

Arable Field Margins



Description

'Arable Field Margin' is a general term referring to strips of land lying between crops and the field boundary, and extending for a limited distance into the crop, which are deliberately managed to benefit key farmland species. They are excluded from crop spraying and other similar agricultural activities.

Arable Field Margins are important for the provision of nesting and feeding sites for game birds and some passerines, many species of Butterflies, Grasshoppers, and plant bugs. Some 2,000 species of invertebrate are commonly found in Arable Field Margins and boundaries. Hedgebanks support invertebrates of economic, ecological and aesthetic value. Even more dependent on Arable Field Margins are the rare arable flowers. Arable wildflowers are of conservation concern because of enormous national declines in their distribution and abundance. Overall, some 300 species of plants can occur along arable field boundaries and hedgerows.

Arable Field Margins are important for Brown Hare, Barn Owl, Kestrel, Harvest Mouse, Corn Bunting and Linnet.

National Status

Cereals account for 63% of the total area of arable land in England. The margins of cereal fields can be managed in ways which benefit wildlife, without having serious detrimental effects on the remaining cropped area. Estimating average national field size to be 12ha suggests that there are about 400,000km of cereal field edge in the UK. If all such boundaries included a 6m managed margin, some 200,000ha of land would be brought into sensitive management.

Local Status

There is no information available on the amount of take-up in this area, although a number of farmers do include headland strips for wildlife as a result of DEFRA initiatives, farm plans etc.

Legal 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 overspraying of water courses and protect non-cropped habitats.

Links with other Action Plans

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| SAP1 | Hedgehog |
| SAP5 | Grey Partridge |
| SAP7 | Kestrel |
| SAP10 | Barn Owl |
| SAP12 | Tree Sparrow |

Current Factors Causing Loss or Decline

- Intensification of cereal production, including the use of herbicides to ensure a weed-free monoculture, and summer use of insecticides.
- The reduction in rotation of cereal crops with other land covers (including grass leys and fallows).
- The reduction in the undersown area associated with the shift to winter cropping. Undersown cereal crops are important for overwintering Sawflies.
- The geographical retreat of cereal growing from many northern and western areas means that this habitat no longer occurs in large parts of the UK.
- Grassy field margins are retained by some farmers to act as buffers to cereal fields, but management is usually minimal.

Current Local Action

- A number of farmers include headland strips for wildlife as a result of DEFRA and FWAG initiatives, farm plans etc.

Proposed Local Action

- In partnership with DEFRA review the extent of Arable Field Margin management in Barnsley and encourage wider participation from the farming community.
- Continue to monitor the population of Brown Hare and encourage appropriate management.
- Encourage participation among farmers in Environmental Stewardship and Countryside Stewardship Schemes.
- Extract information from the *Barnsley Bird Study Group Breeding Bird Survey* to provide populations and mapping of breeding Yellowhammer, Reed Bunting and Corn Bunting.

BMBC Planning Policy Actions

- Include habitat and species protection policies in development plans and/or supplementary guidance.
- Encourage the creation of new habitat through the requirement made under Planning Policy Statement (PPS) 9, to incorporate biodiversity enhancements into development wherever possible.