



Chick food favourites

The chicks of farmland birds need to grow quickly, and to help them they need a rich source of protein. So it is no coincidence that chick hatching is timed to coincide with the spring and summer flush of protein-rich insects. These are the top eight insects for farmland chicks.

Caterpillars (Lepidoptera)

- Are the larvae of moths and butterflies. They have small heads, three pairs of front legs and five pairs of stumpy hind legs.
- The larvae are found in the summer with the pupae overwintering in soil or hedgerows.
(© Ian Kimber)



Bugs (Heteroptera)

- 2-10mm. Bugs feed on plants and insects, and are equipped with a long piercing mouthpart called a rostrum to suck juices through. Juveniles look like small adults, but without wings.
- Found in late spring to early autumn. Many over-winter in hedgerows and on grasses, often as eggs.
(© Keith Edkins)

Hoppers (Homoptera)

- 2-6mm. Hoppers also have a rostrum (see bugs). Aphids and species that produce cuckoo spit to protect their young are all part of this group.
- Hoppers over-winter in hedgerows as eggs, emerging in late spring as wingless nymphs. Adults are found in the summer.
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Click beetles (Elateridae)

- 4-12mm. Long, dark coloured beetles. They have a joint between the abdomen and thorax that enables them to throw themselves backwards out of danger with a loud 'click'.
- Frequent flowering plants, particularly umbellifers and grasses, as they are pollen and plant feeders.
- Found from May to June when pollen and nectar are plentiful. Over-winter as larvae in the soil.

(© Keith Edkins)



Sawfly larvae (Symphyta)

- Look like caterpillars, but have more pairs of hind legs and a prominent head capsule with obvious black eyes.
- Frequent grasses/cereals, broad-leaved weeds and hedgerows.
- Adults emerge in April, larvae seen on plants in May and June. In July they pupate and over-winter in the soil.

(© Nicholas Aebischer)



Weevils (Curculionidae)

- 1.5-10mm. Also known as snout beetles as they have short and broad, or long and narrow snouts from which their elbowed antennae protrude.
- They are mainly plant feeders, including some pest species, but are also found in fields and hedgerows.
- Found from spring to autumn. Over-winter as larvae either in soil or inside their food plant.

(© Keith Edkins)



Leaf beetles (Chrysomelidae)

- 1.5-10mm. Often shiny and brightly coloured, rounded in shape with chunky legs.
- Frequent hedgerow plants, weeds and crops. Some are pest species, for example, flea beetles on brassicas.
- Found from spring to autumn. Over-winter as pupae at the base of plants in grassland, hedgerows and beetle banks.

(© Keith Edkins)



Ground beetles (Carabidae)

- 2-25mm. A large family of beetles (350 British species), mostly carnivorous, helping to control pests such as aphids.
- Frequent open ground in fields and margins.
- Found throughout the year, but mostly from spring to autumn. They over-winter as larvae underground and as adults in tussocky grasses and hedge bottoms.

(© Roger Key)

More information: Birds prefer the above insects but also eat a wide-range of other species including young grasshoppers, spiders, flies, especially the slow moving crane flies, and other beetles.

How you can help: All these insects need good habitat, and we recommend conservation headlands, beetle banks, grass margins, undersowing options and wild flower strips. All of these options can be funded by the Entry Level and Higher Level Stewardship Schemes.

For more information on these insects visit www.gct.org.uk and www.buglife.org.uk

Contact

The Game & Wildlife Conservation Trust is a research charity and for over 75 years our scientists have been researching why species like the grey partridge, water vole, corn bunting and black grouse have declined. We are continually developing practical measures to reverse these declines. Our aim is simple - a thriving countryside rich in game and other wildlife.

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