

STORIES FROM THE FARM

# Nick Rowsell

Manor Farm, Hampshire



*“When I’m walking through the crops and I look around me, and everything is great, I have a little moment and think how lucky I am. My favourite sign of summer is when the swallows arrive.”*



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# Network of habitats

Nick, a 3rd generation farmer in north-west Hampshire, has been growing oats for Jordans on his family farm for several years.

The farm lies within the tranquil landscape of rolling chalk hills. These chalk grasslands are one of the most threatened in the UK, with vast tracts being lost to intensive agricultural production over the last century. Through the JFP and his commitment to wildlife-friendly farming, Nick is helping to reverse this loss by recreating and restoring this important habitat on his farm to benefit the specialised plants and animals that depend on it.

Alison, Nick's Wildlife Trust advisor, has supported him in managing his land to provide food, shelter and breeding sites for dormice and rare birds like woodlark and willow tit – wildlife that is important in the local, wider landscape. The farm's network of woodland, hedgerows, wide field margins and restored chalk grassland also benefit rare arable flowers and grey partridges.

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Insects are essential for a healthy farm, with three out of four crops needing them for pollination. Over the years, Nick has perfected his own nectar-rich flower and bird seed mixes, which he grows with as much care and attention as he does the oats that go into our breakfast cereals. This means his farm supports a wide range of insects, including butterflies such as silver-washed fritillary and mining bees. Small mammals also benefit from the grassland and grassy field margins, which in turn provide food for barn owls and kestrels. These birds of prey use the nest boxes that have been put up on trees and farm buildings.

Nick is also committed to looking after the soil on his farm, believing that good profitable farming depends on healthy, well-structured, thriving soil full of bugs and beetles. Special crops, known as cover crops, are grown at times when the soil would otherwise be left bare, preventing the soil from eroding away. Their deep roots can help loosen up compact soils and maintain soil fungi, which provides vital nutrition for the crops.

Nick's farm – and a second JFP farm, which he manages – lie within the Hampshire and Isle of Wight Wildlife Trust's Facombe Woodland to Kingsclere Downs Living Landscape. Within this, the Wildlife Trust is aiming to create more, better managed and joined up wild places, to help nature recover – and Nick is playing a vital role in this.

