

# Tayside Biodiversity Partnership



## BIODIVERSITY

THE VARIETY OF LIFE

**Blossom time!** There's something really exciting about seeing fruit trees in blossom – first the pear, then the cherry, apple and plum: either just one or two trees or the view across a landscape dotted with orchards. Get up close and you should hear the buzz of the bees pollinating the trees – and being busy pollinating the surrounding plants, including our precious crops in nearby fields.

Traditional orchards are a much-loved part of our British heritage and countryside – from the pears of northern Scotland, to the plums of Westmorland and the mazzards (cherries) of Devon and Cornwall – and of course, the thousands of apple varieties across the UK (it is said\* that you could make an apple pie every day for 16 years and not use the same variety twice!).

There is a rich history of fruit growing in Scotland – walled orchards and traditional orchards are known from Caithness to the Borders. Like the rest of the UK, there are local varieties such as the Lass o' Gowrie apple from Perthshire and the *Lindorseii* pear from Fife. Plums grow exceptionally well in Eastern Scotland too. In Tayside, there were for many years large orchards in Angus, Highland Perthshire and the Carse of Gowrie. The Carse has been known for its apple, pear and plum orchards since the monasteries owned and farmed the grange lands in the 12<sup>th</sup> century. A recent survey of the Carse, though, showed that out of 51 documented orchards, 28 no longer exist and only 9 of the remaining orchards are of any particular value.

This finding mirrors the situation elsewhere in Scotland and the UK – some counties have lost 95% of their orchards since the 1970s – mostly due to changes in agriculture, development pressures and benign neglect. Once a common sight, the traditional orchard habitat is now under serious threat - the reason the UK Biodiversity Action Plan now includes Traditional Orchards in its list of priority habitats.

Our desire to lower food miles and enjoy locally-sourced produce is now turning the tide of disinterest and community orchards, school orchards and fruit trees planted in housing association gardens are now beginning to flourish. If you don't have a fruit tree in your patch, please consider one – there are many Scottish heritage varieties to choose from. If space is a premium, you can still have a row or avenue of fruit trees, or cordon them so that you can have them lining a path.

The Tayside Biodiversity Partnership has just published its latest booklet on orchard wildlife and management. Copies are available from Tel. 01382 433042 or can be downloaded from [www.taysidebiodiversity.co.uk](http://www.taysidebiodiversity.co.uk).

If you are fortunate enough to have a fruit tree or orchard, consider how you manage the grass beneath it – is there potential for a species-rich 'grassland' (however small) that will support an array of beneficial insects which in turn will bring in the bats and birds? Sunny areas may encourage orchids, shadier areas could include primroses. Is there a bird or bat box on the tree (or nearby if the tree is too wee)? It may be too late to plant new trees (leave that until the autumn), but the timing will soon be right to graft old varieties on to rootstock to create new trees for the future. Training courses on pruning and grafting regularly take place in Tayside: enquire via [biodiversity.events@dundee.gov.uk](mailto:biodiversity.events@dundee.gov.uk) or check [www.taysidebiodiversity.co.uk](http://www.taysidebiodiversity.co.uk). In the west, contact [infor@clydevalleyorchards.co.uk](mailto:infor@clydevalleyorchards.co.uk) or check [www.clydevalleyorchards.co.uk](http://www.clydevalleyorchards.co.uk). Now is also the time to plan ahead for using and "marketing" the fruit, a community celebration around Apple Day (October), perhaps, or just a summer event beneath a fruit tree: poetry, art, wildlife surveys – it doesn't matter. Just enjoy your fruit trees!

611 words.

\* quote from the Common Ground "Apple Source Book" 1991