

Guidance for the management of Arable field margins and Winter Stubbles

The National Context

- Arable/Cereal Field Margins have been identified as a UK priority habitat. Most cereal fields occur in the south east of Kirklees.

General objectives

- Create field margins in cereal crops where herbicides and pesticides are not used and annual weeds are allowed to flower and seed.
- Leave cereal stubbles over winter before cultivation.

Important features to maintain and develop

- Weedy margins provide a food supply for insects, and a range of priority bird and mammal species.
- Winter stubble provide food for seed-eating mammals and birds. Although this means that cereals have to be sown in the spring rather than autumn. Spring sown cereals provide a better habitat for breeding skylarks and lapwings
- Links to other habitats. Cereal stubble and field margins add value to adjacent hedgerows, ditches, banks and other habitats which provide cover for a range of animal species.

Priority species' groups for which habitat is important

Birds

Bullfinch*
Dunnock*
Grey Partridge
Kestrel
Lapwing
Linnet
Reed bunting
Skylark
Swallow
Tree Sparrow
Yellow Hammer

Mammals

Brown Hare

* where trees and shrubs border habitat

Other species groups for which habitat is important

- Includes some other bird species, (e.g. finches), moths and invertebrates.

Maintaining and improving the habitat

The following activities will be of benefit:

- An annual cycle of cultivation of field margins after the winter to sustain populations of annual weeds.
- An initial sowing of annual weed seeds can add plant diversity and so a greater variety of food for target species.

- Minimise herbicide and pesticide use.
- Leaving stubble until late winter especially near to hedges which will benefit several bird species.
- If possible identify nests of ground nesting birds to avoid them in any crop operations.

Species to plant

- Not applicable for tree and shrub species except in adjacent hedgerows.
- Wildflowers

An appropriate mix of annual cornfield weeds can be sown and game crops are especially useful. For information on the correct species to plant look for the Natural History Museum's Postcode Plant Database at www.nhm.ac.uk or write to The Natural History Museum, Cromwell Road, London, SW7 5BD, UK.

Extending the habitat

- Any areas of bare soil or substrate (particularly stony substrates) can provide a valuable habitat similar to Arable field margins.