

● STORIES FROM THE FARM

# Graham Birch

Field Barn & Hedge End Farms, Dorset



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# Investing in Nature

Graham has had a different route into farming compared to many of the other JFP farmers, but that doesn't mean that he is any less committed. Previously working in the finance sector in London, Graham decided he wanted a complete change from city life which resulted in him taking on a mixed farm in Dorset in 2007.

Once he settled in, Graham was very keen to improve the habitats on the farm for wildlife and so began by putting the farm into a Higher Level Environmental Stewardship scheme – a government scheme that provides funding to farmers and land managers to improve their land. Because of the positive environmental work on the farm, Jordans enlisted Graham to supply oats and as a result, this meant that Graham became part of the JFP when it began in 2015. Being relatively new to farming, Graham says that *"I really value the relationship that's developed with Hamish"*, his farm advisor from Dorset Wildlife Trust.

There have been some real successes on Graham's farms and Hamish says, *"there are some superb areas of species-rich grassland"*. Several species of orchids flourish there,





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which are accompanied by countless species of other wildflowers. This diversity supports a thriving invertebrate population, which in turn supports the farmland birds that feed on them.

Graham's farm has a good population of brown hares, and hedgehogs – a species which is declining across many rural areas of the UK – are frequently recorded. Sightings of numerous farmland birds during the summer months indicate flourishing and breeding populations of skylarks, yellowhammers, linnets, and corn buntings, and Graham's four barn owl boxes have all been occupied by breeding pairs. *"The farms are important for wintering birds too,"* explains Hamish, and *"large flocks of redwing, fieldfare, lapwing and golden plover can be seen"*.

Graham is supported on the farm by his farm manager Scott, who manages and maintains the wildlife habitats. *"In the early days, Scott could just about tell the difference between a crow and a gull,"* laughs Graham, *"but now he can identify so many different species and together when we are out and about on the farm, we are always looking at the amazing wildlife we have here."*

Graham truly believes that modern farming can co-exist with nature. The diversity and abundance of wildlife that can be seen on his farm is testament not only to his belief, but also to his commitment in farming to support wildlife.