

Hereford Times – Talking Point: Andy Link, chef/patron
The Riverside Inn, Aymestrey
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Creating a home for wildlife

The natural world is under considerable pressure – UK songbirds have decreased by a staggering 60 per cent and hedgehog numbers have dropped by half since the year 2000.

Clearly, nature needs a helping hand. As we set about the task of preparing the pub kitchen garden for planting after the winter, the other chefs and I decided to take a more wildlife friendly approach.

We have created rock piles to provide a home for reptiles such as slow worms and lizards, and log piles to provide shelter for insects, as well as bird nesting boxes. Earlier this year The Riverside adopted the British Hedgehog Preservation Society as its 2018 charity, and as well as raising money, we are purchasing hedgehog houses to provide shelter for them when raising young, and as a hibernation area.

Our habitat enhancement plan also includes a plan to install bat boxes as roosting sites. In the UK, we are lucky enough to have 18 species of bat, 17 of which are known to breed here – that's almost a quarter of our mammal species. Bat populations have suffered a severe decline in recent years, which is very sad, as one of the pleasures of a summer dusk is seeing them flitting around.

We have now kept bees for several years, and a key part of our planting scheme looks at plants that are good for pollinating insects with nectar or pollen at different times, this extends also to plants with berries, edible foliage, nuts etc – some of which make it on to the menu. Berries and nuts are also a useful source of food for lots of birds.

We are lucky to be next to a beautiful part of the River Lugg, which supports wildlife, but even a small pond in a garden is beneficial – providing somewhere for frogs to spawn, and birds to drink during a drought.

It may sound like an excuse, but sometimes not being too tidy, keeping some grass longer and allowing dandelions and daisies to flourish, is hugely important to many species, and mowing less frequently is very much advocated. Scattering wildflower seeds can also help create a diverse habitat which is good for nature and is also a pleasure to look at. Planting a wildlife friendly hedge is another beneficial thing to do, providing food for a huge variety of birds and insects, and shelter for small mammals. By helping one species, you often help another – for example by helping voles to flourish, you also provide a food source for our fabulous owl population.