

Facts and Figures

• The area occupied by top fruit (trees) in the High Weald has fallen by 64% since 1990.

• Over two-thirds of apples eaten in the UK are imported.

• An incredible 2,500 of the estimated 6,000 varieties of British apple are held by the National Fruit Collection at Brogdale in Faversham, Kent.



Modern orchard



Traditional orchard

Traditional or modern?

Over the last 50 years, the ‘traditional’ orchards, and the fruit varieties and culture associated with them, have been disappearing from the Weald.

Many modern, surviving orchards have a very different character, no longer resembling those of the fictional Larkin family in *The Darling Buds Of May*. Dwarf bushes in bare soil, mechanically sprayed and picked – you can hardly imagine dozing away a summer’s afternoon under such trees!

The characteristics of traditional and modern orchards

Traditional	Modern
Tall, widely-spaced trees – around 50 trees per acre	Densely-planted dwarf shrubs – around 300 per acre
Species-rich grass sward beneath the trees – usually grazed	No undergrazing
Mixed variety of fruit grown – at one time, up to 200 in a single orchard, including apples, plums, cherries and pears	Only a few varieties grown in any one orchard
Up to 6,000 varieties of apple may be grown	Nine varieties dominate commercial orchards
Trees support a multitude of wildlife – mosses, lichens, insects, birds and mammals	Conditions suit far fewer wildlife species
More sympathetically managed	Intensively managed with pesticide and fertiliser
Labour-intensive harvest, keeping rural employment and tradition alive	Machine harvested
Forms an attractive and distinctive landscape feature	Lower landscape value

Orchard loss

Many orchards have been ‘grubbed up’ or removed because there is no longer a demand for the fruit they produce and other land uses have more commercial value. Others have been lost through neglect as disease, death and a lack of re-planting leads to a few shabby trees that are easily lost.

Wildlife havens

Older, and in particular traditional, orchards can shelter all kinds of wildlife. There are a variety of wildlife habitats within an orchard.



Orchard grassland

Regular grazing or hay cutting creates wonderful conditions for flowers such as orchids,

Meadowsweet, Knapweed, Dyer’s Greenweed, Hay Rattle and Ragged Robin. On wetter land, sedges and rushes may be found.



Tussocky grass shelters the larvae of butterflies like the Speckled Wood. Longer grass left around the orchard margins favours small mammals, like Field Voles, which are preyed upon by Barn Owls.

Orchard trees

Older trees can be particularly valuable for mosses and lichens, and occasionally Mistletoe. Throughout the year, the trees are a source of food for a variety of creatures.



In spring, blossom provides a source of pollen for bees and moths, which in turn attract a variety of birds. Bullfinches may be unwelcome in commercial orchards, but tolerated in traditional, where they seek out the buds for food.

In summer, the leafy canopy provides nesting sites and food for many birds. Mistle Thrushes are the first to arrive, followed by Chaffinches and Goldfinches as the blossom fades. Green, Great and Lesser Spotted Woodpeckers, Treecreepers, Nuthatches and tits nest in hollow trunks, with Little Owls using larger holes.

In autumn, the fallen fruits are a good food source for butterflies like the Red Admiral and Small Tortoiseshell. Windfalls are enjoyed by foraging Badgers, mice, voles and

Hedgehogs, and some creatures can become a bit tipsy from feeding on too much fruit!

Birds such as Jays, Blackbirds,

Redwings and Fieldfares also feed on the fruit, both on the tree and rotting on the ground.

