



TECHNICAL INFORMATION

Hedgerow management

Hedgerows form an important and attractive part of the countryside. They also provide a very important habitat for a wide range of species and often link together different areas of habitat. Bats, birds and butterflies all use hedges as corridors for flight. They are a good source of food, providing berries for birds and nectar sources for butterflies and insects. Birds also use hedges to nest in and hedgerow trees as song posts. Hedgerows also provide a home for a range of small mammals.

Important Biodiversity Action Plan species that benefit from well-managed hedges include; song thrush, tree sparrow, linnet, bats, butterflies and dormice.



Fenced hedge with grassy margins – a good wildlife corridor

How to manage hedgerows to benefit wildlife

Most important – all hedgerows are different and each requires its own management approach.

Aim to create variation in the hedge size, shape and varieties across the farm as a whole. Different types of hedge habitat will favour different species and increase the diversity of wildlife on the farm. As a general rule the larger a hedge is the more wildlife it is able to support. A full hedge management plan will help to ensure variation in hedge types and styles.

- Aim to cut hedges every other year, or preferably every third year with slow growing thorn hedges. Try to avoid trimming all hedges in the same year. Ideally cut no more than a third of the hedges in any year.
- If cutting must be carried out annually, cut the hedge at a higher level than the previous year, allowing the hedge to grow taller.
- Gap up with local provenance stock of mixed species.
- Fence livestock away from a hedge by at least one metre and leave at least one metre of uncultivated or ungrazed land between the hedge and the crop.
- For all hedges and especially those of particular wildlife importance consider adopting set-aside headlands or grass buffer strips. Funding for these might be available under agri-environment schemes.



An un-trimmed hedge junction – excellent for birds and bats

- Leave some hawthorns as ‘standards,’ they provide flowers (pollen and nectar) and berries for wild animals at no cost.
- Hedge junctions can be particularly beneficial to wildlife. Allow field corner hedges to grow un-trimmed (or trim very occasionally) to provide an alternative habitat type.

Some farm practices to help conservation

- Over-management, or trimming the hedge too severely can have a detrimental effect. In general a taller, bushier hedge will provide more wildlife potential than a smaller, thinner hedge.
- Avoid trimming hedges at the wrong time of year i.e. when birds are nesting, or whilst fruit is still available.
- Never cut between April and the end of August. Ideally cut in January and February, after most of the berries have been eaten.
- If conditions dictate that trimming must occur whilst berries are still on the hedge, trim only the sides, or even alternate sides as this will leave some fruit remaining at all times.
- Avoid spray and fertiliser drift into hedges, hedge verges and hedge bottoms – **save money**.
- Avoid cultivating close to the hedge reducing root damage, soil compaction and higher inputs.
- Allowing stock access to a hedge will often reduce the wildlife potential through browsing, over-grazing of hedge bottoms and nutrient enrichment from dung.



Hedge trimmed along the sides, leaving berries and nectar sources available on top

Relevant legislation

Tree Preservation Orders
Hedgerow Regulations Act 1997
Felling Licence

Further Information

For further information including possible grant aid contact your local FWAG Adviser and see the farmland biodiversity, environmentally responsible farming and virtual farm walk areas on the FWAG website: www.fwag.org.uk

Every effort has been made to ensure accuracy in the information sheet. However, FWAG cannot accept liability for any errors or omission.

Photographs courtesy of Richard Knight