

Managing Traditional Orchards

Traditional old orchards are often rich in wildlife due to them no longer being in production. Everything from birds and beetles to wildflowers and lichens can be abundant. So when taking on an old orchard in any form the most important point is not to rush into anything. Take time to look, to observe and record what is already there, the number and types of the trees, the wildlife that either lives in or visits the orchard.

Many contemporary ideas do not apply in old orchards, Tidiness can be a bad thing, leaving fallen limbs and deadwood is immensely valuable.



This tree may look a mess to us but it's a great refuge for wildlife.



NB – If you want an orchard to look 'managed,' make obvious piles of logs and deadwood as these will provide a great habitat for all sorts of wildlife, large and small.

The biggest threat to old trees is often their sheer bulk and in windy conditions they can break up or fall over simply due to their size. So whilst we would not prune them as we would a younger tree in production, we may decide to lop off a few significant limbs in order to reduce the overall bulk and thus not catch the wind as much.



There is no point in investing the time and effort in pruning old trees back into fruit-bearing as virtually none of these old orchards are in production. The aim is to keep the trees standing for as long as possible to provide habitat because if we re stock these orchards it will be a long time before the young trees become equally valuable to wildlife.

SUMMARY

Traditional Orchard management should:

- Aim to prolong the life of the trees for as long as possible and thus enhance biodiversity value for as diverse a range of wildlife as possible.
- Maintain the Landscape and Heritage value of our ancient orchards.
- Possibly get the trees back into a good cropping condition – although in many cases this will not apply.
- Promote an interest, understanding and appreciation of our old orchards so people will value them into the future.
- Cherish old orchards as wonderful places.

