

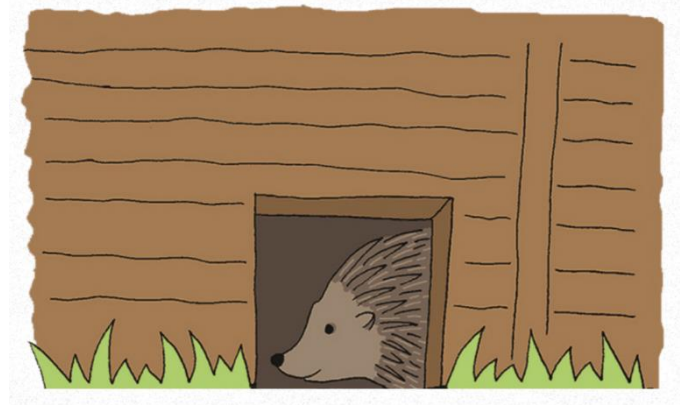


#TeamWildier Toolkit: Wildlife Actions - Connectivity

Think about how you and your outdoor space are connected to your wider community and your surrounding landscape. You can make small changes, have a big impact for wildlife and join with other people to create a real buzz (snuffle and tweet!) in your neighbourhood.

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What Comes Naturally

Get to know the habitats surrounding your garden/outdoor space and further afield. This will help you decide what kind of wildlife you can support and who you may attract as a visitor. Gardens can provide valuable food and refuge for wildlife suffering from habitat destruction and your garden could be a much-needed missing link in a disconnected landscape.

1. Mixed native hedge along boundaries

Rather than, (or in addition to) your fence you could plant a lovely hedge to connect your garden to your neighbour's garden or the wider habitat.

Hedgerows are one of the most important garden habitats for wildlife and, with the right management; they will support a good variety of birds, small mammals, insects, and plants. As well as being vital refuges for native species, hedgerows are key to transforming our urban and suburban outdoor spaces into wildlife corridors, allowing animals to travel between dwindling habitats.

These 'green corridors', allow wildlife to move about between gardens and other spaces to reach feeding and breeding opportunities - this makes them a **much more wildlife-friendly choice of boundary than fences or walls**, especially if they're made up of native trees and shrubs.

To avoid disturbing wildlife, try to avoid cutting the entire hedge at once and do not cut at all during the bird-nesting season that spans March to July. Disturbing nesting birds is illegal. In the same way, don't 'tidy' trees and hedges unnecessarily and leave dead branches on the tree or where they have fallen if possible.



Living hedgerows make a vital contribution to halting biodiversity decline and tackling climate change - we would recommend that any garden large enough to accommodate one should have a hedge!

As well as offering food for insects, small mammals, and birds, hedges provide important shelter for many species - particularly nesting birds and hibernating insects, they also provide connectivity and a vital corridor for species to move between gardens.

Hedges make natural windbreaks, creating sheltered areas, which is particularly important for butterflies. They also create areas of shade, increasing the range of wildlife habitats in our gardens - as well as creating pleasant places for us to sit and rest. In terms of their benefit to the wider environment, they also soak up carbon, contribute to reduce rainwater run-off and flood risk, and filter dust and pollution from nearby streets – overall, as a garden feature, it's fair to say hedges are pretty hard to beat!

Informal hedges and trees are more natural and much better for wildlife than those that are regularly clipped, as they will create a denser, richer creature habitat and highway if allowed thicken out and produce flowers and berries.

Allowing leaf litter to lay naturally at the base of your hedge also creates a good hideout for small mammals, hedgehogs hunting for worms and beetles, and ground-nesting bees.



Choosing your plants:

Native shrubs and trees like hawthorn, field maple, blackthorn, beech, hornbeam, and holly make an ideal mixture of hedging plants.

Growing rambling plants, such as **wild rose, bramble and honeysuckle** through your hedge will offer even more shelter (and food) for wildlife. **Ivy is particularly beneficial** in providing cover for nesting birds - and it flowers in the autumn when few other nectar sources are available to insects.

Take note! **Blackthorn** has a tendency to send out suckers and can spread quickly to take over other areas of your garden or community space, so care is needed around selecting the right spot.

Suggested hedge plants for small gardens:

Blackthorn - *Prunus spinosa*

Bramble - *Rubus fruticosus*

Common Beech - *Fagus sylvatica*

Common Hawthorn - *Crataegus monogyna*

Common Hornbeam - *Carpinus betulus*

Crab Apple - *Malus sylvestris*

Dog-rose - *Rosa canina*

Field Maple - *Acer campestre*

Guelder Rose - *Viburnum opulus*

Hazel - *Corylus avellana*

Holly - *Ilex aquifolium*

Honeysuckle - *Lonicera periclymenum*

Ivy - *Hedera helix*

Traveller's-joy (aka Old Man's Beard) - *Clematis vitalba*

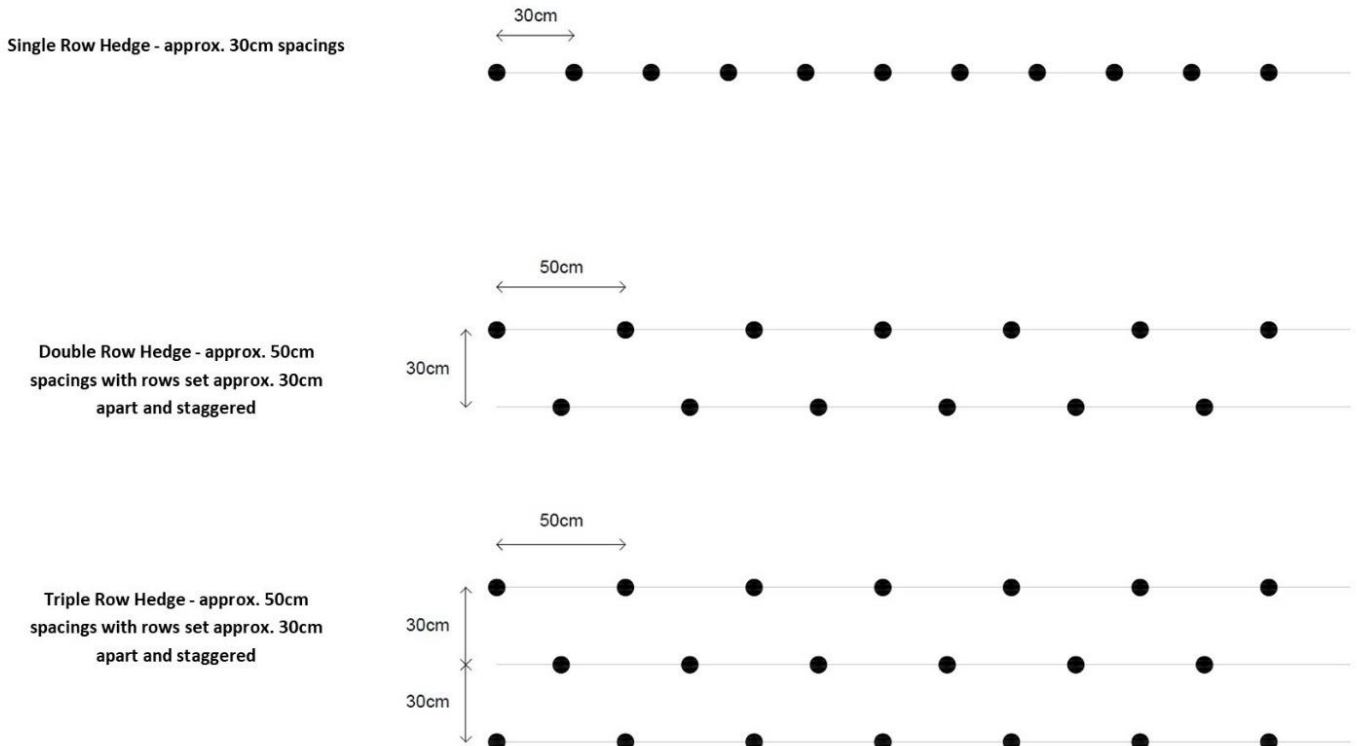
Wayfaring tree - *Viburnum lantana*



Planting your hedges:

The best time for planting is between November and March but be careful to avoid planting into waterlogged or frozen ground. Bare rooted plants are usually cheaper and more environmentally friendly (remember to buy from a peat-free nursery) but take care not to expose the roots for long when planting. Until they are established, we recommend keeping the base of your hedge plants free from weeds with a thick layer of garden mulch.

For a mixed native hedge, try to include three plants of the same species per 1m (3 ¼ ft). How you space your hedge will depend on how thick you want it to be when it is mature. We suggest the spacings below as a guide:



Maintaining your hedges:

Hedges are best left to do their own thing throughout most of the year, with pruning recommended in late winter or early spring - this ensures that nesting birds are not disturbed (hedges definitely need to be left well alone March to August for this reason!) - and that wildlife can take advantage of the pollen and nectar provided during the summer, and the fruits on offer during the winter months.

Top tips!

- Angling your plants at around 45 degrees as you plant them will help you to establish a hedge which is not too thin at the bottom.
- In the first spring after planting, cut your shrubs back to 45-60 cm (18-25 in) above the ground to encourage bushy growth in following years.
- Try to cut sections of hedge at different times, so there is always an undisturbed place for wildlife.



Schools & Community Groups:

If you are interested in creating new hedgerows on your site, there are various schemes which provide free trees and supporting resources – contact us at team.wilder@ywt.org.uk for more info!

2. Rows of trees or shrubs

Rows of trees and shrubs can provide connectivity between gardens and between areas of trees or woodland. Especially if you have a **nearby woodland** and you have the space, then try creating a woodland edge habitat in your garden or community green space by planting some small trees or shrubs with shade loving plants and wildflowers below them. Make sure you have lots of deadwood and leaf litter in this area to complete the habitat.

See **#TeamWilder Toolkit: Wildlife Actions - Shelter**.

3. Letting your grass grow long

Just leaving a bit of your lawn to grow can make such a difference to improve your garden for wild visitors. The long grass provides shelter for many insects and this in turn provides food for more wildlife.

Long grass is one of the rarest habitats in our well-tended gardens, yet it's incredibly beneficial for wildlife.

When you stop mowing you allow:

- Different species of plants to thrive.
- More food for pollinators.
- A habitat for insects and their larvae.
- Shelter and food for birds, small mammals, and amphibians.

Leave your garden wild



Take a day off today and do nothing! Leave a wild spot in your garden by not mowing the lawn, or not weeding the paving – nature will love it!



www.wildlifewatch.org.uk



Maintaining your wild patch:

There are a few different tactics you can adopt when creating a wilder grass area; the size of your garden and how relaxed you're able to be about leaving the mower alone for long periods will both be factors in choosing the best option for you!

At its simplest, you can **choose an area of grass and just leave it to grow** – then wait to see what arrives. Essentially, the less pristine our lawns are, the more promising they are for wildlife! Mowing a perimeter around and/or a path through your long grass means that you can navigate it without getting wet legs and makes it obvious that the area is being managed deliberately, rather than forgotten.

Try **relaxing and altering your mowing habits**. If you stop mowing your whole lawn or part of it, for a month or a season, you can create a busy wildlife habitat. If possible, try to leave some grass uncut throughout the year; simply varying the areas left on a three-year rotation to avoid the development of coarser grass and scrub.

If you just have a small area of grass, you may feel that a wilder grass area is impossible as it will prevent you enjoying use your lawn in summer and early autumn. But maybe you could reduce or stop mowing from early August to **allow the grass to grow over winter** avoiding cutting again until April or May, when you want to start using the lawn again. Leaving your grass long over winter provides shelter for hibernating insects and a place for invertebrate eggs and pupae to overwinter. Having access to emerging insects which have spent the winter as an egg or pupa in the long grass will help birds to build energy and fat reserves in early spring, ahead of the breeding season.

Mowing Regimes:

Whenever you mow it's important to **rake off and remove cuttings** to prevent nutrients returning to the soil – nutrient-rich soil encourages rank grasses and pernicious plants such as docks, which can outcompete the more delicate grasses and wildflowers that you're trying to establish.

Cut back the majority of your wild area at **the end of summer** once any flowers have gone to seed (August to September during a sunny spell). Make sure you leave the cuttings for a few days to drop any flower seeds back into your wild patch.

During the first year, we'd recommend cutting and raking your wilder grass area back to 5-7 cm around 4 times during the growing season. After this, a couple of cuts a year should be enough - once in August and then again in early autumn.

Be careful when you do mow - small mammals, amphibians and reptiles may be hiding in the grass. Some birds nest in larger meadows, so don't mow until after the beginning of August.

Top tips:

- You can control any assertive plants that have found their way in, like thistles, nettles and docks, by hand-weeding or reduce their spread by hand cutting them back before they go to seed.
- Explore locally to find out what wildflowers and grasses flourish and replicate these in your garden. Different plants like different soil and rock types and with such a range of habitats in Yorkshire it is worthwhile planting for hyperlocal success.
- Use an app like PlantNet or iNaturalist to identify local plants and chat to local botanists about wildflowers that are in decline that you could grow in your garden.



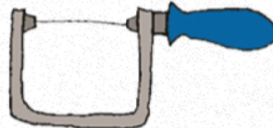
- Think about what is happening seasonally in your area, if local meadows and grassland are cut in July then help pollinators by growing plants that flower from July onwards. Your long grass can help the wildlife that is dislocated.
- If you want to develop a meadow, scarify (create some patches of bare soil with a rake or spade) the ground after autumn mowing, then sow a mix of wild grass and wildflower seed. Include yellow rattle seed, to help suppress rank grasses and give more delicate grasses and wildflowers space to thrive.
- Nature thrives on irregularity - the rises and hollows in your lawn may drive you to distraction but try to embrace them as they provide a 'micro-climate' for a range of plants and minibeasts.
- If you have a tree in your lawn, you could leave a border of grass to grow around it. Introduce some bulbs around it - native daffodils, bluebells, crocuses, snake's head fritillaries and snowdrops could all work well in this kind of setting.

For more information about mowing regimes see our [#TeamWilder Toolkit: Meadow Creation and Maintenance](#).

4. Creating a hedgehog highway

Make sure your garden has small gaps in the surrounding fences and walls allows hedgehogs and other small mammals to pop in and roam freely.

A hedgehog roams on average 2km each night and needs a gap of 13cm by 13cm (5") to get in out of your garden. You can cut a hole in a fence or dig a tunnel under it, ask your neighbours to join in and create a hedgehog highway.



You will need:

A fence panel

Ruler

Pencil

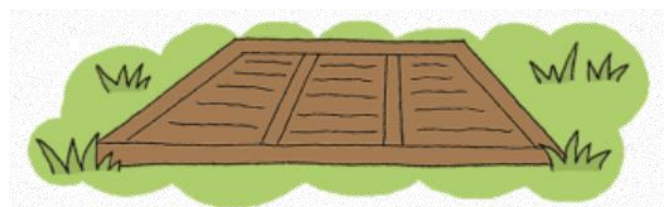
Coping saw

Sandpaper

Your neighbours' cooperation! Keep an eye out for neighbours doing work on their gardens, or using fencing contractors - this is the perfect opportunity to get a hedgehog hole put in!

Step 1:

If your neighbour is happy, remove a fence panel. The other option is to leave the fence up and use a pad saw or 'jab saw' instead of a coping saw.



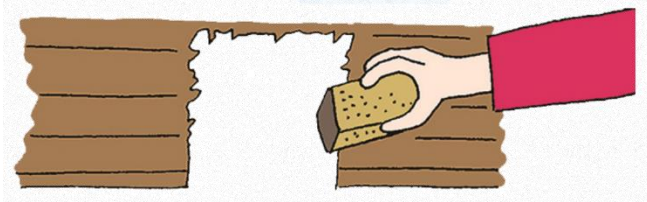
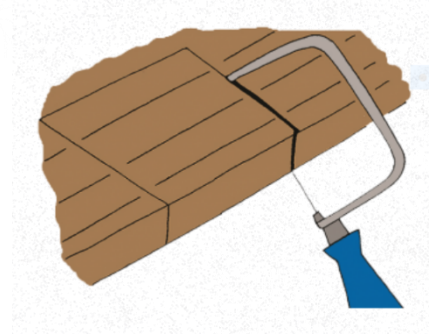
Step 2:

Measure and mark a 13cm x 13cm hole at the bottom of the panel.



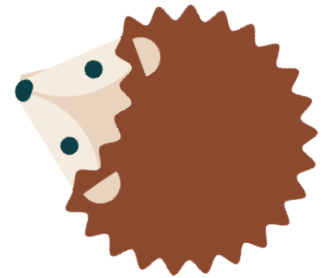
Step 3:

Using the coping saw, cut out the marked hole.



Step 4:

If there are very rough edges, use sandpaper to smooth them down.



Step 5:

Put your fence panel back, your hedgehog highway is now open for business! It's a good idea to label your hedgehog highway to ensure it is not blocked by anyone accidentally.

5. Dry stone wall

A dry-stone wall is a great alternative to a fence and acts as a wildlife corridor. Lichen, mosses, and ferns grow on and between the rocks; mice, stoats and voles hide in the gaps; bees visit the nectar-giving flowers that can live in cracks and frogs, toads, and slow-worms shelter in damp crevices.

You may not be able to have a wildlife pond, but you can still provide a space for amphibians from nearby ponds to live. Frogs and newts will travel up to 500 metres from a pond, toads will travel up to 5000 metres! Dry stone walls, piles of stone and undisturbed log piles and plenty of insulating garden waste or leaf litter will provide damp conditions for creatures to spend a hot summer or a cold winter. People can be unhappy with a shady part of their garden, but by thinking about the wildlife that needs shade you can transform this space into a perfect wildlife haven.

<https://www.wildlifetrusts.org/actions/how-build-mini-stone-wall>

7. Climbing plants

Climbing plants like **ivy, wisteria, honeysuckle, and clematis** will scale up vertical surfaces like walls and fences, covering otherwise bare areas with lush green foliage and colourful flowers, and creating connectivity for wildlife between gardens.

Climbing plants can be grown in pots and trailed up walls using a trellis, making them a perfect addition for yards or balconies where space and access to soil is limited.



Recommended climbing plants:

Plant	Description	When it flowers
Ivy	Ivy is one of our most familiar plants, seen climbing up trees, walls, and along the ground, almost anywhere. It is a great provider of food and shelter for all kinds of animals, from butterflies to bats.	Autumn
Honeysuckle	A true wildlife 'hotel', Honeysuckle is a climbing plant that caters for all kinds of wildlife: it provides nectar for insects, prey for bats, nest sites for birds and food for small mammals.	Spring, Summer and/or Autumn
Clematis	Clematis, (otherwise known as old-man's beard) is a climbing plant that scrabbles over bushes in hedgerows, woodland rides and edges, and scrubby grassland on limestone soils. Leave the seed heads as they make good nesting materials for birds.	Summer to Autumn
Jasmine	Jasmine is a highly scented climber that is renowned for its fragrance. Different varieties flower at different times of the year. The flowers tend to be white or pale pink, although those of winter jasmine are bright yellow.	Spring, Summer and/or Autumn
Wisteria	A mature wisteria looks incredibly impressive when in full flower. They can be grown up walls or even mature trees. They like well-drained soil in full sun.	Late Spring to Summer
Climbing rose	Climbing roses (Rosa) are vigorous climbers and often bear scented blooms. Varieties with single open flowers are best for bees. They are great for covering walls and fences or growing over pergolas and arches.	Summer to Autumn
Golden hop	A strong growing climber with yellow, deeply lobed leaves to 15cm in length with drooping greenish-yellow flower clusters. It provides shelter for birds and the leaves are a food plant of the comma butterfly. Care is needed as hops can irritate skin (wear gloves when handling) and it is toxic to pets if eaten.	Summer
Passionflower	A vigorous, large, evergreen climber with beautiful bowl-shaped flowers up to 8cm in diameter. Passionflowers provide general shelter for insects and are great for ladybirds.	Summer to Autumn

* Information with thanks to RHS

8. Porous boundaries

Porous boundaries allow wildlife to move between gardens and can benefit many species, including birds, mammals, and amphibians. **Here are some ways to incorporate them into your garden:**

- **Use hedges:** Hedges can provide shelter, food, and nesting places. You can plant hedges from scratch or grow them through existing fences.
- **Cut holes in fences:** Small holes in the bottom of fences can help small animals move between properties.



- **Open trellis and fences:** These are made to be porous as there are plenty of gaps. If you desire more privacy, then consider simply replacing one panel at the bottom of your garden.

9. Other things to think about ...

Feeding birds:

Feeding birds is a perfect way to support bird populations in decline through loss of habitat. See **#TeamWilder Toolkit: Wildlife Actions – Food**. If you are about to start feeding birds or thinking about adjusting the type of food you supply then you might want to consider a few factors, depending on where you live. For most people, especially if you are living in an urban or semi-urban area then none of this applies, so feed on! However, some bird species such as willow tit and marsh tits are in huge decline and by intervening with feeders you can impact on their local populations by giving other birds, such as blue tits and great tits, an advantage. Here are some things to think about if you live in a rural or suburban area or if you live near a woodland or a nature reserve:



- **Do some research about local bird populations**, talk to a local bird watcher about what birds are living near you and find out if you have any local birds on the Birds of Conservation Concern list.
- If you are concerned that you are missing out supporting some of your local birds, then **reduce the amount of peanuts and try out different seeds**.
- Some less confident birds may prefer a small scattering of seeds on the ground so **test some different ways of feeding and see if you attract different birds**.
- If you have the space then **introduce plants and features to encourage birds naturally**: providing wild berries, letting wild grasses go to seed, planting teasel and knapweed, an untidy tangle with deadwood, leaf litter, access to soil and plant for caterpillar abundance. In this way you can attract birds without having to constantly fill and clean your feeders and when you go on holiday you don't have to worry about your visitors going hungry.

If you are thinking about putting up a new bird box, then have a think about what species of bird you want to help in your local area. If you do not need to encourage blue tits and great tits locally then put-up boxes suitable for other birds **#TeamWilder Toolkit: Wildlife Actions – Shelter**.

If you live near land that is grazed, you can help swifts, swallows, and house martins by putting up special boxes for swifts or you can make a boggy or muddy area for swallows and house martins to collect mud for their nests.

Butterflies and moths:

Yorkshire has such a variety of landscapes and by finding out whether you may get some rarer butterflies or moths visiting, will help you think about what types of plants you need to provide for caterpillars and as a nectar source. Be ambitious about what visitors you may get as migrating butterflies and moths may suddenly make an appearance and be in desperate need of a pitstop on a long journey. See **#TeamWilder Toolkit: Wildlife Actions – Food**.



Ponds:

If you live near ponds or wetlands that support **dragonflies**, then you can make their populations stronger and more resilient to drought by having your own wildlife pond. See **#TeamWilder Toolkit: Wildlife Actions – Water**.

Bats:

If you have **bats living nearby**, then try to minimise your outdoor lighting to support your local bats.



Image credit: Jo Rawson

- **Have essential lights on a sensor rather than constantly on (saves on electricity too!)**
- **Dim or switch lights off at dusk and dawn.**
- **Use warm long-wavelength lights and avoid blue-white short wavelength lights. Pick lighting that is less than a 3000K colour temperature.**

7. Helping others grow wilder

Chat to your neighbours about what you are doing in your garden - you might inspire others and find new ways to collaborate. Talking about what you are doing in your garden for wildlife can inspire other people to try new things, together you can have an even bigger impact for local wildlife.

Ideas for things that you can collaborate on:

- Create a wildlife corridor through numerous gardens, or along a street, path, alley, or snicket
- Creating a wild border on a shared boundary
- Planting a continuous hedge
- Arranging a seed swap
- Take part in an open garden event
- Grow trees for local tree planting schemes
- Apply for Yorkshire Wildlife Trust's Wildlife Gardening Award - www.ywt.org.uk/wildlife-gardening-award



Having conversations about your garden is a great way to find out what types of plants might flourish on your specific soil-type and swap cuttings and seeds. Sharing stories about your garden wildlife spurs others to adapt their gardens accordingly. With enough enthusiasm you may be able to **start a formal or informal wildlife gardening group**.

Finding local experts: This can be a good way of improving your understanding your local habitat. Joining in a volunteering event at a local nature reserve gives you an opportunity to find other people locally who are also interested in wildlife and may have some good tips for you.

<https://www.ywt.org.uk/get-involved/volunteer>



Attending events is a great way to increase your knowledge of local wildlife to help you to understand what to grow and who may visit your garden or green space.

<https://www.ywt.org.uk/our-events>

8. Improving your local area for wildlife

Joining a local community group: This is a great way of finding people who are enthusiastic about their local area. This group may be already interested in nature, and you can find like-minded people, or you can be an advocate for local wildlife and inspire more people to start thinking about nature recovery in your community.

Discovering **what is already happening** is essential to making the most from your efforts. Visit your local library, community hub, keep an eye on noticeboards and do a search for local groups on social media. Your local councillor should be able to tell you about groups and opportunities in your community. Don't be put off if you think you haven't got much time or knowledge to contribute, a small amount of participation makes a network stronger. Knowing that other people care and are trying to make a difference helps motivate everyone along and reassures people that change is possible.

For more information on how to take action in your community explore our **#TeamWilder Community Toolkits**, they offer a range of support with setting up a community group, getting your voice heard and working with others.

For more inspiration see the wealth of **#TeamWilder case studies** which share stories from a wide range of community groups from across Yorkshire.

This toolkit has been created with credit to The Wildlife Trusts.

