

Countryside- Rural St Helens

Nationally, post-war agricultural economics, which demanded increased intensification and scale of farming, resulted in a simplification of the agricultural landscape with many hedgerows networks removed and ponds lost to neglect as changes in farm practices left them redundant and greater specialisation and efficiency of farm enterprise has reduced the variety of farmland habitats.



Brown Hares

Around half of St Helens Borough is agricultural and represents a major resource for wildlife. Many familiar species such as skylark, grey partridge, tree sparrow, corn bunting and brown hare, which have undergone significant declines nationally, are still present in reasonable numbers. Farmland, particularly in the north of the Borough, also provides winter-feeding for visiting pink-footed geese, golden plover and, lapwing.

Rising to 576feet above sea level, Billinge Hill is of major significance for a range of species including the Black Oil Beetle and the Tawny Mining Bee. Bird ringing records show the importance of the hill as a stopover point for a large number of migrating birds.

The former mosslands in the north west of the Borough are also important for a wide variety of winter farmland birds including tree sparrows, yellow hammer, golden plover and lapwings.

Small numbers of red squirrel have been recorded in and around Rainford. These are likely to be linked to the population in Knowsley Estate.

St Helens along with Wigan and parts of Warrington are strongholds for the willow tit, which is one of the most pressing conservation concerns due to rapid and widespread population declines. The willow tit seems to fare best in wet willow woodland such as those found along the Sankey Valley.

