



Special Species Challenge



WHAT WE'D LIKE YOU TO DO

- Make your park a champion for an animal that needs a helping hand.
- Choose a 'special species'.
- Provide the food and shelter it needs to survive and thrive.
- Do something **NEW** that will make a significant positive impact for wildlife,
- The scope of the work should reflect the resources you have and the location and size of your park.
- For example, a large park might create an ambitious plan to manage their park for hedgehogs; a small park might put in two hedgehog homes. A residential park might ask their residents to choose the special species and then do what they can to help.

WHY TAKE THE CHALLENGE?

Many animal species in Britain are highly endangered and need all the help they can get. A park can be a real oasis for a range of key species.

When you start and complete a challenge(s), you'll get a logo(s) to display to let everyone know what you are doing and what you have achieved.



KEY STEPS

1. DECIDE ON YOUR SPECIES

- Decide which type or species of animal to focus on – do this by looking at what’s living in and around your park and by talking to local wildlife experts to see what needs help (e.g. find out which species are listed in your region’s Local Biodiversity Action Plan).
- Choose a species that really needs a helping hand and to which you’ll be able to provide assistance.
- Key species that need help across the country include hedgehogs, dormice, red squirrels, bats, otters, frogs, lizards, newts and snakes, songbirds like the skylark and many birds of prey. This list just scratches the surface.
- NB: don’t choose insects such as bees and butterflies as the main work that can be done to help these animals is covered in other challenges (especially the pollinator patch challenge).
- Once you've decided to take up this challenge, let us know using the [online form](#). You'll get a logo to show that you've started the challenge.

2. DECIDE WHAT YOU ARE GOING TO DO

- Once you’ve decided what species to champion, put together a simple plan with actions and goals, time-tabled if possible. You can use the wildlife plan template [here](#).
- Aim to provide the species you are helping with all the food, shelter and protection it needs to live and thrive.
- The internet is a mine of good advice. You will likely find a group dedicated to the species you’ve chosen. They might be able to help you directly or have a local branch.
- Use the good ideas and resources below as a starting point.
- Be ambitious!
- We would be delighted to receive a copy of your [plan](#), along with any relevant photos so we know what you’re working on. Upload your plan and photos [here](#).
- Putting a [plan](#) together will help us know whether the scope of what you’ve got planned is ‘enough’ to win the challenge.



3. PUT YOUR PLAN INTO ACTION

- Put someone with the necessary skills in charge of the job and give them the time and resources they need to get on with it.
- Let everyone know what you're doing and keep them updated on progress.
- If you can, get everyone involved.
- Use your challenge to educate everyone. Make the challenge part of what your park is 'all about'.

4. REPORT ON YOUR SUCCESS

- When you've reached your project goal or a first major milestone let us know – send us details of what you've achieved and upload your report and photos of the results [here](#).
- If possible, provide details to show that your plan has had a real impact (e.g. that it has resulted in a change in the number of animals spotted).
- If you are due an advisory visit, show your advisor what you've achieved.

5. WINNING THE CHALLENGE

- Once we've received details of what you've done, we'll review the information.
- If you have done enough, you'll win the challenge and get a “*We've completed the Special Species Challenge*” logo to display.
- If not, we'll let you know what you still need to do.



GOOD IDEAS FOR YOUR PLAN

- Do a survey – a great place to start for any wildlife project is to see what you already have. If you can, get a general biodiversity survey done - your local Wildlife Trust should be able to help or just focus on your special species.
- Provide food and water – all animals need food and water, and you can help by providing these artificially (e.g. using squirrel or bird feeders). The most important thing you can do is to make sure your park is full of the food plants that your chosen species need. For example, the Wildlife Trusts recommend that Red Squirrels benefit from brambles, raspberry, dog rose, guelder rose, wild cherry, bird cherry, bullace and crab apple, to name just a few.
- Make a home – many species can be helped by putting up artificial homes and hiding places. For example, if your focus is the dormouse, then put up new dormouse boxes in your woodlands. It is amazing the variety of artificial homes you can offer – from bird boxes and hedgehog homes to artificial otter holts. Whatever you put in, research the topic carefully to make sure it is properly constructed and properly situated.
- Create a natural feature to help – one of the best ways to provide a home and shelter for an animal to make sure the natural features that they nest or hide in are readily available. If your focus is hedgehogs, then create a compost heap or log pile. This will not only give them a haven, but also attract the insects they eat. Ponds are another great feature which will help a whole host of species, including frogs and toads.
- Create more extensive habitat – research your special species and get an understanding of the types of habitat they use to forage, hide and nest. Then work to create more of this type of habitat on your park. Many species use hedges for food and to move around. Many species benefit from long grass areas and messy corners where they can be undisturbed.
- Manage with nature in mind – look at how you manage your park and check that you are doing everything you can for your chosen species. Be especially careful that you are not, inadvertently, harming it. Look at when you strim and mow and ensure you leave food plants in place and don't disturb active nest sites.
- Remove any dangers – take a look and see if there anything obvious that might be endangering wildlife. For example, you might think about stopping the use of certain chemicals and dealing with any litter, netting etc, which could pose a menace.
- Do a follow-up survey – to see how your plans are progressing, keep an eye out for the species you are trying to help and do regular follow-up surveys to see if numbers are on the rise.



ONLINE RESOURCES

The Amphibian and Reptiles Groups (arguk.org) of the UK organisation provides information and advice on the conservation of these groups of animals, along with links to many other organisations which focus on specific species, such as frogs and newts. ARG UK works with a network of independent volunteer amphibian and reptile groups around the country. The groups are a good resource to draw on as they can come in and work in partnership with parks on all aspects of wildlife conservation. Local groups can be found at: <https://www.arguk.org/get-involved/local-groups>

ARG asks all holiday and home parks to firstly celebrate and welcome all of our native amphibians and reptiles, and secondly – and more specifically – to help promote a more positive view of adders by getting involved in the group’s ‘Adders are Amazing!’ project.

The Bat Conservation Trust (bats.org.uk) offers loads of tips on how to look after bats and has many local groups.

The British Hedgehog Preservation Society(britishhedgehogs.org.uk) provides lots of information on how to feed and look after hedgehogs. The BHPS also provides free stickers for mowers, strimmers, etc. to remind people to look out for hedgehogs when they are cutting the grass.

Hedgehog Street is a partnership project between the People’s Trust for Endangered Species (PTES) and the BHPS. The scheme’s website provides lots of information about hedgehog conservation and you can register as a ‘Hedgehog Champion’. The project has produced a land managers guide for helping hedgehogs which can be found at: <https://www.hedgehogstreet.org/free-guides-hedgehog-advice-for-everyone/>.

The International Otter Survival Fund (IOSF) (otter.org) provides advice on otter conservation, including how to build an artificial otter holt.

The People’s Trust for Endangered Species (ptes.org) focuses on key species that need a hand, such as dormice and water voles.

The RSPB (rspb.org.uk) - everything you need to know about helping our feathered friends, including the last word on nest boxes.

The Red Squirrel Survival Trust (rsst.org.uk) offers advice on how to help Britain’s endangered reds.