

Action Plan Scope:

This Action Plan covers the UK BAP priority habitat Cereal field margins¹ plus the margins of other arable crops. These margins comprise strips of land lying between arable crops and field boundaries, and extending for a limited distance into the crop, which are managed in such a way that they benefit key farmland species, often no longer able to survive elsewhere on the farm. These margins may be left fallow (cultivated regularly but not cropped), managed as conservation headlands (where crops are grown using very limited inputs of pesticides and herbicides), as grass margins or as game crops. They may act as corridors allowing wildlife to move between fragmented areas of suitable habitat.

1. CURRENT STATUS

1.1 Legislation and priority status

International	None known
UK and Wales	Food and Environmental Protection Act (1985) ^f Cereal Field margins: UK BAP priority habitat Welsh S74 list ^b
Gwynedd	None

1.2 Status in Wales and beyond

Wales has an area of approximately 60,000 ha of cropped arable land, and by using an average field size of 3ha, the potential extent of arable field margin in Wales can be estimated as being 16,300 ha². In Wales only 22% of the total arable land contains cereals, as compared with 51% of the total area across Great Britain³.

Increasing specialisation and the decline of mixed farming means that extensive areas of arable land are now largely restricted to the lowlands of Pembrokeshire, Powys, Monmouthshire, Gower, the Vale of Glamorgan and the lowlands of NE Wales, although there are also significant areas in Anglesey and Gwynedd⁴.

1.3 Status in Gwynedd^c

Gwynedd contains a relatively low proportion of Welsh arable land (3%) compared to east and south Wales, where traditionally more arable crops were grown. However, the soils on the Llŷn Peninsula (especially along the coastline and on the southern side) are well drained and of loamy, brown earths, and consistently graded (mostly grade 3 / 4 with scatterings of grade 1 & 2) as better quality agricultural land. Historically much of Gwynedd's arable crops were grown here. Now only an occasional cereal crop is grown.

^a illegal to spray pesticides into hedge bases, unless there is specific label recommendations or a specific off label approval. Under current procedures for pesticide registration and review, some have statutory label exemptions preventing their use on outermost 6m wide strips of crops. These restrictions are designed to prevent over-spraying of watercourses and protect non-cropped habitats.

^b Welsh Assembly Government, Going Wild in Wales - List of Species and Habitats of Principal Importance for the Conservation of Biological Diversity. Crown Copyright 2003.

^c Within this document the term "Gwynedd" refers to areas outside the Snowdonia National Park area, except where specified otherwise

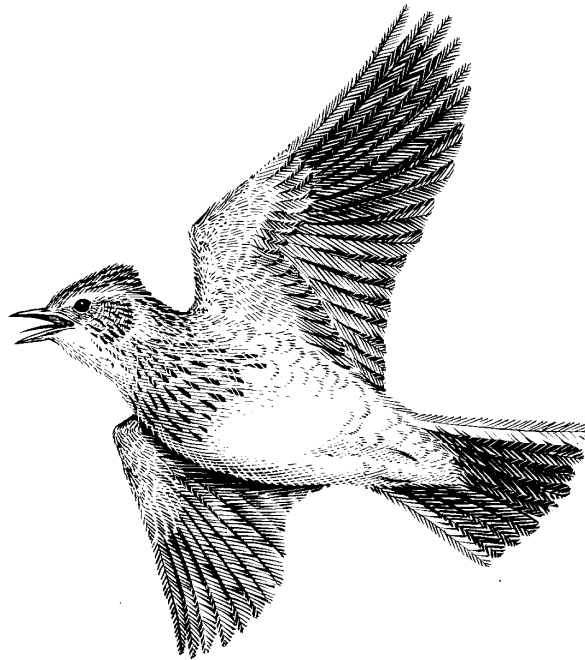
2. FACTORS AFFECTING THIS HABITAT IN GWYNEDD

- Reduction in arable farming, as more farms specialise in pastoral systems
- Within livestock systems, cessation of the practice of growing a small area of crops for stock feed
- Intensification and specialisation of arable production, including the use of herbicides and insecticides.
- Changes in seasonal cropping patterns - from spring-sown to autumn-sown crops - and the associated loss of stubble, especially in winter.
- A reduction in the rotation of arable crops with other land covers (including grass leys and fallows).
- Reduction in the under sown area associated with the shift to winter cropping.
- Maximum usage of fields encouraged by production subsidies.

3. ASSOCIATED GWYNEDD SAPS / HAPS

Cloddiau, Lowland Heathland, Hedgerows, Maritime cliff and slopes

Polecat, Brown hare, Bats, Twite, Lapwing, Farmland birds



4. CURRENT ACTION IN GWYNEDD

4.1 Site and habitat protection

- None known

4.2 Management and programmes of action

- Arable field margins (Meirionnydd only) were targeted under Tir Cymen (final ten year schemes commenced in 1998) including options such as 'wildlife strips', 'conservation headlands' or 'rough grass margins'.
- The Llŷn (ESA) Scheme offers payments for unsprayed arable crops in areas of the Llŷn Peninsula.
- The current all-Wales agri-environment scheme Tir Gofal offers payments for unsprayed crops, winter stubbles, under sown spring sown cereals, rough grass and fallow margins, wildlife cover crops and conversion of improved grassland to arable.
- There has been a recent interest in the production of flax on the Llŷn Peninsula and Anglesey.
- The RSPB, particularly in view of the dramatic decline of farmland birds in Wales, continues to promote wildlife-sensitive arable land management. In 1996 they produced *Silent Fields*, a report outlining the reasons for this decline in Wales, which includes a decrease in mixed farming and arable crops. This was later followed by *Living Fields*, which aims to provide ways of halting/ reversing this decline.
- Plantlife recently produced a bilingual awareness-raising leaflet entitled Farming for Arable Flowers, which includes details of relevant Tir Gofal Options.

4.3 Survey, research and monitoring

- Plantlife will be conducting a Britain-wide arable plants survey during 2004 (UK Arable Plants Survey) to collect records of 25 rare arable species. An awareness raising poster and leaflet have been produced by the Plantlife Wales officer.

5. ACTION PLAN OBJECTIVES

1. To maintain, improve and restore the biodiversity of arable field margins.
2. To encourage the re-introduction of arable cropping in areas such as the Llŷn Peninsula and Meirionnydd, which have now largely gone over to livestock production.

6. PROPOSED ACTIONS

Code	Action	Partner(s) ^d
Policy and legislation		
1	Investigate the viability / feasibility of arable cropping in Gwynedd, including local sales and marketing TARGET/TIMESCALE: By 2006	DEPC , CLA , FUW , FWAG Cymru , NFU Cymru
Species / habitat management and protection		
2	Promote and support grant schemes including Tir Gofal, Llŷn ESA and / or use management agreements to secure favourable management of arable field margins, taking into account the needs of associated LBAP species and habitats TARGET /TIMESCALE: To be set, Ongoing	FWAG Cymru , BASC , CCW , CLA , DEPC , FUW , GC , NFU Cymru , NT , Plantlife , RSPB Cymru
3	Seek funding for land management by developing a biodiversity grant scheme, which would include grants for appropriate management of arable field margins TARGET/TIMESCALE: By 2005	GC , Relevant partners
Advisory		
4	Provide advice on the detrimental effects of pesticides, and encourage the use of environmentally-friendly alternatives TARGET/TIMESCALE: Ongoing	DEPC , BASC , CCW , EAW , GC , NWWT , Plantlife , RSPB Cymru
Survey, research and monitoring		
5	Encourage survey and recording of arable weeds by local promotion of UK Arable Plants Survey TARGET/TIMESCALE: Ongoing	Plantlife , BASC , CCW , CLA , FUW , FWAG Cymru , GC , NFU Cymru , NWWT
Communications and publicity		
6	Raise awareness of the decline of farmland birds and other species associated with arable crops by attending local agricultural shows and events, through the media, open days, farm walks, interpretation and in producing / distributing advisory / information material for landowners TARGET/TIMESCALE: Ongoing	RSPB Cymru , BASC , CCW , GC , NWWT , Plantlife

^d Lead partner for this action is indicated by bold typeface, see section 7.2 for explanation of abbreviations

7. PARTNERS & OPPORTUNITIES

7.1 Overall lead partner for HAP

RSPB Cymru

7.2 Key partners

British Association for Shooting and Conservation (BASC)

Countryside Council for Wales (CCW)

Country Land and Business Association (CLA)

Department for Environment, Planning and Countryside (Welsh Assembly Government) (DEPC)

Environment Agency Wales (EAW)

Farming and Wildlife Advisory Group Cymru (FWAG Cymru)

Farming Union of Wales (FUW)

Gwynedd Council (GC)

National Farmers Union Cymru (NFU Cymru)

National Trust (NT)

North Wales Wildlife Trust (NWWT)

Plantlife

7.3 Opportunities

Farming unions, landowners and managers

8. ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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Line drawings: English Nature

9. ABBREVIATIONS

BAP: Biodiversity Action Plan, ESA: Environmentally Sensitive Area, HAP: Habitat Action Plan, JNCC: Joint Nature Conservation Committee, LBAP: Local Biodiversity Action Plan, SAP: Species Action Plan.

Version 1, 2004

¹ UK Biodiversity Group classification - Jackson, D.L. 2000. Guidance on the interpretation of the Biodiversity Broad Habitat Classification (terrestrial and freshwater types): Definitions and the relationship with other habitat classifications. JNCC Report No. 307.

² Jones, P.S. et al, 2003. Priority habitats of Wales: a technical guide. CCW.

³ UK Cereal Field Margins Habitat Action Plan. Biodiversity: The UK Biodiversity Steering Group Report. Volume 2: Action Plans. 1995.

⁴ Jones, P.S. et al, 2003. Priority habitats of Wales: a technical guide. CCW.