



WHAT IS A HABITAT?

A habitat is a home. Habitats are complex and are not viewed from an individual species' point of view. Plants and animals suited to particular habitats interact and depend on each other and the loss or addition of one small element can impact on the ability of species to thrive in that habitat.



For **animals**, the habitat needs to provide shelter, air, water, food and everything that allows them to find a mate and reproduce.

For **plants** the habitat must provide the right combination of light, air, water and soil (if used) to enable them to grow and reproduce.

Habitats can be viewed on a large scale e.g. the Amazon rainforest or on a very small scale e.g. a pond in your back garden. Both are equally important but provide different things.

Typical farmland habitats in Wales

Farms provide a rich diversity of habitats and are home to many different plant and animal species. In Wales, grassland habitats are dominant but there is even variation between types of grassland. For example, many farms have improved pastures as well as areas of unimproved grassland that have never been ploughed and reseeded. Rhos pasture, or marshy grassland is usually found in poorly drained areas and provides important habitat for ground nesting birds and rare invertebrates including the marsh fritillary butterfly.

Networks of hedgerows on farms provide important habitats for wildlife alongside the important role they play in providing shelter for animals and controlling water flow on farms. Woodlands and copses are common on farms and provide shelter for livestock and crops as well as providing important habitats for wildlife.

Ponds and watercourses are great features to have on a farm and can provide habitats for a wide range of invertebrates, birds, mammals and plants.

Man-made structures such as roadside verges, stone walls and buildings also provide habitats. Many plants thrive on roadside verges and provide food resources for many birds, mammals, amphibians and invertebrates. Stone walls and buildings provide shelter and can often host more specialised plants and animals that are not found elsewhere.



Are some habitats more important than others?

All habitats are important and it is difficult to prioritise one over another. Some may be locally or nationally important because they host species that are declining and in need of protection. Sites that have habitats rich in common species are also important and worthy of preservation. The important thing to remember is that productive farming can exist alongside a natural environment rich in biodiversity. Many farms in Wales have a mosaic of different habitats that are home to many different species and there are plenty of opportunities to enhance areas of the farm and encourage wildlife without negatively affecting the farm's productivity.



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