reduce reliance on fencing when maintained properly. Healthy hedges also support beneficial insects and birds that play a role in natural pest control.

As wildlife corridors, hedgerows allow species to move safely through the landscape. This connectivity is increasingly important as habitats become fragmented and as wildlife adapts to changing weather patterns and climate. Continuous hedge networks support healthier, more resilient populations and help nature recover at a landscape scale.

Hedgerows are among the most wildlife-rich habitats in the countryside. A single hedge, when well-managed, can support hundreds of species over the year. Native trees and shrubs provide flowers for pollinators, berries and nuts for birds and mammals, and dense cover for nesting, roosting and shelter. Species such as dormice, bats, hedgehogs, reptiles and farmland birds rely heavily on hedges for food and protection. Their value increases when hedges are connected to one another, to woodlands, rivers, field margins and grassland.

The Wider Benefits

Hedgerows also deliver vital ecosystem services that benefit everyone. Their roots stabilise soils and banks, helping to reduce erosion and nutrient run-off into watercourses. By slowing the movement of water across the land, hedges contribute to natural flood management, reducing flood risk downstream and helping protect farmland, homes and infrastructure. As woody features, hedgerows store carbon in their soils, roots and growth, playing a role in tackling climate change when managed sensitively.

Despite their importance, many hedgerows have been lost or fallen into poor condition through removal, neglect or inappropriate management. Restoring and caring for hedges is one of the most effective and achievable ways to support nature recovery while strengthening the long-term resilience of the landscape.

Why do we need to be hedge-over-hills in love with native hedgerows in the Tamar Valley?

Enhanced Biodiversity - Native hedgerows provide habitats for a wide variety of species, including birds, insects, mammals, and plants. This diversity helps create a balanced ecosystem, supporting pollinators like bees and butterflies, and predatory insects that control pests.

Soil Conservation - Hedgerows prevent soil erosion with their dense root systems, which stabilise the soil. They also improve soil structure and fertility through organic matter from decomposing leaf litter and nitrogen-fixing plants.

Water Management - Hedgerows help manage water resources by reducing runoff and improving water infiltration. This is crucial for maintaining soil moisture and to slow the flow of surface water over land.

Microclimate Regulation - Hedgerows act as windbreaks, protecting crops and reducing soil desiccation (soil drying). They also moderate temperature extremes, providing shade in hot weather and reducing frost risks.

Pollution Reduction - Hedgerows can reduce noise, dust, and chemical drift from agricultural activities and roads, creating cleaner and healthier environments for both wildlife and humans.

Carbon Sequestration - By absorbing carbon dioxide, hedgerows contribute to mitigating climate change. Their dense vegetation captures and stores carbon, helping to reduce greenhouse gas levels.

Aesthetic and Functional Value - Hedgerows enhance the beauty of landscapes and can serve as natural borders and screens. They also offer food sources for livestock, humans, and wildlife, diversifying farm income.

Habitats and Connectivity - Hedgerows are wonderful habitats in their own right, as well as creating corridors that allow wildlife to move safely between fragmented habitats and landscapes.

PTES, The Benefits of Healthy Hedgerows,
www.hedgerowsurvey.ptes.org

Diversity for biodiversity
A diverse mix of native trees and shrubs in hedgerows supports a wide range of wildlife by providing essential nesting, roosting, and foraging opportunities. Berries, nuts, and blossoms offer vital nutrition, enhancing biodiversity and promoting healthy ecosystems by improving soil quality and attracting pollinators.

Native trees that blossom in spring support early pollinators, while those with berries provide food for wildlife in autumn and winter. Trees with nuts and berries play a crucial role by offering food and shelter, especially during colder months, and enhance habitat diversity for insects, birds, and mammals.

Hedge Resources and Guidance

people's trust for endangered species — Peoples Trust for Endangered Species - hedgerows

the tree council — The Tree Council - Hedge planting and growing

Devon Hedge Group — Devon Hedge Group

Hawthorn (*Crataegus monogyna*)
Named after the month it blooms, this tree heralds the transition from spring to summer. Its pale green leaves are among the first to appear in spring, followed by a burst of delicate pale-pink blossoms in May. A hedgerow staple, it is teeming with wildlife, from bugs to birds.

Mature trees can grow up to 15 metres tall, characterised by dense, thorny branches, though they may also grow as small, single-stemmed trees. The brown-grey bark is knotted and fissured, with slender, thorn-covered twigs.

Wildlife Wonder
Common Hawthorn supports numerous species. Its leaves feed caterpillars of various moths, including Hawthorn, Orchard Ermine, and Pear Leaf Blister. Dormice eat its flowers, which provide nectar and pollen for bees and other pollinators. The antioxidant-rich haws are eaten by migrating birds like Redwings, Fieldfares, and Thrushes, as well as small mammals. The dense, thorny foliage offers excellent nest spots for many birds.

Blackthorn (*Prunus spinosa*)
One of the earliest trees to blossom, Blackthorn dazzles the hedgerows with clouds of snow-white flowers in early spring. It is renowned for its rich, dark fruits. Mature trees are spiny and densely branched, reaching heights of 6–7 metres and living up to 100 years. The dark brown bark is smooth, with twigs forming straight side shoots that develop into thorns.

Wildlife Wonder
Blackthorn flowers early, offering nectar and pollen for bees in spring. Its leaves feed caterpillars of various moths, such as the Lackey, Magpie, Swallow-Tailed, and Yellow-Tailed, and are used by Black and Brown Hairstreak butterflies. Birds nest in the dense thickets, eat insects from the leaves, and enjoy sloes in autumn.

Rowan (*Sorbus aucuparia*)
The Rowan tree boasts a rich, mystical history. Its elegant form produces berries that are perfect for making jam. Both its leaves and berries are beloved by wildlife, thriving in both woodlands and urban areas. Mature trees can reach 15 metres and live up to 200 years. They have smooth, silvery-grey bark and purple, hairy leaf buds.

Wildlife Wonder
The leaves are eaten by caterpillars of moths like the larger Welsh wave and autumn green carpet, while apple fruit moth caterpillars feed on the berries.
Flowers offer pollen and nectar for bees and other pollinators.
The berries provide autumn food for birds, including Blackbirds, Mistle Thrushes, Bullfinches, Redstarts, Redwings, Song Thrushes, Fieldfares, and Waxwings.

Wild Cherry (*Prunus avium*)
Adorned with beautiful blossoms and a bounty of bright red fruits, the wild cherry is one of the prettiest native trees. It is cherished by both gardeners and wildlife. Mature trees can reach 30 metres and live up to 60 years. Their shiny, deep reddish-brown bark features cream-coloured lenticels. The botanical name "avium" highlights the role of birds in propagating the tree by eating cherries and dispersing seeds.

Wildlife Wonder

Spring flowers offer early nectar and pollen for bees. Birds like Blackbirds and Song Thrushes, along with mammals such as Badgers, Wood Mice, Yellow-Necked Mice, and Dormice, eat the cherries. The foliage is a primary food source for caterpillars of various moths, including Cherry Fruit, Cherry Bark, Orchard Ermine, and Brimstone.

Guelder Rose (*Viburnum opulus*)
Flamboyant, yet delicate, the Guelder Rose is a beacon for wildlife. It brightens woodlands with its spring blossoms, autumn colours, and vivid red berries. Guelder Rose is a spreading, deciduous shrub that grows up to 4 metres tall and spreads 2–5 metres wide. It features greyish, hairless stems.

Wildlife Wonder
The red berries are a vital food source for birds like Bullfinches and Mistle Thrushes. The shrub canopy offers shelter for various wildlife, and the flowers attract insects and hoverflies.

Crab Apple (*Malus sylvestris*)
A forager's delight, Crab Apple trees produces small, hard fruits - perfect for making bright orange jelly. Mature Crab Apple trees grow to about 10 metres and can live up to 100 years. They have an irregular, rounded shape with a wide, spreading canopy. The greyish-brown, mottled bark becomes contorted, especially when exposed, and twigs often develop spines. Crab Apples are among the few host trees for parasitic Mistletoe which drapes among their branches.

Wildlife Wonder

Crab Apple leaves feed caterpillars of moths like the Eyed Hawk-Moth, Green Pug, and Pale Tussock. The flowers offer early pollen and nectar for insects, especially bees. Birds such as Blackbirds, Thrushes, and Crows eat the fruit, along with mammals like Mice, Voles, Foxes, and Badgers.

Hazel (*Corylus avellana*)
The hazel tree is incredibly versatile, with catkins that resemble lambs' tails and nuts that ripen in late summer. Its durable and flexible stems make it invaluable for various uses, and it plays a crucial role in conservation efforts. The nuts are a favourite among people, squirrels, and Hazel Dormice. Hazel trees, often coppiced, can grow up to 12 metres and live up to 80 years. Those that are coppiced can live for several hundred years. They have smooth, grey-brown bark that peels with maturity. Look carefully for the tiny crimson pink tendrilled flowers in early spring, peeping out of the buds!

Wildlife Wonder
Hazel leaves provide nourishment for caterpillars of moths such as the Large Emerald, Small White Wave and Nut-Tree Tussock. Coppiced Hazel supports butterflies, particularly Fritillaries, and offers shelter for ground-nesting birds like Nightingales, Nightjars and Willow Warblers.

Hazel is closely associated with Dormice, which eat hazelnuts to prepare for hibernation and feed on caterpillars in spring. Hazelnuts are also a favourite of many birds and small mammals. The base of mature hazel stands and its branches are often adorned with mosses, liverworts, and lichens.

Oak, Sessile (*Quercus petraea*)
Though less renowned than the English Oak, the Sessile Oak is equally cherished for its gnarled and twisted branches, reaching heights of 20 -40 metres. It stands tall in woodlands, as hedgerow trees and condensed within a managed hedge, providing a haven for wildlife. Squirrels, Jays, and Badgers feast on its acorns, while caterpillars thrive on its leaves.

Wildlife Wonder
Oak trees support more wildlife than any other of our native trees. They provide habitats for over 250 insect species, which feed birds and other predators. The bark hosts mosses, lichens, liverworts, and deadwood cavities for nesting birds and roosting bats. Flower and leaf buds feed Purple Hairstreak butterfly caterpillars. The soft leaves decompose easily in autumn, forming rich leaf mulch that supports beetles and fungi, such as the Oakbug Milkcap.

Hornbeam (*Carpinus betulus*)
The mighty hornbeam is as tough as they come. It is both beautiful and useful, with its year-round leaf cover. Although deciduous, it holds on to its bronzed leaves late into the winter. Common hornbeam has pale grey bark, distinctly marked by vertical lines. Mature trees can grow up to 30 metres tall and live for over 300 years. The brown-grey twigs are slightly hairy, and the leaf buds resemble those of beech but are shorter and slightly curved at the tips.

Wildlife Wonder

The Hornbeam retains its leaves during the winter months, offering shelter, roosting, nesting, and foraging opportunities for birds and small mammals. Hornbeam serves as a food plant for caterpillars of various moths, including the Nut Tree Tussock. In autumn, Finches, Tits, and small mammals eat the seeds.

Other Unsung Heroes of the Hedge

Silver Birch (*Betula pendula*)
With its distinctive silver-white bark, the silver birch is a popular choice among gardeners looking to rejuvenate and cleanse their land for the upcoming year.

Downy Birch (*Betula pubescens*)
Soft on the outside, tough on the inside. This tree, with its fuzzy leaf stalks, shoots, and twigs, grows further north than any other broadleaf species on a global scale.

Dog Rose (*Rosa canina*)
A familiar, scrambling beauty that decorates hedgerows with its pale pink flowers. The Dog Rose uses its curved spines to clasp onto other shrubs as it grows.

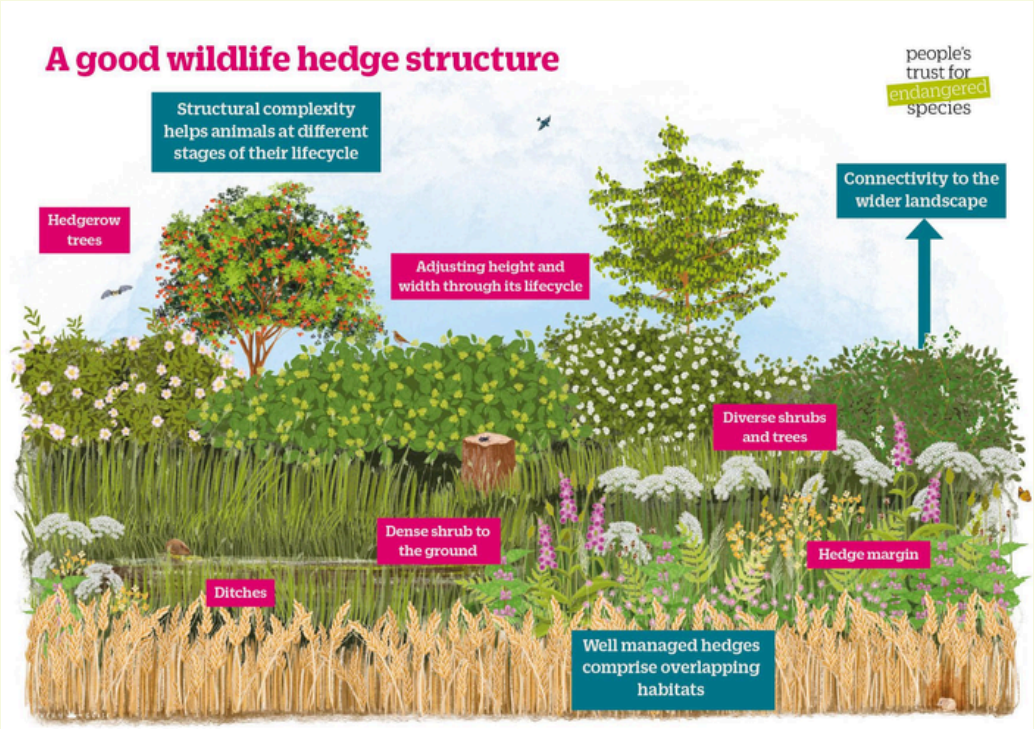
Spindle (*Euonymus europaeus*)
The Spindle is at its most beautiful in autumn when its leaves turn russet and its pink and orange fruits ripen. Wildlife is drawn to its leaves and fruit, while aphids flock to it, attracting a variety of their predators.

Honeysuckle (*Lonicera periclymenum*)
A twining, scented woodland stunner. This trumpet-like flower is a haven for wildlife, with its sweet, heady fragrance attracting nearby species, especially on warm summer evenings.

Elder (*Sambucus nigra*)
The Elder embodies the essence of summer with its fragrant flowers and soot-dark fruits. Legend has it that planting an elder by your house would keep the devil at bay.

Wych Elm (*Ulmus glabra*)
Once widespread, the Wych Elm has become a rare sight due to the devastation caused by Dutch elm disease. This decline is closely linked to the dwindling population of the white-letter hairstreak butterfly, as its caterpillars depend on elm leaves for survival.

A good wildlife hedge in the Tamar Valley is one that's tall, wide and richly layered, with a dense base, a varied mix of native shrubs and the occasional mature tree to mimic the shelter and food supply of a natural woodland edge. Dense vegetation at the bottom provides refuge for birds, small mammals and insects, while a broad, diverse shrub layer offers blossom, berries and year-round cover. The traditional Devon earth-banked hedges and Cornish stone-faced hedges enhance this structure even further, creating warm, sheltered pockets, damp crevices and sunlit slopes that support an exceptional range of plants and wildlife. When managed sensitively, avoiding hard annual cutting and maintaining depth and connectivity, these living boundaries become vital corridors, linking habitats across the valley's farmed and wooded landscapes



PTES, A good wildlife hedge structure, www.hedgerowsurvey.ptes.org

Hedgerow Management, Cycles and Planning

- Avoid hard annual trimming to prevent loss of berries, reduced shelter, and gaps forming at the hedge base.
- Allow hedges to grow taller and wider between cuts to strengthen structure and increase food and cover for wildlife.
- Use longer trimming cycles (e.g., cut every 2–3 years) or rotate trims across the farm to keep resources available year-round.
- Retain mature and dying trees within hedges, and plan for new tree recruitment to maintain long-term habitat features.
- Rejuvenate older hedges with traditional methods such as hedge laying to rebuild dense growth from the base.
- Protect and maintain hedge banks, whether earth-banked or stone-faced, as they provide valuable micro-habitats and structural diversity.
- Create a simple management plan noting trimming cycles, hedges needing rejuvenation, important trees, and habitat connectivity.

Why not take the time to explore the resources and guidance from People Trust for Endangered Species (PTES) and complete a Healthy Hedge Survey.