

Product review

WILDLIFE-FRIENDLY FOODS

Food for the forests

What you eat has an impact on wildlife. **Sanjida O'Connell** assesses what's best for you, the birds and the bees.

Many people buy organic food because they believe it is better for the environment and wildlife. Certainly this is true, as a study of organic agriculture published at the end of last year demonstrated (News, October). Plus, you know where you are with organic food, because it needs to be certified by a regulatory body such as the Soil Association.

Some companies, however, have started claiming that their products are specifically wildlife friendly. In some cases, these brands are already organic and so good for wildlife by default, but these companies say that

they are prepared to do even more to encourage biodiversity.

The American Thanksgiving Company, for instance, produces organic and fair-trade coffee, but it has one line, Bat Magic, that is grown specifically to encourage bats.

Other companies may not be certified organic, but they are prepared to make their products more wildlife friendly. Currently around 3 per cent of the farmland in the UK is organic, so any scheme that can restore wildlife to the remaining 97 per cent has got to be welcome.

"Our pre-occupation is to increase wildlife on all farms," says Marek Nowakowski, co-founder of the Farmed Environment Company. "Wildlife is a crop. You need skills to grow bumblebees or birds, as much as you do a field of wheat."

His research shows that creating wildlife-friendly habitats within conventional farms delivers more wildlife than there would otherwise be. But the big question is whether claims for wildlife-friendly foods can be substantiated – *BBC Wildlife* puts eight products to the test.

Sanjida O'Connell

is a presenter, tv documentary maker and science writer who also writes about food and conservation issues.



Jordans

Luxury crunch maple and pecan cereal, £1.65

☎ 0800 587 890; www.jordans-cereals.co.uk

They claim: Jordans uses cereals from Conservation Grade farms. These farms are required to create wildlife-friendly habitats on at least 10 per cent of their land. Conservation Grade farms show a five-fold increase in the overall level of wildlife.

We say: Verification is by an independent organisation called the Farmed Environment Company. It gives compulsory annual training to farmers, and every three years, a spot wildlife audit is made. Farmers can

be barred if they fail to comply with regulations. Conservation Grade seems to be one of the most well-regulated schemes.

Taste test: Delicious: big chunks of nuts, good maple flavour; but high sugar content.

Where to buy it: Supermarkets and health food stores

8/10



Green & Blacks

Dark 70% chocolate, 100g, £1.49 (Organic)

☎ 020 7633 5900; www.greenandblacks.com

They say: Green & Blacks is organic and fair trade and the cocoa trees are shade-grown, meaning they are planted beneath indigenous trees and alongside crops such as avocados and bananas. "By having a variety of cocoa and shade trees and interspersing them with other plants, the biodiversity within the farm is greatly increased," the company says.

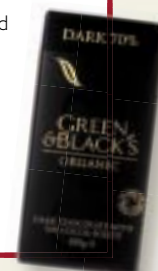
We say: Green & Blacks cannot verify that its shade-grown cocoa from the Dominican Republic is better for wildlife. However, research

carried out by the US Smithsonian Institute on Panamanian plantations does indicate that bird numbers in shade-grown cocoa are equivalent to numbers in rainforests.

Taste test: Very bitter and densely chocolatey; a little goes a long way.

Where to buy it: Most supermarkets and health food stores.

8.5/10



The Wildlife Trusts

White & Wild Milk, £0.83/litre, (English milk organic)

☎ 0870 036 7711; www.whiteandwild.co.uk

They say: Farmers supplying milk to the scheme must set 10 per cent of their land aside for wildlife. In addition, for every 20 two-litre and every 40 one-litre bottles purchased, a broad-leaved tree will be planted on a wildlife trust reserve.

We say: The Wildlife Trusts are in the process of verifying whether the 50 farms involved are setting aside 10 per cent of their land for wildlife, but they are not actually auditing wildlife on the farms. Nor do they take animal welfare into consideration. John

Cousins, head of agricultural policy at the Wildlife Trusts, says, "We do not make any claim about the way the milk is produced."

Taste test: Just like any other semi-skimmed organic milk, but a fuller flavour than non-organic milk.*

Where to buy it: Asda, Sainsburys, the Co-op and Budgens.

7/10



RSPB and Suma

Wildlife friendly brown rice, £1.69 (Organic)

☎ 0845 458 2290; www.rspb.org.uk/supporting/shopping/food/rice/twiceasnice.asp

They say: The rice is grown in the Ebro Delta in North-east Spain – an important area for birds such as purple herons and flamingoes. It is certified organic; other wildlife-friendly practices include increasing the water depth in the rice fields, which dramatically increases the numbers of fish. The fields are kept flooded during the winter providing a habitat for overwintering birds.

We say: Riet Vell grows the rice; it's owned by The Spanish Ornithological Society, which is BirdLife's partner

in Spain. BirdLife supervises the verification. While this scheme may be entirely laudable, it does not have a truly independent verification system.

Taste test: The product is currently unavailable.

Where to buy it: It is being relaunched this year.

6/10





Nairns

Stem-ginger 'Wheat-free' biscuits, £1.29

☎ 0131 620 7000; www.nairns-oatcakes.com/home.asp

They say: The oats come from the Scottish equivalent of Conservation Grade (Scottish Rural Stewardship Scheme). The biscuits are made using palm oil, which normally comes from monocultures of palms that have wiped out vast tracts of rainforest. "We ensure our suppliers are committed to producing palm oil on a sustainable basis," Nairns says.

We say: Farmers in the SRSS are monitored by a branch of the Scottish Parliament. Nairns' palm oil comes from a company called Aarhus

Karlshamn, which supports the idea of growing oil palms sustainably. The company is in talks with the WWF, but no plantations currently conform to sustainable guidelines.

Taste test: Gingery, dry and crispy – not luxury biscuits.

Where to buy them:

Health-food stores and supermarkets.

6.5/10



**Sheepdrove Organic Farm
Pork, various prices, (Organic)**

01488 716 59; www.sheepdrove.com

They say: As well as being organic, the farm encourages wildlife by planting corridors of wildflowers and filtering water through a natural reedbed system. There are more than 100 species of bird and 23 species of butterfly on the farm. Welfare of the animals is high: pigs are kept in family groups once they are weaned.

We say: Wildlife is monitored and new scientific research is carried out by the Elm Farm Research Centre. Sheepdrove has hired a biodiversity officer, who is also the

UK coordinator for the Barn Owl Conservation Network – there are three breeding pairs at Sheepdrove.

Taste test: Very tender, but the flavour didn't bowl me over.*

Where to buy it: Mail order or from Sheepdrove Organic Farm Family Butchers, Bristol. ☎ 0117 973 4643.

8.5/10



**Riverford Organics Home Delivery
Large vegetable box (12 items), £12.50 (Organic)**

01803 762720; www.riverford.co.uk

They say: As well as being organic, the company encourages wildlife by planting hedgerows, growing trees and creating a reservoir for winter rain. This year, Riverford grew 12 hectares of lettuce without any spraying, indicating that there are high levels of predatory insects, which in turn provide food for resident birds.

We say: Their claims are scientifically unsubstantiated (apart from meeting Soil Association criteria), but Riverford hopes to carry out an Environmental Impact Assessment in 2006.

Taste test: My box was 100 per cent UK grown and had a good range of vegetables for November. Perfect looking vegetables, incredibly fresh, fantastic flavours.

Where you can get it: Parts of London, the South-west and the Midlands. Check on the website to see if the company delivers to your area.

7.5/10



**Kraft Foods
Kenco sustainably developed coffee, £2.55**

01242 236101; www.kraftfoods.co.uk; www.ra.org/coffee

They say: Thibaud de Saint-Quentin, vice president of Kraft Foods says, "Kenco Sustainable Development is our first brand to be made with 100 per cent Rainforest Alliance-certified coffee beans and brings high quality, sustainably produced coffee into the mainstream marketplace." On farms certified by the Rainforest Alliance, forests and wildlife are preserved.

We say: Rainforest Alliance farms are certified by the Sustainable Agriculture Network, a coalition of conservation groups in South and

Central America. To date, farms in 12 countries have been certified, ensuring that 28,500 hectares of land is managed to protect wildlife.

Taste test: I expected it to taste disgusting but was pleasantly surprised. Smooth but lacks depth.

Where to buy it: Most leading supermarkets.

8/10

