

# Arable field margins

## Current UK status and trends

Unknown, but around 41% of the British landscape is tilled. Margins are under threat due to the end of Entry Level Stewardship.

## Estimated current Northamptonshire resource

Unknown, around 105,000ha of arable land in Northants (45%)

## Progress towards BAP targets 2008–2015

No targets set, but 253ha of floristically enhanced grass margins created

## Lead partner

Natural England

## Target areas



## Habitat description

Arable field margins are herbaceous strips or blocks around arable fields that are managed specifically to provide benefits for wildlife. Arable field margins are usually sited on the outer 2–12m margin of the field. Much of the wildlife interest in arable areas is now found at the field edges or headland with many arable weeds now among our rarest plants.

The following margin types are included:

- Cultivated, low-input margins
- Margins sown to provide seed for wild birds
- Margins sown with wild flowers or agricultural legumes
- Margins providing permanent, grass strips with mixtures of tussocky and fine-leaved grasses



Arable field margins can support rare plants (*e.g.* corn parsley, shepherd's needle), crop-nesting bird species (*e.g.* corn bunting, reed bunting or lapwing), birds which feed in arable fields (*e.g.* grey partridge, tree sparrow, turtle dove) and a variety of bumblebee species.

## Main issues and threats

- Intensification of crop production, including the use of herbicides to ensure a weed-free monoculture, and summer use of pesticides
- Lack of guidance and within the farming community perceived complexity of creating and maintaining arable margins
- Regular recreation (*e.g.* horse riders) trespassing onto arable margin set aside for wildlife

- Reduction in rotation of cereal crops and other land covers (including grass leys and fallows)
- Loss of stewardship funding, in particular Entry Level Stewardship (ELS)

## General strategy

- Encourage maintenance of current arable field margins through Campaign for the Farmed Environment
- Encourage creation of new arable field margins through Countryside Stewardship
- Target arable field margin creation and maintenance in areas known to hold rare arable plants
- Work with Catchment Sensitive Farming to promote buffer strips where they buffer water courses and prevent erosion and runoff
- Target field margins where they buffer and link other existing priority habitat
- Encourage benefit stacking, for example enhancing existing margins by providing pollinator habitat or overwinter bird seed

## Targets

1. Maintain the current extent of arable field margins
2. Create 400ha of arable field margins by 2020

## Actions

<b>A.</b>	Maintain current extent of arable field margins by encouraging farmers to maintain existing habitat	CFE
<b>B.</b>	Create arable field margins through Countryside Stewardship and CFE	Natural England CFE
<b>C.</b>	Target buffer strip creation along where they buffer water courses and prevent erosion and runoff	Environment Agency RNRP
<b>D.</b>	Through Countryside Stewardship create margins in areas known to hold rare arable plants	Natural England
<b>E.</b>	Encourage enhance enhancement of existing margins by providing pollinator habitat or overwinter bird seed	CFE Natural England

## Flagship species



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- Corn bunting
- Grey partridge
- Harvest mouse
- Shepherd's needle
- Skylark
- Turtle dove

## Further information and management advice

- ▶ [Habitat information from the Wildlife Trust](#)
- ▶ [Habitat information from Natural England](#)
- ▶ [Campaign for the Farmed Environment advice](#)
- ▶ [Habitat and management advice from the RSPB](#)
- ▶ [Buglife's management advice for invertebrates](#)
- ▶ [Management advice for bumblebees from Bumblebee Conservation Trust](#)