



FIELD MARGINS

1. INTRODUCTION

For the purposes of this action plan the term "field margin" refers to strips of land lying between a crop and the field boundary, and extending for a limited distance into the crop. This action plan is primarily concerned with arable fields but some of the issues are also relevant to the margins of intensively managed grassland. The margins of fields provide very valuable habitat. Some of Britain's rarest plants are found within the edges of arable fields.



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These once common species such as cornflower, spreading hedge-parsley and shepherd's needle are now rarely found due to changes in methods of agricultural production.

As well as providing an important refuge for wildflowers, field margins also provide buffer strips between farming operations and sensitive habitats such as hedgerows, watercourses and ditches. These features provide valuable wildlife corridors for a range of species including invertebrates, birds, small mammals, reptiles and amphibians. Wildlife corridors act as a link for wildlife moving to neighbouring habitats, or between hibernation and breeding habitats.

Field margins provide nesting and feeding sites for game birds and songbirds. Invertebrate species including butterflies, grasshoppers, solitary wasps, and bees are attracted to field margins. Many beneficial predators such as spiders and ground beetles which feed on a variety of foods, especially traditional crop pests such as aphids, are dependant on the field margins for part of the year. The high number of invertebrates provides food for farmland birds and mammals such as bats. The presence of small mammals may also attract barn owls. Field margins can be deliberately managed to create conditions which benefit arable wildflowers, invertebrates, small mammals and birds.

Sensitive management of field margins habitat throughout England could offer huge benefits to threatened farmland species, many of which have suffered severe declines over recent decades.

- 2. OUR OBJECTIVES & TARGETS** **Target**
- A. To record all known examples of biodiversity rich field margins** **by 2010**
- B. To maintain the existing overall area of conservation field margins and increase the extent of the habitat by at least 40ha per year** **2004-2015**

ASSOCIATED HABITAT PLANS

- Hedgerows
- Woodlands
- Lowland Grassland (all types)
- Rivers & Streams
- Scrub & Carr

ASSOCIATED SPECIES PLANS

- Farmland Birds
- Song Thrush
- Scarce Arable Plants
- Barn Owl
- Rare Bumblebees

3. NATIONAL BAP OBJECTIVES & TARGETS

- *Maintain, improve and restore by management the biodiversity of some 15000ha of cereal field margins on appropriate soil types in the UK by 2010.*

The target of 15000ha represents the consensus of expert opinion of the area necessary for the maintenance, improvement and restoration of biodiversity. The figure covers the conservation management of rare arable flowers (which generally occur on drier less fertile soils) and also grass margins which occur on a much wider range of soils (including heavy and fertile soils).

4. CURRENT STATUS

In Warwickshire, Coventry and Solihull there was in 2002 about 57000ha of land under cereal crops and a total of 77000ha of arable fields. If managed sensitively for wildlife, the margins around these cereal crops have the potential to provide an enormous wildlife resource. Up to and including 2002, the amount of land considered as 'cereal field margins' (according to the national definition) under sensitive management through the Countryside Stewardship scheme was 835ha (conservation headlands and seed/flower mixes) and 8783km (margins) within Warwickshire. There are also a number of farms with similar margins outside the CS scheme.

- Common Agricultural Policy reform may introduce measures which integrate more environmental objectives into the payments system.
- Chemical use regulations have tightened (particularly on field margins) and pesticide application technology is continually improving.
- Farmers can meet their set-aside requirements by setting-aside field margins of a minimum 20m width. However, set-aside strips of 10m are now allowed when they are situated along permanent watercourses and lakes. The scheme literature advises farmers on how best to manage the margins to benefit wildlife.

4.1 Legal and Policy Status

Under the Food and Environment Protection Act 1985 it is illegal to spray pesticides into hedge bases, unless there is a specific label recommendation or a specific off-label approval.

Under the current procedures for pesticide registration and review, some compounds have statutory label exemptions preventing their use on the outermost 6m wide strips of crops. These restrictions are designed to prevent over-spraying of water-courses and protect non-cropped habitats.

4.1 Current Factors Affecting The Habitat

The main factors which are influencing the wildlife value of cereal field margins are:

- **The availability of agri-environment schemes** to promote the creation of new cereal field margins is leading to an expansion of this habitat.
- **Intensive management associated with cereal production**, including the use of herbicides to ensure a weed free crops, summer use of insecticides, increased fertiliser use, and ploughing/cultivation up to the base of field boundary. Inputs have declined since the 1980's, but even with the more judicious use of pesticides and improved application technology, there are still further opportunities for biodiversity gains.
- **The pressure on farm incomes** leading to a desire to maximise the productive area

5. CURRENT LOCAL ACTION

- Good farming practice, including field margins, beetle banks and conservation headlands can be seen on many farms in the county where the farmer has an interest in demonstrating the farm's environmental gains. The Countryside Stewardship Scheme (DEFRA) which operated in Warwickshire until 31st March 2004 encouraged and supported financially, such management.

Warwickshire, Coventry and Solihull Local Biodiversity Action Plan

- In 2002 Countryside Stewardship supported the creation of the following:
 - Conservation Headlands without fertiliser (CH2) – 16ha
 - Uptake of 6m uncultivated arable margins (R3) – 3ha
 - Uptake of 6m grass arable margins (R3) - 149km
 - Uptake of 2m grass arable margins (R7) – 19km
 - Uptake of Conservation Headland with fertiliser allowed (CH1) – 5ha
- Conservation headlands and field margins are promoted by FWAG, the Game Conservancy Trust, Linking Environment and Farming (LEAF) and other farm wildlife advisors. DEFRA provide advice that is linked to the agri-environment schemes. FWAG and others provide assistance to farmers with their agri-environment scheme applications.
- The RSPB and Game Conservancy Trust have information available on the management of land to benefit farmland birds and The Game Conservancy Trust, NFU, FWAG and RSPB have produced leaflets on the subject.
- The Codes of Good Agricultural Practice (COGAP) for the Protection of Air, Soil and Water and the Code of Practice for the Safe Use of Pesticides on Farms are available free of charge from DEFRA's Regional Service Centres. COGAP, although not legally binding, indicates what is acceptable as good farming practice.
- LEAF and FWAG hold demonstration days to provide advice and examples of good environmental practice.
- Ongoing survey work e.g. recent entomological work by staff of Warwickshire and Coventry Museums has included surveys of local field margins.

6. PROPOSED LOCAL ACTIONS (some dates amended – Core Steering Group – Feb 2008)

ACTION	Lead	Partners	By	Meets objective
Policy & Legislation				
PL1. Support regional/national initiatives which seek to make beneficial changes to the CAP.	LBAPSG	LAs	2007	B
Site / Species Safeguard & Management				
SM1. Promote management favourable to field margins through appropriate agri-environmental schemes.	FWAG	WWT NE	2004-2015	B

SM2. Secure further uptake of agri-environment schemes, targeting sites where field margins can benefit wildlife most, in particular areas where priority species are likely to benefit and sites alongside other priority habitats.	FWAG	NE WWT	2004- 2015	B
SM3. Encourage greater use of Integrated Crop Management.	FWAG	NE LEAF	2004- 2015	B
SM4. Actively recommend measures to increase the extent of connectivity and maintain options to expand area of habitat.	LBAPSG	WCC LAs WWT NE	2008- 2015	B
Advisory				
A1. Create a comprehensive library of existing information and advice on the management of field margins. Make available to local landowners and managers, e.g. via FWAG web-site.	FWAG	NFU NE RSPB GCT	2005	B
A2. Set up a co-ordinated advisory programme; target proactive advice towards key sites and areas, and improve advisory material for landowners/ managers.	FWAG	NFU WWT RSPB	2006	B
Research & Monitoring				
RM1. Gather baseline data on distribution and populations of key species associated with field margins. Identify and monitor appropriate BAP, RDB, Nationally Scarce and Species of Conservation Concern.	WM	BSBI WWT NE	2004- 2015	A
RM2. Produce an inventory of known key sites and define areas where field margins are of high current or greatest potential biodiversity value.	WM	NE WWT	2005	A
RM3.				
Communication, Education & Publicity				
CP1. Increase public awareness of the importance of, and threats to, field margins and the need for conservation action.	FWAG	RSPB NFU WWT CLA GCT NE	2004- 2015	B

Abbreviations: BSBI – Botanical Society of the British Isles, CLA – Country Landowners Association, FWAG – Farming & Wildlife Advisory Group, GCT – Game Conservancy Trust, LA – Local Authority, LEAF – Linking Environment and Farming, LBAPSG – Local Biodiversity Action Plan Steering Group, NFU – National Farmers Union, RSPB – Royal Society for the Protection of Birds, WM – Warwickshire Museum, WWT – Warwickshire Wildlife Trust

7. REFERENCES (see **LBAP Bibliography** web page)

8. FURTHER INFORMATION (see separate **Links** web page for links to web sites)

UK Field Margins Biodiversity Action Plan no.8

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Buglife (2004) Information on the habitat-management requirements of key invertebrates . CD-Rom £34.99 from Beverley Doyle by email at: beverley.doyle@buglife.org.uk

Farming and Wildlife Advisory Group, FWAG - information on the new Environmental Stewardship agri-environment scheme. Tel.01926 318280 or email: warwickshire@fwag.org.uk

Botanical Society of the British Isles BSBI : James Partridge, 01926 427452 or email: jmpart@yahoo.co.uk

Game Conservancy Trust: '*Restoring wild grey partridge to farms*' . 5 free fact sheets, also an on-farm advisory service. Tel. 01425 652381.

8. CONTACT

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