# Solar farms boost endangered wildlife while advancing UK’s clean energy goals



## Solar Farms: A Boon for Biodiversity and Renewable Energy

A compelling new study has emerged, supporting the notion that solar farms can invigorate local wildlife while contributing significantly to the fight against climate change. Research conducted on 124 solar farms across the UK reveals that these installations are home to approximately 7,500 birds belonging to 94 different species, including around 20% classified as endangered under the “Red List,” such as nightingales, skylarks, and yellowhammers.

The findings, released by Solar Energy UK in collaboration with Lancaster University and ecological consultancies, illustrate a biodiversity profile that also includes nearly 3,000 butterflies and bumblebees from 29 species, as well as eight mammal species, including water voles and brown hares. The report details the presence of 44 tree species and 314 plant species within these renewable energy sites, demonstrating the multifaceted ecological potential of solar farms.

Chris Hewett, Chief Executive of Solar Energy UK, noted, "Three years ago, we knew anecdotally that solar farms were good for wildlife. But the evidence is strong now. We are starting to see clear benefits for biodiversity, with over 50% of sites seeing Red Listed birds.” This assertion is backed by parallel studies, including recent research from the RSPB and University of Cambridge, which found that solar farms managed with natural habitats can support nearly three times as many birds compared to adjacent arable farmland.

The potential for solar farms extends beyond avian populations. An RSPB spokesperson emphasised, “In the right location and when managed with wildlife in mind, solar farms can deliver meaningful benefits for farmland species, particularly in intensively farmed landscapes where nature is often depleted.” The introduction of habitats such as hedgerows and wildflower patches not only supports wildlife but can also enhance food and shelter availability for these species.

Innovative approaches are increasingly being adopted alongside traditional energy production. Some solar farms are integrating livestock grazing beneath the solar panels, promoting an agricultural ecosystem that augments biodiversity. Craig Bennett, Chief Executive of The Wildlife Trusts, highlighted the opportunity to restore degraded peatland, suggesting that innovative installations could help revive essential ecosystems. “If done carefully, it’s possible to do solar farms in a 'nature-positive' way,” he stated, indicating that deploying solar technology on low-quality agricultural land could yield ecological benefits while harnessing renewable energy.

Energy Minister Michael Shanks MP reinforced these findings, arguing against the narrative that solar energy competes with nature. He asserted, “Solar power is a fundamental part of our clean power ambitions, strengthening our energy security and protecting billpayers, whilst supporting nature, farmers and local communities.” This sentiment encapsulates a growing recognition of the duality of solar farming: its capacity to provide clean energy and bolster ecological health.

In summary, as evidence mounts supporting the environmental benefits of solar farms, the integration of wildlife conservation practices in solar energy models presents a promising path forward. Not only do these initiatives contribute to renewable energy goals, but they also play a vital role in restoring biodiversity in increasingly intensively farmed landscapes, paving the way for a healthier and more sustainable future.

## Reference Map:

* Paragraph 1 – [[1]](https://news.google.com/rss/articles/CBMicEFVX3lxTE5Gb1ZGaE01WThOWDd0Y2RUR1EtQ1ljbENZM0dZd0FMTnRlVGwzYmpBRnVoUUZlcTd5WHlJWmpZRFh5TWpBaHRUMFlWT29sX1hGclpZZE4tZWE5dTNRRU5DWlVlRjA4b2gyVERhTzQtT1o?oc=5&hl=en-US&gl=US&ceid=US:en), [[6]](https://solarenergyuk.org/news/solar-farms-can-be-wildlife-havens/)
* Paragraph 2 – [[1]](https://news.google.com/rss/articles/CBMicEFVX3lxTE5Gb1ZGaE01WThOWDd0Y2RUR1EtQ1ljbENZM0dZd0FMTnRlVGwzYmpBRnVoUUZlcTd5WHlJWmpZRFh5TWpBaHRUMFlWT29sX1hGclpZZE4tZWE5dTNRRU5DWlVlRjA4b2gyVERhTzQtT1o?oc=5&hl=en-US&gl=US&ceid=US:en), [[2]](https://www.rspb.org.uk/whats-happening/news/solar-farms-managed-for-nature-boost-bird-numbers-and-biodiversity)
* Paragraph 3 – [[2]](https://www.rspb.org.uk/whats-happening/news/solar-farms-managed-for-nature-boost-bird-numbers-and-biodiversity), [[5]](https://www.theguardian.com/news/2024/mar/01/weatherwatch-how-solar-farms-benefit-bees-and-butterflies)
* Paragraph 4 – [[3]](https://www.york.ac.uk/news-and-events/news/2019/research/solar-farms-haven-british-wildlife/), [[4]](https://www.pv-magazine.com/2016/04/28/study-finds-positive-link-between-uk-solar-farms-and-biodiversity_100024351/)
* Paragraph 5 – [[1]](https://news.google.com/rss/articles/CBMicEFVX3lxTE5Gb1ZGaE01WThOWDd0Y2RUR1EtQ1ljbENZM0dZd0FMTnRlVGwzYmpBRnVoUUZlcTd5WHlJWmpZRFh5TWpBaHRUMFlWT29sX1hGclpZZE4tZWE5dTNRRU5DWlVlRjA4b2gyVERhTzQtT1o?oc=5&hl=en-US&gl=US&ceid=US:en), [[7]](https://www.rspb.org.uk/whats-happening/news/solar-farms-managed-for-nature-boost-bird-numbers-and-biodiversity)
* Paragraph 6 – [[1]](https://news.google.com/rss/articles/CBMicEFVX3lxTE5Gb1ZGaE01WThOWDd0Y2RUR1EtQ1ljbENZM0dZd0FMTnRlVGwzYmpBRnVoUUZlcTd5WHlJWmpZRFh5TWpBaHRUMFlWT29sX1hGclpZZE4tZWE5dTNRRU5DWlVlRjA4b2gyVERhTzQtT1o?oc=5&hl=en-US&gl=US&ceid=US:en), [[6]](https://solarenergyuk.org/news/solar-farms-can-be-wildlife-havens/)

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## Bibliography

1. <https://news.google.com/rss/articles/CBMicEFVX3lxTE5Gb1ZGaE01WThOWDd0Y2RUR1EtQ1ljbENZM0dZd0FMTnRlVGwzYmpBRnVoUUZlcTd5WHlJWmpZRFh5TWpBaHRUMFlWT29sX1hGclpZZE4tZWE5dTNRRU5DWlVlRjA4b2gyVERhTzQtT1o?oc=5&hl=en-US&gl=US&ceid=US:en> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.rspb.org.uk/whats-happening/news/solar-farms-managed-for-nature-boost-bird-numbers-and-biodiversity> - A study by the RSPB and University of Cambridge found that solar farms managed with nature in mind support nearly three times as many birds compared to nearby arable farmland. These mixed-habitat solar farms, featuring hedgerows and diverse vegetation, provide habitats for threatened species like Corn Buntings, Yellowhammers, and Linnets, highlighting the potential of solar farms to aid in biodiversity conservation.
3. <https://www.york.ac.uk/news-and-events/news/2019/research/solar-farms-haven-british-wildlife/> - Research from the Universities of York and Lancaster indicates that well-designed and managed solar farms can serve as havens for British wildlife, including declining species such as foraging bats, yellowhammers, and grey-legged partridges. The study emphasizes the importance of integrating conservation initiatives like planting hedgerows and creating wildflower meadows to enhance biodiversity on solar farms.
4. <https://www.pv-magazine.com/2016/04/28/study-finds-positive-link-between-uk-solar-farms-and-biodiversity_100024351/> - A study published in PV Magazine highlights the positive impact of solar farms on plant and animal life in the UK. The research found that solar farms, especially those with suitable land management schemes, provide meadow habitats and foraging grounds, leading to increased botanical diversity and supporting a wide range of animal species.
5. <https://www.theguardian.com/news/2024/mar/01/weatherwatch-how-solar-farms-benefit-bees-and-butterflies> - An article in The Guardian discusses how solar parks can benefit pollinating insects like bees, butterflies, moths, and hoverflies. Field data from 15 sites in 2021 showed that these insects thrived in solar parks, particularly where a variety of plants were allowed to flourish or were planted around the panels, providing a vital food source in areas where hedgerows and other habitats had been destroyed.
6. <https://solarenergyuk.org/news/solar-farms-can-be-wildlife-havens/> - A report by Solar Energy UK reveals that solar farms can be wildlife havens, supporting declining species such as linnets, yellowhammers, and skylarks. The study found that solar farms managed with conservation in mind, including practices like limiting grazing and reducing herbicide use, can enhance biodiversity and provide habitats for various species.
7. <https://www.rspb.org.uk/whats-happening/news/solar-farms-managed-for-nature-boost-bird-numbers-and-biodiversity> - A study by the RSPB and University of Cambridge found that solar farms managed with nature in mind support nearly three times as many birds compared to nearby arable farmland. These mixed-habitat solar farms, featuring hedgerows and diverse vegetation, provide habitats for threatened species like Corn Buntings, Yellowhammers, and Linnets, highlighting the potential of solar farms to aid in biodiversity conservation.