



for birds
for people
for ever



THE GAME
CONSERVANCY
TRUST

FARMING FOR WILDLIFE

Uncropped cultivated margins

ELS

HLS

Arable plants are the most threatened plant group in the UK. They are dependent on disturbed soil, such as annual cultivation, but are prone to the effects of herbicides, fertilisers and crop competition. In arable areas with rare arable plants or a diverse range of broad-leaved plants, they can benefit from cultivation but with no crop establishment. '6 m uncropped cultivated margins' is an option in Entry Level Stewardship (ELS). Margins or in-field plots can also be managed in Higher Level Stewardship (HLS).

Uncropped cultivated areas should be carefully selected to encourage rare species or a diverse range of broad-leaved plants, without becoming infested with competitive grass weeds and cleavers.

BENEFITS FOR WILDLIFE

Uncropped cultivated areas protect scarce arable plants

If sites are carefully selected and cultivated at the right time, they can protect rare arable plants and areas with a diverse range of plant species.

An abundance of broad-leaved arable plants boosts the number of insects

The natural regeneration of broad-leaved arable plants on

uncropped, cultivated areas provides habitat for a wide range of insects, including some rare species that are dependent on specific arable plants.

Uncropped cultivated areas provide food for birds

The arable plants provide seed food for birds at various times throughout the year, and the insects associated with these plants provide food for

insectivorous birds and birds that feed their young on insects in spring. The open sward ensures birds have access to this food when surrounding crops are too dense for them. They may be particularly important for birds that require seed food throughout summer, such as linnetts and turtle doves.

Robert Goodison (Defra)

GUIDELINES OVERLEAF

HOW CAN I CREATE AND MANAGE UNCROPPED CULTIVATED AREAS?

SITE SELECTION

- Many rare species are now restricted to the outer 4 m of arable fields. They may still be present in the seed bank even if they have not been seen for many years. A survey in June or July may uncover important sites. Choose areas with a wide range of less competitive plants, but without competitive grass weeds or cleavers.
- The best sites are likely to be ones with a long history of arable cropping and without repeated, heavy applications of herbicides or fertilisers. Most of the rare species are associated with light soil types.

CREATION AND MANAGEMENT

- The uncropped area can be cultivated with the rest of the field, but left undrilled. If there are specific rare species, then the cultivation time may need to be specific to the needs of the plant, as some species are predominantly autumn-germinating, and others are predominantly spring-germinating.
- Steps should be taken to prevent any drift of pesticides or fertiliser onto the uncropped area.
- Other than the annual cultivation, the area should be undisturbed and allowed to naturally regenerate.
- Annual cultivations are generally needed to prevent the build-up of perennial weeds such as thistles and couch grass. Weed problems can be minimised by varying the season (spring or autumn) and depth of cultivation. If necessary, problem weeds should be removed by spot treatment or a weed-wiper.
- If an ELS uncropped cultivated margin becomes infested in competitive weeds, then convert it to a 6 m grass buffer strip by spraying off the weeds and sowing a grass mix. Alternatively, you may relocate the option within the same field.

KEY POINTS

Select areas carefully to ensure they encourage less competitive arable plants and do not become infested with grass weeds.

If rare species are present then time the cultivation to suit the germination time of the plants.

Take steps to prevent the drift of pesticides or fertilisers onto the uncropped areas.

You can get further information on this and other ways of managing your farm for wildlife from:



Agricultural Adviser, The RSPB,
UK Headquarters, The Lodge,
Sandy, Bedfordshire SG19 2DL.
Tel: 01767 680551
www.rspb.org.uk/farming



Farming and Wildlife Advisory
Group, NAC, Stoneleigh,
Kenilworth, Warwickshire
CV8 2RX. Tel: 024 7669 6699
www.fwag.org.uk



The Game Conservancy Trust, Fordingbridge,
Hampshire SP6 1EF. Tel: 01425 652381
www.gct.org.uk

The Defra ELS and HLS schemes can fund this type of management. For full details, refer to the scheme handbooks.

ELS = Entry Level Stewardship

HLS = Higher Level Stewardship

See also the RSPB advisory sheet on:
Buffer strips on cultivated land