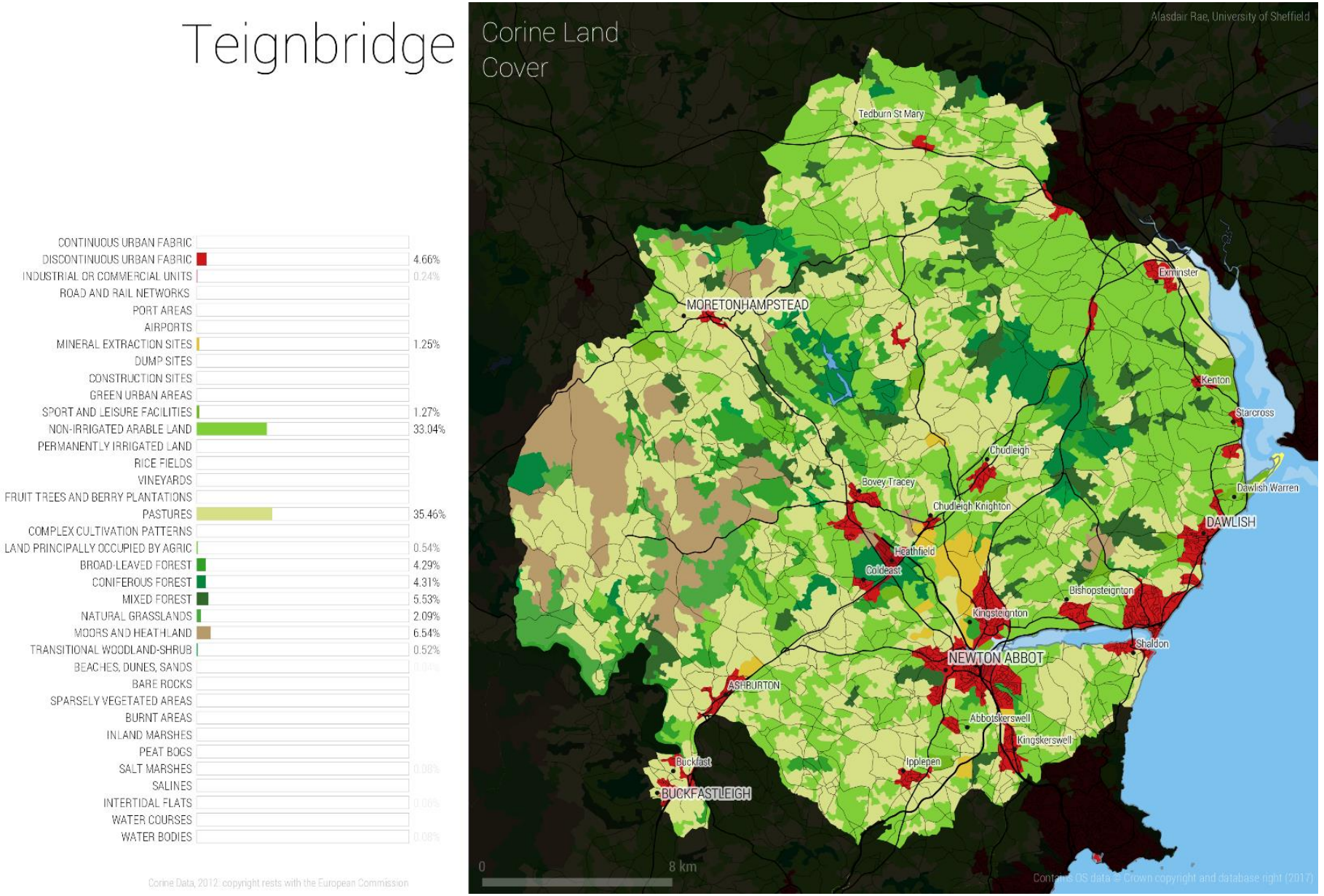
Teignbridge’s habitats - for ACT Wildlife Warden’s



Teignbridge’s Land cover - using 'A Land Cover Atlas of the United Kingdom', by Alasdair Rae [A Land Cover Atlas](#) .

Alasdair Rae used Corine Land Cover (Coordination of Information on the Environment Land Cover, CLC) - an EU mapping initiative, to produce a set of maps covering UK local authority areas. These Corine Land Cover %'s (and the map below) are useful, but bear in mind that the map was made by identifying fairly large areas of habitats (25ha or more) and will have left out many small areas. So, look out for inaccuracies in your Parish!

At a glance, Teignbridge is:
35.5% pasture *(the Corine programme can't identify wildflower meadows, so they are in here somewhere!)*
33% arable
6.5% moors and heathland
5.5% mixed woodlands
4.9% urban and industrial
4.3% coniferous forest
4.3% deciduous woods
2.1% natural grasslands
1.3% sports and leisure
1.3% mineral extraction *(quite high because of the ball clay industry)*
0.5% transitional woodland-scrub

So about 76% of our Teignbridge land is a fairly poor habitat for wildlife (arable, pasture, urban, sports and leisure and mineral extraction).
About 14.5% of Teignbridge land has tree cover, but nearly 1/3rd of that is coniferous and much less valuable as a habitat for our native wildlife.
Because part of Dartmoor is in Teignbridge, as well as the Haldon Heaths, 6.5% is moors and heathland.
Only 2.1% is 'natural' grassland, unaffected by fertiliser, sprays or ploughing and reseeding.

You can use habitat details from the Corine map and then 'ground truth' by walking around your Parish with a map and binoculars, making changes and notes!

More information about common habitat types in Teignbridge (percentages from the Corine Map):

- **Arable crops (33%):** this includes cereals, such as wheat, barley and oats. Spring barley has a value for farmland birds if the stubble is left from harvest-time till the next spring, especially if herbicides and pesticides aren't used - so that there is plenty of food for birds, such as linnets, finches and cirl buntings. Other arable crops are oilseed rape (used to make cooking oil), maize (mostly grown to be made into silage for cattle) and kale and fodder beet (winter food for sheep and cattle). This includes short-term grasslands, or leys, which are ploughed up every 2-3 years and are unlikely to have much value for wildlife unless a Herbal Ley has been grown, which will have included some wildflowers for their herbal value to grazing animals, or their ability to access soil minerals.

- **Pasture (33.5%)** - Permanent pastures are fields which haven't been ploughed for at least 3-4 years: a few that are very steep or very wet may have many species of plants and invertebrates, but most will still be being sprayed, fertilised or spread with slurry, resulting in very few plant species and very few invertebrates.

- **Heath and moorland (6.5%)**: the Haldon ridge was once heathland - most of it is now plantation, small blocks have been restored to heathland and many rides retain heathy elements. Little Haldon Heaths and Ideford Common are still important heathland habitats (though Corine doesn't identify

Ideford Common as heath). Large areas of Dartmoor are in Teignbridge and include several different moorland habitats, including wet flushes and peatlands.

- **Mixed Woodlands (5.5%):** if the Corine programme has identified mixed forests correctly, there is more land with mixed woodlands than either plantation or broad-leaved woods. Only ground-truthing can show how accurate this is. Large areas under phased restoration to broadleaved woodland, such as Fingle Woods (Woodland Trust and National Trust) could affect this.

- **Urban and industrial areas (4.9%):** Lots of buildings - but lots of gardens and verges too, which are increasingly important to wildlife! Working with neighbours can join gardens up to produce a rich wildlife corridor for hundreds of species! 'Brown-field sites' associated with old industry can be very variable and very important for wildlife too - but are often called 'waste land' and are prey to planning applications! For many years the Aller Brook Local Nature Reserve was a frequently-mowed out-of-bounds area - now it is important to people and wildlife, as the Brook corridor is for wildlife - and people can walk parallel to the wildlife, glimpsing, but not disturbing it!

- **Coniferous forest (4.3%):** most often non-native conifers, such as Sitka Spruce or Scots Pine, where the ground has been deep-ploughed before planting, the trees are all the same age and the only other species are ferns, sapling birch and other early colonisers. Nevertheless, they can hold interesting wildlife, especially along rides, where remnants of native vegetation survive.

- **Deciduous woodlands (4.3%):** This will be a mixture of secondary (newer) woodlands and ancient woodland. Ancient woodland has many native species of trees, shrubs and plants (with 'ground flora' such as bluebells, primroses and wood anemones); secondary woodland has often developed naturally on abandoned land and its 'ground flora' will be whatever has survived from the previous habitat - or woodland/hedgerow plants that have good seed dispersal and have been brought in by wind or animals; newer planted woods may have blocks of different species, but again, few woodland plants; very new woodlands will have several different species, no mature trees and brambles rather than woodland flowers. All woods need brambly areas where ground-nesting birds can nest, but these have been reduced by massively-increasing deer numbers.

- **Natural grasslands (2.1%):** It is hard to find these on the map, apart from at Dawlish Warren. (For comparison, go to https://moormeadows.org.uk/map/ which shows where people are caring for/restoring and creating wildflower meadows in and around Dartmoor, amounting to around 400 hectares!)

- **Sports and Leisure (1.3%):** We don't want to stop sports, but we can look for opportunities around pitches to planting hedges and corners.

- **Mineral extraction (1.3%):** The Newton Abbot Ball Clay industry has resulted in most of this. Quite a large % of mineral extraction land provides important habitats that are dynamic and sometimes short-lived. Studying recent ariel photographs could give a better idea of the interesting habitats there. Access is difficult for safety reasons.

- **Transitional woodland-scrub (0.5%):** With reduced or no management, a mix of tall grass, brambles, gorse and small trees can be extremely valuable to invertebrates and birds, although, as a result, plant diversity may decline. To sustain them, such areas need some form of management (often labour-intensive) to cut back woody vegetation and stop them from becoming woodland. These are valuable habitats which have reduced on farm land because DEFRA would not allow them on land receiving Basic Payment Scheme funding (BPS). BPS is now being phased out and these habitats may increase under the new Environmental Land Management Scheme (ELMS).

- **Habitats that aren't on the map:**

- **Hedges** aren't included on this map because they are much too narrow, but they make up a significant and very, very important habitat. They may even be the most important habitat because of the connectivity they provide between other habitats. The least valuable hedges are short and thin because they are flailed every year. Those which are well-grown and only cut every 2-3 years, or very well-grown (coppiced or laid every 10-20 years) have enormous value as they provide varied habitat for many species. Overgrown hedges that have turned into a spindly line of trees will have less wildlife value.

- **Orchards** were once very common in Teignbridge and the wonderfully mixed habitats found there were excellent for many bird species that are now rare, such as lesser spotted woodpecker, spotted flycatcher and redstart. They also have very good lichens and invertebrates - from hornets to butterflies. In the autumn and winter their fallen fruits attract many birds, including fieldfare and redwing; deer, foxes and badgers also enjoy the apples and pears.

- **River and streams** are linear habitats that, like hedges, connect other habitats. To provide the best habitats for fresh-water creatures, they need large buffer strips either side. These strips protect them from pesticide sprays and also prevent grazing animals from breaking down their banks and damaging 'bottom' habitats with soil and sediment. Polluted run-off from roads and septic tank outlets can reduce the number of species drastically.

- **Ponds and lakes, including flooded, disused clay pits and reservoirs**: Ponds and small lakes with a mix of natural vegetation can provide disproportionately good habitat for their area, hosting a wide range of aquatic life, from plankton right up to top predators like Heron. Garden ponds are a fantastic way of bringing wildlife close to people.

- **Estuaries:** Teignbridge includes the south side of the Exe Estuary, with its mud flats, large numbers of birds and numerous national and international designations. Access is limited (which protects the birds) but there are plenty of viewing places. The beautiful Teign estuary is accessible via the tidal Templer Way path. It only has small salt marshes because of the steep valley around the estuary.

- **Marine habitats**: Most parts of Dawlish Warren National Nature Reserve are accessible and the Southwest Coast Path gives access to the coastal edge between Dawlish, Teignmouth and Shaldon. At the right tides there are accessible rock pools at Dawlish Warren and Shaldon. The marine habitats are important - including, for example, Seagrass beds in Dawlish Warren Bite and the Exe Estuary. They have particular value as nursery areas for many fish species and for carbon sequestration. There are several projects, including around Plymouth and around Torbay, to find out more about their wildlife and how to protect them.

- **Other small, but important habitats:**

  Unsurfaced tracks - provide a variety of small habitats and are especially species-rich if there is a hedge each side, raising the temperature for insects and reptiles and providing shelter from wind and rain.

  Bare ground - especially on south-facing banks, provide important nesting sites for solitary bees and habitats for mosses, lichens and tough plant species.