

Farmland Management for Birds



Farmland birds are key indicators of the health of the environment. Unfortunately, in recent years, many of these species have suffered serious declines.

Reversing the declines of farmland birds relies heavily on farmers and their management knowledge and skills. Simple changes to management practices, leading to more foraging habitat and nesting sites, can have huge benefits for farmland birds. These changes can be voluntary, but assistance may also be available under the various agri-environment schemes.

Foraging Habitat

- Provision of buffer strips can be of great benefit to a number of species, such as Barn Owls. These rough grass strips should be at least 2m wide but ideally 4m-6m. Strips of these types can be eligible for payments under the Entry Level Stewardship (ELS) scheme.
- Buffer strips can also be of benefit to Lapwings, by increasing numbers of insects in arable fields, but even more beneficial is the creation or restoration of grazed and wet pasture. A Higher Level Stewardship (HLS) scheme may be able to help with the cost of such actions.
- Good hedgerow management can help a number of the most threatened farmland birds, such as Corn Buntings and Yellowhammers, by providing more insects, seeds and berries for food. Good management of hedges next to buffer strips is particularly important. There are a range of ELS and HLS options relating to hedges.
- Insect-rich foraging habitats are of great importance to a number of farmland birds. To help them, consider ELS and HLS options such as unharvested or unfertilised conservation headlands, reduced-herbicide cereal crop management, or sown wildflower headlands

Nesting Sites

- Changes in farming practices have badly affected in-field nesters such as Lapwings, Skylarks and Grey Partridge. The provision of nest plots, fallow or stubble fields through ELS and HLS can really help these species.
- Sympathetic maintenance, through ELS, of traditional farm buildings can bring benefits for Barn Owls, as well as maintaining farm infrastructure.
- Maintaining thick bases to hedges by avoiding spray drift, over-zealous trimming, ploughing too close to the hedge or heavy grazing will help hedge-nesting species and can qualify for points under ELS.



For further information please contact: