



Arable fields in Tees Valley©Jessica Harrison

Tees Valley Biodiversity Partnership



Arable field margins Habitat Action Plan 2009-2013

Plan Lead Organisation	Redcar and Cleveland Brough Council
Plan Coordinator	David Spencer
Action Group	Rural
Associated Plans	Farmland birds, hedgerows
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Description

Arable field margins are defined as strips of land lying between arable crops and the field boundary, which are deliberately managed to create conditions which benefit key farmland wildlife species. They can take a variety of forms and titles including conservation headlands, buffer strips, beetle banks and wildlife strips.

Approximately 41% of the British landscape is tiled, of which cereals comprise 51%. Most of the wildlife interest of arable fields is concentrated in field edges and corners. Arable field margins provide a feeding habitat for several species of farmland bird including grey partridge and corn bunting. These margins are particularly beneficial for invertebrates such as ground beetles and hoverflies and provide nectar sources for bumblebees and butterflies. They also can provide cover and feeding for small mammals and their predators, including the barn owl. Cultivated field margins on light soils with low fertility can assist the conservation of rare arable weeds which were once widespread in arable fields. Many of these species such as a corn cockle and corn buttercup are nationally scarce species.

In recognition of the importance of arable field margins for a wide range of farmland wildlife, government agri-environment schemes remunerate farmers for creating, restoring and managing filed margins for biodiversity. Currently through Environmental Stewardship schemes there are options for arable field margins, field corners and buffer strips in entry level, organic level and higher level schemes.

Local BAPs have a limited role in contributing to biodiversity actions on arable field margins. The main drivers are DEFRA led agri-environment schemes and market prices of arable crops and costs of fertilisers. However given the importance of the habitat especially for local and national priority BAP bird species the Tees Valley Biodiversity partnership can play a beneficial role by supporting the work of Natural England and FWAG by promoting and encouraging uptake of beneficial field margin options in Environmental Stewardship Schemes.

Current factors causing loss and decline

- ◆ Intensification of arable production, including increased use of herbicide and summer use of insecticide.
- ◆ Removal of set aside as an agri-environment scheme.
- ◆ Changing agricultural practices with a shift from spring to winter cropping resulting in a loss of winter stubble.
- ◆ A reduction in rotation of cereal crop rotation with other land covers (including grass leys and fallows).
- ◆ Increases in field sizes with associated loss of field margins and boundary features.

Conservation Status

Arable field margins are a UK priority habitat.

The Habitat in the Tees Valley

Agricultural land is the single largest land use in the Tees Valley, and occupies almost 62% (46,500 hectares). The June 2007 Agricultural Census data show that 21,531 ha of land was in arable land use spread amongst 334 land holdings. In 2008 there were 228 ha of arable land in one of the agri-environment schemes (Entry Level Stewardship, Higher Level Stewardship). These are distributed as small patches and strips within the arable mosaic.

Current Activity in the Tees Valley

Environmental Stewardship Schemes are delivered in the Tees Valley by Natural England. Farming and Wildlife Advisory Group (FWAG) have a branch based near Barnard Castle that covers the Tees Valley. The Rural Action Group of the Tees Valley Biodiversity Partnership runs a farmland bird survey which provides a link between the partnership and participating landowners.

Further Information

For Information on Environmental Stewardship schemes:
<http://www.naturalengland.org.uk/planning/grants-funding/es/els/online.htm>
<http://www.defra.gov.uk/erdp/schemes/es/>

Managing Priority Habitats for Invertebrates'-Cereal Fields. Published by Buglife on line at <http://www.buglife.org.uk/conservation/adviceonmanagingbaphabitats>.

Vision Statement

For arable field margins in the Tees Valley to be managed to provide a favourable habitat for a wide range of wildlife.

Targets

AFM.T1 To increase the area of arable field margins managed for biodiversity through environmental stewardship schemes.

Actions

Code	Action	Organisational lead	Action contact	Partners	End date
AFM.A1	To encourage uptake of arable field margin options for farmers renewing ES through TVBP annual farming and wildlife event.	TVBAP rural action group	Sue Antrobus	Natural England FWAG	Ongoing
AFM.A2	To promote new autumn ES options and handbook with targeted press work	TVBAP rural action group	Sue Antrobus	Natural England FWAG	2009
AFM.A3	FWAG direct farmers to information on arable field margins where appropriate.	FWAG	Jennie Stafford	Natural England	Ongoing
AFM.A4	To provide local case studies of best practice on Tees valley biodiversity website.	TVBAP rural action group	David Spencer	Natural England	2009
AFM.A5	To promote arable field margins in ES to farmers who are part of the TVBP farmland bird survey.	TVBAP rural action group	Dave Spencer	Natural England FWAG	Ongoing