

A man with a beard and short hair, wearing a dark grey jacket over a plaid shirt, stands in a field of tall sunflowers. He is smiling and has his hands in his pockets. The background is a dense field of green foliage and more sunflowers, slightly out of focus.

STORIES FROM THE FARM

Hamish Stewart

Ragley Hall Farm, Warwickshire

"Conservation used to be restricted to the edges — now it's part of the farm's business plan"



STORIES FROM THE FARM

A passion for ponds

When Hamish took on the role of Farm Manager at Ragley Hall Farm in Warwickshire, he was keen for the farm to join the Jordans Farm Partnership.

Having previously worked at another Jordans farm he was aware of what could be achieved through the partnership and knew that farming for both profit and wildlife could go hand in hand.

Within weeks of Hamish's arrival, the farm was signed up to the partnership. The farm was already in a Countryside Stewardship Scheme but *"the JFP goes beyond this"* says Hamish. By joining the partnership, he has been able to do even more to benefit wildlife whilst continuing to run a profitable farm business.

Hamish takes great pride in the wild bird seed plots he grows on the farm, which provide a reliable food source for farmland birds over winter. Hamish's mixes of sunflowers, quinoa, kale, linseed and oats are grown with the same care and attention that he gives to his commercial crops. His efforts are paying off, with his plots coming alive with finches, tree sparrows, skylark and linnets in winter.

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STORIES FROM THE FARM

Hamish also has a passion for ponds. With guidance from his farm advisor at Warwickshire Wildlife Trust, Hamish set to work restoring the 46 ponds on the farm. He cleared out silt and rotting leaves, and removed dense tree branches from the stagnant, wildlife-depleted ponds. He ensured each pond was surrounded and protected by six-metre-wide buffer strip of grass and other vegetation too. These buffer strips help ensure activities on the wider farm, such as applying fertiliser to crops, do not disturb the pond – vital to ensuring the pond remains healthy and supports a wide variety of aquatic plant and animal species. Hamish also maintains shallow marshy areas around the ponds, ideal habitat for dragonflies and damselflies, and has created log piles close by to encourage amphibians and insects.

As a result of his dedicated work the ponds are much healthier, and Hamish has seen a real benefit for wildlife. Insects and other invertebrates have increased thanks to the pond improvements and this in turn has benefitted the birds that feed on them. In addition to moorhens nesting on the ponds, herons breed on the farm estate and lapwing rely on the insects to feed their chicks.

The rejuvenated ponds benefit amphibians too, as toads, frogs and newts all use the ponds for breeding in spring.

Of course, the clean healthy ponds are also a valuable source of drinking water for other thirsty wildlife on the farm!



COMMON FROG © MARK HAMBLIN/2020VISION



BANDED DAMOISELLE © CHRIS MACUIRE



LAPWING CHICK © MARGARET HOLLAND