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THE GAME
CONSERVANCY
TRUST

FARMING FOR WILDLIFE

Beetle banks



Peter Thompson (GCT)

Beetle banks can be used to provide more tussocky grassland within large-scale arable farmland, which is important for a wide range of farm wildlife

Beetle banks are grass mounds, about 2 metres wide, that run the length of large arable fields, cutting right across the middle. They can start 20 metres out from the field edge at each end so that a field can still be farmed as one unit.

Beetle banks are generally appropriate for fields larger than 20 hectares. Fields of 30 hectares and above may warrant more than one beetle bank.

BENEFITS FOR WILDLIFE

Beetle banks boost numbers of beneficial insects and spiders on arable farmland

A tussocky grass strip through the middle of a field, such as a beetle bank, provides essential over-wintering habitat for many welcome insects and spiders, which will move into the crop in the spring and feed on crop pests. These species may travel up to 250 metres from grass field margins during spring, so they do not reach the centre of large fields. Beetle banks provide an over-wintering habitat that enables such predatory insects to cover a whole field.

Beetle banks provide habitat for ground-nesting birds and small mammals

A tussocky grass strip through the middle of a field provides habitat for species that prefer to nest in open farmland away from field boundaries, such as corn buntings and skylarks, and mammals such as harvest mice. Grey partridges may also select these in preference to hedge banks to avoid predators.

HOW CAN I CREATE AND MANAGE A BEETLE BANK?

CREATING A BEETLE BANK

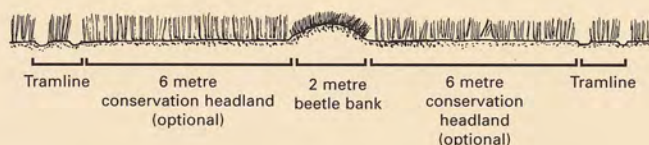
- September is the best month to establish the grass sward that forms a beetle bank.
- You will need to plough furrows that point towards each other from either side during cultivation of the field to create a raised bank of about 0.4 metres along the plough line. The headland at each end of the beetle bank can remain cropped.
- The grass mix should include up to 30% of tussock-forming species such as cocksfoot or timothy grass. The rest of the mix can consist of fescues and bents. All species should be of native origin.
- You should broadcast the seed at a rate of 70 kilograms per hectare immediately after the cultivation to get good establishment.
- Three cuts may be necessary in the first summer (when the sward reaches 10 cm in height) to encourage the grasses to tiller and to help control invasive annual weeds.
- Once established, you should only cut the grass strips when there is a need to get the dead tussocks to regenerate (this is likely to be no more than once every three years).

PROTECTION FROM SPRAYS

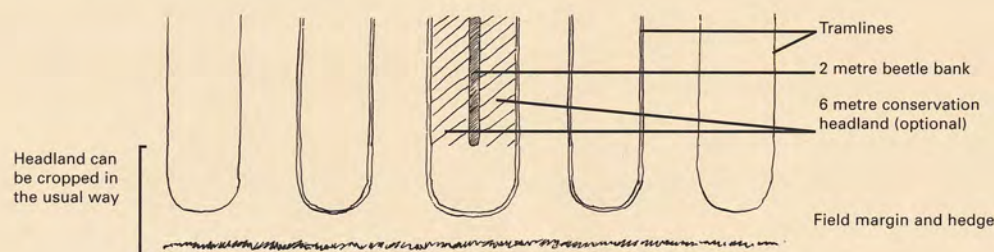
- Beetle banks are particularly vulnerable to the effects of pesticide drift because these narrow strips of grass are sprayed on either side.
- On light soils with a low weed burden, conservation headland management on either side of a beetle bank will enhance its value for insects

and birds whenever the adjacent crop is a cereal. Conservation headlands are selectively sprayed margins (see the separate sheet entitled 'Conservation headlands'). You should avoid the application of insecticides within at least 6 metres of the beetle bank whenever possible, as these will be particularly harmful.

1 Diagram of a beetle bank



2 Plan view of a beetle bank



Payment for some of this management may be available as part of wider package of work under the Countryside Stewardship Scheme. 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



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



The Game Conservancy Trust, Fordingbridge, Hampshire SP6 1EF. Tel: 01425 652381

KEY POINTS

Beetle banks can boost predatory insect numbers and thus help with pest control.

The field headland can remain intact so that the whole field can still be farmed as one unit.

Beetle banks can be funded by the Countryside Stewardship Scheme.

Sponsored by:

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Department for
**Environment,
Food & Rural Affairs**

Contact DEFRA for information and application packs for agri-environment schemes:
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17 Smith Square
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