

● STORIES FROM THE FARM

Robert Law

Thrift Farm, Hertfordshire

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Amazing Graze

Although a first-generation farmer, Robert has been growing oats for Jordans since 1985 — he is the original Jordans grower!

Growing a variety of arable crops on his mixed farm near Royston in Hertfordshire, he also farms 60 cows and 1,700 breeding ewes.

In the early days of farming, Robert was more concerned about inputs, seed dressings and fungicides to help with producing a successful crop. But over the years this has changed, and he has become more concerned with the environment and conservation; particularly how his farm can support wildlife.

Robert believes that running a profitable farm business and farming for wildlife can go hand in hand, and that finding areas that can be managed for wildlife is achievable. *“Every farm has got awkward corners that large farm machinery finds difficult to work,”* says Robert. *“GPS (Global Positioning Systems) and technology can help growers to pinpoint less profitable areas of land that can be managed to benefit wildlife.”* Robert’s farm goes well beyond the 10% of habitat managed for wildlife that is a requirement of the JFP standard, providing an area of wildlife-friendly habitat that is equal to 24% of his farmed land.

Over the years, Robert has planted a remarkable 40km of hedgerows that he manages with wildlife in mind; providing nesting habitat, shelter and food for farmland birds such as corn bunting, linnet and yellowhammer. The hedgerows also provide



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corridors that connect areas of woodland on the farm, as well as linking the farm to the wider landscape; providing foraging and commuting routes for a range of farmland birds and mammals, in particular bats.

Despite this impressive hedgerow planting, Robert says *"You don't need to do a lot on the farm to make a big difference – it's all about getting the right habitat in the right place"*. And Robert must be doing something right as surveys conducted on the farm have recorded 42 pairs of grey partridge, which is a *"huge population"* according to Matt, Robert's farm advisor from the Hertfordshire and Middlesex Wildlife Trust. Matt also reports that *"Lapwing and barn owl regularly breed, and brown hare are also doing well"* on the farm.

Running along the north-east edge of Robert's farm is Therfield Heath; a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) designated for its chalk grassland. This special habitat is important for its mix of grasses, specialist flowers, and insects. A particular species of note on the SSSI is the rare pasqueflower, *Pulsatilla vulgaris*, which can now only be found at a handful of sites in the UK. Robert's farm holds grazing rights on the heath and the grazing of his sheep on the site is integrated into the farm's overall annual grazing plan. With the conservation grazing by Robert's flock, the grass and more aggressive plant species are prevented from dominating the site and, as a result, up to 60,000 pasqueflower plants can bloom in springtime.

