

Environmental Stewardship

Case study: Tedney Farm



Name:	John and Thomas Walker
Region/County:	Midlands, Herefordshire/Worcestershire
Address:	Tedney Farm, Worcestershire
Farm Size/Type:	400 hectares, mixed beef, sheep, arable and horticulture
Cropping:	Hops, apples, pears and damson
Stocking:	Hereford cattle, sheep
Key objectives:	Farmland birds, wildlife, soil and water protection

TWO West Midlands farming brothers have helped England's flagship environmentally friendly farming scheme reach a major milestone this winter. By signing up to join Natural England's Higher Level Stewardship, John and Thomas Walker's farm became the 10,000th to join since the scheme started in 2005.

John and Thomas Walker run a 400 hectare mixed livestock, arable and horticulture farm on the Herefordshire/Worcestershire border. The business is managed from two sites, with one farm having been in the family since 1710, and the other bought just after the First World War.

They have a flock of 500 ewes and a herd of around 120 pedigree breeding Hereford cattle, and are proud to see their high quality organic beef being sold in Waitrose supermarkets.



Hereford cattle on Tedney Farm, Worcestershire

With the support of the new HLS agreement, John and Thomas have decided to create enhanced habitat for wetland wildlife beside the River Teme by returning some of the fields, where they currently grow arable crops and potatoes in rotation, into grasslands for the cattle. The Teme is designated as a nationally important Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) because of the variety of wildlife it supports, including salmon, native crayfish, lampreys, bullhead and pearl mussels. Otters are also found on the river along with a range of river birds.

John said: “There were always flocks of lapwings around when I was growing up and it would be great if returning these arable fields to river meadows encourages the curlews and lapwings to return. Having the fields under grass will also help prevent soil and nutrients from running into the Teme and this will help maintain a healthy river, able to sustain good fish stocks which should increase the numbers of dippers, kingfishers and otters.”

Hops - a traditional crop in Herefordshire - have also been reintroduced on the farm and are now sold to various brewers in England, as well as being marketed as far afield as Texas. John and Thomas have also restored and replanted over 31 hectares of traditional damson, cider apple and Perry pear orchards on the farm. This work has already safeguarded the habitat of the Noble Chafer, a rare beetle with a brilliantly iridescent body.

Local Natural England Land Management adviser, James Griffiths, is excited about the work already under way. “Traditional orchards are becoming increasingly rare, as they are often removed or cleared, particularly if the trees are reaching the end of their productive life. The Noble Chafer beetle depends on old, decaying wood within live trees especially cherry, plum and apple. The news that this reclusive mini-beast is thriving in John and Thomas’ orchards is a clear testimony to their dedication in providing the right habitats for local native species.”



Restored orchards (foreground), with older orchards behind.

Farmland birds like yellow hammers, tree sparrows and skylarks will also benefit from management of the arable land and the hedgerows. John said: “I’m very proud of our orchards and the amount of old hedges we have already re-laid and restored. It is wonderful to see the large flocks of migrant fieldfares and redwings feeding in the orchards and hedges in the winter. We are hopeful that the wild bird seed mixes and unharvested headlands we’ve included in the new HLS agreement will increase numbers of birds like skylarks on the farm.”

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