

Wildlife Around Hartlebury Castle

We have lots of wildlife around the Hartlebury Castle site. You can see some of them when you walk around the moat, some are very shy, so you have to be very quiet and still to see them. There are others though that are nocturnal so only come out at night.

Here are some of the creatures that make their home at Hartlebury Castle.

Water Birds

Ducks – we have many ducks on our moat and they love it here because there is lots of food for them such as water plants, fish, insects and worms. Sometimes you'll see them turn upside down as they look for food under the water! Where you see ducks, you will also see ducklings in the spring, so look out for them on your walk.

Coots - A coot is smaller than a duck and has black feathers and a white patch on its beak. They are not very good at flying and would rather run over the water than fly, if they're not going too far! Coots build their nests out of reeds, and we have plenty of those, so you may see coot chicks too when you visit!

Swans – You may see a pair of swans on your walk when you visit. This is the first year in a long time that we have been home to swans, so we're very excited! The two swans that live here are mute swans. The male swan is called a cob, the female swan is called a pen, and baby swans are called cygnets. They are very protective of their nests and babies, so be careful to keep your distance if you see them, just watch from the path. A pair of swans stay together for life, and will reuse the nest each year, so we're very hopeful that they will return every year.

Geese – From time to time we have geese visit us, they are usually Canada Geese and like all our water birds, eat insects, plants and worms in and around the moat. Like swans, they stay together for life. The female is a goose, the male is called a gander and the babies are called goslings. The goslings are able to walk, swim and find food as soon as they hatch out of the egg, but their parents are still very protective of them, so like the swans, watch them from the path.

As well as our water birds, you might see a wide range of other birds whilst outside. Look out for robins, magpies, crows, rooks and ravens, blackbirds, house martins, sparrows and even kestrels, owls and falcons!

Other Animals

Muntjac Deer – There used to be a large herd of deer at Hartlebury Castle, but Bishop Pepys gifted them to Queen Victoria, and so now the only deer we have to visit us are muntjac deer. These are very small deer and have reddish brown fur with white stripes on their faces. They have very short antlers, and also small tusks! These deer are quite shy, so you'd have to stay still and quiet for a while to see one, but they are around the grounds!

Squirrels – Unfortunately, we do not have the rarer red squirrel living here, but we have a good group of grey squirrels. Although they are a common animal, and you can see them in most gardens, we still love to see our squirrels cheekily scampering around the carriage circle or up the trees on the moat walk. I expect you will see some on your walk as you go.

Red Foxes – You probably won't see a fox on your walk as they come out at night and in the very early morning (some are braver and come out during the daytime too). However, you may see signs that a fox has been around...a scattering of feathers where a fox has taken a pigeon or other bird for food for instance. Foxes also hunt voles, mice, rabbits and other small mammals but they also eat blackberries, mulberries, apples and plums and we have plenty of all these in the grounds!

Hedgehogs – These are secretive night time creatures, but we do have them in our grounds. They hide away in the undergrowth and under the roots of trees until it's dark. Hedgehogs love to eat earthworms, insects, snails, slugs, frogs, eggs and berries. The spines on their backs are for protection, and they will roll up into a tight ball if they are being attacked or threatened. Hedgehogs hibernate during the winter and become more active in the spring and summer months.

Bats – We are lucky to have a small bat population living at the Castle. We have two types of bat; the lesser horseshoe bat and the pipistrelle bat. Both bats are very small and are night time creatures. They feed on mosquitoes, gnats and midges as well as flies, moths and spiders.

All bats are protected in the UK which means it is against the law to kill or injure a bat, destroy or block their roost or to own, sell or exchange one even if it is dead.

Insects

We have a large variety of insects that live around the grounds, some we love, others we like less, but they are all part of the rich tapestry of life here at Hartlebury Castle and form part of our eco system and are very important to it.

The insects you may see include dragonflies, butterflies and moths, ladybirds, spiders, bees, wasps, damselflies and craneflies. All these are important to help our plant life thrive and therefore help our larger animals to survive!

Don't forget you can colour in our drawings of some of these animals on our activities page on our website.