2012 is the 25th anniversary of agri-environment in the UK and things have come a long way since those first agreements.

Agri-environment helps farmers safeguard some of the UK’s most cherished species, habitats and landscapes, and remains of the utmost importance.

These schemes allow thousands of farmers to make space for nature, providing environmental goods that the market fails to support. Their continuing popularity amongst the farming community shows they make economic sense in a world of increasing uncertainty in both commodity prices and weather.

The future of the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) is currently the subject of much discussion, with attention focussed on ‘greening’ the Single Farm Payment (Pillar 1); but the funding of Rural Development Programmes (Pillar 2) will also change and there are real concerns over the delivery of policies such as agri-environment, by the next CAP. It is vital for farmers and the environment that these schemes remain adequately funded.

The current Rural Development Programme finishes in 2013 and with delays in Europe, it is likely that there will be no replacement until 2015. That means at least two years without any new or renewed Environmental Stewardship from the end of 2013. This is a real incentive for anyone considering entering Entry Level Stewardship (ELS) or Higher Level Stewardship (HLS) to investigate this now - new handbooks are available from Natural England for agreements starting in 2013.

With some new options available, both for new schemes and for those in current schemes to include as amendments, farmers in Stewardship are better placed than ever to support wildlife on their farm. If you would like free advice on options in an existing agreement or on applying for a new agreement, contact Diane White, North Wessex Farmland Bird Advisor using the details on the back of this newsletter.

2012 is the 25th anniversary of agri-environment in the UK and things have come a long way since those first agreements.

Agri-environment helps farmers safeguard some of the UK’s most cherished species, habitats and landscapes, and remains of the utmost importance.

These schemes allow thousands of farmers to make space for nature, providing environmental goods that the market fails to support. Their continuing popularity amongst the farming community shows they make economic sense in a world of increasing uncertainty in both commodity prices and weather.

The future of the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) is currently the subject of much discussion, with attention focussed on ‘greening’ the Single Farm Payment (Pillar 1); but the funding of Rural Development Programmes (Pillar 2) will also change and there are real concerns over the delivery of policies such as agri-environment, by the next CAP. It is vital for farmers and the environment that these schemes remain adequately funded.

The current Rural Development Programme finishes in 2013 and with delays in Europe, it is likely that there will be no replacement until 2015. That means at least two years without any new or renewed Environmental Stewardship from the end of 2013. This is a real incentive for anyone considering entering Entry Level Stewardship (ELS) or Higher Level Stewardship (HLS) to investigate this now - new handbooks are available from Natural England for agreements starting in 2013.

With some new options available, both for new schemes and for those in current schemes to include as amendments, farmers in Stewardship are better placed than ever to support wildlife on their farm. If you would like free advice on options in an existing agreement or on applying for a new agreement, contact Diane White, North Wessex Farmland Bird Advisor using the details on the back of this newsletter.

**BASIS points available through CFE online training**

Farmers and advisors can now pick up BASIS CPD points from the comfort of their own home or office by completing the NEW online training module on the Campaign for the Farmed Environment (CFE) website www.cfeonline.org.uk

There are four sections to the online training, one for each campaign theme: farmland birds; farm wildlife and resource protection, plus a general CFE section. Each section ends with five questions and users are expected to take 20-30 minutes in total to complete the training.

Laura Francis, CFE Coordinator for Bucks, Berks and Oxon says, ‘By completing the online training it is possible to pick up four BASIS CPD points with relative ease. The answers are hidden in the text that appears online but the questions are challenging enough to relate back to the field and day-to-day situations.’
Catchment Sensitive Farming (CSF) is a national scheme aimed at helping farmers reduce their impact on diffuse water pollution, keeping local waters clean and improving farm profitability.

Diffuse water pollution can come from a variety of sources - often in small, discrete amounts which then build to yield a significant cumulative effect on water quality and aquatic habitats. Examples include yard run-off, manure heaps, bare soil in arable fields, damaged river edges from stock trampling and so on. Although not always immediately obvious, this kind of pollution can have a real impact on the environment.

Often there are simple solutions to the problem, such as collecting clean rain water from buildings before it enters the yard. This could be done by repairing a broken gutter or installing rainwater storage tanks, or perhaps by roofing a muck storage area or silage clamp. Diverting run-off from a steep farm track or fencing a watercourse are other relatively simple ways to prevent diffuse pollution.

CSF offers FREE training and advice for farmers through workshops and one-to-one visits. Through putting such simple measures in place as described above, advisors can help farmers to maximise farm productivity, save money and reduce nutrient and pesticide leaching. Practical methods such as soil analysis and calibration of fertiliser spreaders and sprayers can all help farmers to reduce the amounts of inputs on the farm whilst improving water quality too. Grants of up to £10,000 per holding are also available to help improve the farm infrastructure with regards to CSF.

For more information contact your local CSF Officer:

**Kennet, Lambourn & Upper Cherwell:** Andrew Russell, 0300 060 1929 or Stephanie Nellis, 0300 060 3932

**Test and Itchen:** Serena Leadlay, 0300 060 0694

---

**What is Catchment Sensitive Farming and how can it help?**

Catchment Sensitive Farming (CSF) is a national scheme aimed at helping farmers reduce their impact on diffuse water pollution, keeping local waters clean and improving farm profitability.

There are numerous new and ongoing projects partnered and financially supported by the North Wessex Downs AONB including the North Wessex Farmland Bird Project; Stepping Stones - a new project to connect high quality habitats in the areas surrounding Salisbury Plain; and the Our Land project, promoting tourism within the protected landscapes of AONBs and National Parks in the South of England.

To find out more about what the AONB can do for you, including planning guidance, a regular e-bulletin, grants and more, visit the website or contact the AONB team on the number below.

[www.northwessexdowns.org.uk](http://www.northwessexdowns.org.uk) or tel. 01488 685440
The North Wessex Downs AONB partnership is seeking to encourage a viable forestry sector that helps to deliver a wide range of public benefits. To this end, the AONB engaged Hampshire & Isle of Wight Wildlife Trust to deliver a series of workshops and a conference, promoting sustainable woodland management.

Some 23,000 hectares, or just over 13% of the North Wessex Downs AONB, is wooded. Over a third of this woodland is identified as ancient in origin and over 45% has either a national or local designation for its particular wildlife value. Significantly, research has identified that only 44% of all this woodland is under active management. Woodlands require practical management to create and maintain habitat diversity, to protect woodland heritage and to encourage responsible use by the public.

The workshops held were very well attended, covering topics such as managing woodlands for biodiversity, the economics of woodland management and the identification and preservation of historic and cultural features in woodland. This series of workshops will culminate with a Woodland Conference in Hungerford on February 6th - further details to be announced on the North Wessex AONB website.

The MDNIA Partnership came together in response to a Defra challenge to come up with new ways to deliver wildlife conservation. One of only 12 successful bids, this project is different in that it has been designed by farmers.

While the origins of the project are unique, its ambitions for the project area are widely shared. These include a necklace of dew ponds and small pond complexes on a ribbon of wildflower-rich habitat, linking them together and to grassland and woodland wildlife sites.

For further information on the previous workshops and upcoming conference see the AONB website or contact Amanda Ingham of the Hampshire & Isle of Wight Wildlife Trust: 01256 381186, or: amandai@hwt.org.uk
Making your options work for wildlife: three worthwhile options providing the ‘Big 3’ for farmland birds

Diane White, North Wessex Farmland Bird Advisor

After a difficult year for growing anything, including seed mixes in Environmental Stewardship (ES), to help plan for the better weather we hope to get next year, here are some top tips on three key options for farm wildlife. Each provides at least one of the ‘Big 3’ for farmland birds - safe ground nesting habitat, insects for summer chick food and seed to feed the birds over winter. For more information refer to your ELS/HLS handbook or contact your Natural England or Farmland Bird Advisor.

Skylark plots (EF/HF8)

Including skylark plots in fields of winter wheat gives skylark the chance to continue nesting in the crop later in summer; otherwise it is too thick for the birds to access. Skylark don’t actually nest on the bare plots but use these as a landing strip to access their nest in the crop itself. At 2 plots/ha in winter wheat, the number of skylark chicks per ha in a year can increase by 50%.

The HLS agreement at the Benham Estate in Berkshire includes 30 skylark plots. Iain Lindsay, Farm Manager says, ‘The only challenge with this option is remembering to put them in when you are concentrating on establishing the autumn crops! Skylark plots are such a simple option - just slow down and lift the drill to create the plots, then you leave them.’

The plots must be 16m², a minimum of 3m wide, a minimum of 3m wide and away from tramlines. Once created by lifting the drill, or by spraying out the plots by the end of December, they can be ignored and receive the same treatment as the rest of the field.

As well as for nesting, birds such as skylark and yellow wagtail will use them to forage for insects.

Also known as arable plant margins or plots, these provide an opportunity for rare arable plants, whose seed may have lain dormant for decades, to flower and set seed. These plants require the annual cultivation involved in this option, with no subsequent disturbance in the flowering year. The low-growing broadleaved plants that come up may include rarities such as pheasant’s eye (right) and provide hosts for native insects as well as a fantastic source of insects and seeds for birds like turtle dove and yellow wagtail to forage on and feed to chicks in spring and summer.

The margins are cultivated in autumn or spring and can be moved around, depending on which option you chose - this can avoid a build up of unwanted weeds. Charles Bowerman farms in Wiltshire and his HLS agreement includes this option. Mr Bowerman cultivates this margin in spring in a field with chalky soil, perfect for these mostly annual, rare plants, avoiding competition from coarse grasses. Although Mr Bowerman admits this option is not the most exciting, he has an enviable list of rare plants to show for it, including Venus’s looking-glass and dense-flowered fumitory, both uncommon in the countryside now.

Uncropped, cultivated margins for rare plants (EF/HF11, HF20)

© D White
This has been a tough year for establishing wild bird seed mixes and many of those that look good tend to be two year mixes containing kale that were planted in 2011, like the one above at Trinley Estate in Hampshire, seen here in its first year. Andrew Hughes, who manages the estate has some high credentials including recently being awarded the 2012 Wessex Grey Partridge Trophy by the Game and Wildlife Conservation Trust. Trinley Estate has been in HLS since 2006 and includes 3.69 ha of wild bird seed mixes amongst over 80 ha in total of ELS and HLS options.

Andrew does what many with a shoot on their land find works well - he swaps some of the wild bird covers with plots of maize every two years, as he explains: ‘Having areas of wild bird seed as well as maize means we are providing the wild birds with an important seed source over winter and getting some income from that. By swapping the areas over I can clean up the wild bird seed plots every few years as well as get a better crop of maize. The plots are doing well this year and even though it’s been a difficult one for the grey partridge, we still have approximately 63 birds on the estate. After so many disappointing breeding seasons in recent years, it is essential that we ensure over-wintering bird numbers are maintained to capitalise on favourable seasons in the future.’

Key elements to a mix that looks like the one above include establishing a stale seedbed and feeding the plots as necessary. Andrew uses min till to form the seedbed and drills the cereal and broadleaf seeds of the mix together in spring, using a cereal drill - exact timing depends on the mix used. He fertilises the plots with nitrogen to ensure the crop has necessary nutrients like any other and applies digested sewage cake every three years to lift the organic content of the soil.

In ELS the mixes are less flexible, but if you are in HLS or have a voluntary plot, you should try to target your wild bird seed plots to the birds recorded on or near to your farm - ask your farmland bird advisor who can help if you don’t know the species present. Grey partridge and corn bunting like to feed in the open, away from tree cover, while tree sparrow prefer to be near cover. A two year mix containing kale and cereals benefits grey partridge; tree sparrow also like cereals plus millet, while corn bunting favour cereals in particular. Most plots can be rotated and this can avoid the build-up of weeds or problems such as clubroot.

Rescue mixes sown late on a failed plot can work, but talk to your seed merchant, NE or farmland bird advisor sooner rather than later for their advice.
You may be lucky enough to remember the time when hearing the gentle purr of turtle doves emanating from scrub was the sound of summer. Unfortunately for most of us, that time has passed and these iconic birds of summer, immortalised (somewhat ironically for a summer migrant) in the song ‘The Twelve Days of Christmas,’ have become one of the UK’s most endangered breeding birds, declining by 91% since 1970.

**Operation Turtle Dove - saving a bird on the brink**

Turtle dove are a migratory species, only in the UK for the summer months. On their arrival in spring, after a long journey from their African wintering grounds, turtle dove have roughly four months to get into breeding condition, mate, nest and rear their chicks, before leaving our shores between July and September. These days, if they make it here at all after the perilous flight through illegal hunting grounds in the Mediterranean, they can struggle to find seed in the English countryside when they arrive around April. The result is a longer time taken to get into breeding condition, giving time for only one brood before they leave, if it’s a good year.

**Operation Turtle Dove** is a new partnership project that began earlier this year, involving RSPB, Conservation Grade, Natural England and Pensthorpe Conservation, with an aim to reverse the current decline of the turtle dove. The project comprises three parts: researching breeding grounds in England; improving the amount of seed food available in core breeding areas; and researching the factors affecting turtle dove on their migration and at their wintering grounds where it is thought habitat loss is affecting them.

ES or voluntary CFE options for turtle dove

Turtle dove need seed food available from their arrival in April/May right through to their departure in late summer. They prefer seeds from plants associated with arable fields, such as chickweed and fumitory, in an open sward so they can access the ground. Options that can provide these are listed below:

- **Uncropped, cultivated margins** (see page 4) - EF11, HF11
- **Fallow areas for birds or rare plants** - EF13, HF13, HF20
- **Nectar flower mix** - EF4, HF4. A specific seed mix has been developed that can be used voluntarily under CFE or in an HLS agreement targeting turtle dove - it includes fumitory, red clover and common vetch, so is also great for bumblebees

Maintaining areas of **thick native scrub** or **tall, thick native hedges**, especially with thorny shrubs and climbers, will also provide turtle dove with nesting habitat.

For more information or advice, or to report records of turtle dove or contact Fay Pattinson on 01273 763616 or at fay.pattinson@rspb.org.uk

© Kings Crops

Lots of fumitory - perfect for turtle dove

**Fallow areas for birds or rare plants** - EF13, HF13, HF20

**Nectar flower mix** - EF4, HF4. A specific seed mix has been developed that can be used voluntarily under CFE or in an HLS agreement targeting turtle dove - it includes fumitory, red clover and common vetch, so is also great for bumblebees

Maintaining areas of **thick native scrub** or **tall, thick native hedges**, especially with thorny shrubs and climbers, will also provide turtle dove with nesting habitat.

For more information or advice, or to report records of turtle dove or contact Fay Pattinson on 01273 763616 or at fay.pattinson@rspb.org.uk
Rare bumblebees need help

The Bumblebee Conservation Trust (BBCT) launched a new project in May this year called ‘Bees for Everyone’ primarily funded by the Heritage Lottery Fund. The project aim is to work with land owners to target restoration and creation of flower-rich habitats in locations vital for the survival of some of the UK’s rarest bumblebees.

One such bee is the shrill carder bee, which has become restricted to just six locations in England and Wales, including Salisbury Plain. Providing foraging and nesting habitat in the North Wessex Downs for the shrill carder bee could help to safeguard and expand this remaining population, as well as benefiting four of the other UK priority bumblebees which are also found in the area.

Bumblebees are important wild pollinators of many agricultural crops and wildflowers and because many species have long tongues, they can pollinate plants that other insects can’t. They need a diversity of flowers and consistent supply of pollen and nectar throughout the life of the colony - from March right through to September. The widespread loss of wildflower grasslands over the past 60 years has unfortunately meant that bumblebees can now struggle to find these.

Luckily there are many easy ways that you can help bumblebees on your land however, either voluntarily or with funding through Environmental Stewardship (ELS and HLS). BBCT can provide a free site visit and survey of the bumblebees on your land, advice on habitat management and we may also be able to supply bumblebee-friendly flower seed.

To find out more, please contact Jo Chesworth: jo.chesworth@bumblebeeconservation.org or visit the website: www.bumblebeeconservation.org

Look out for great bustards on a fallow plot near you

Another small group of juvenile bustards was released in September 2012 by the great bustard reintroduction project, adding to the existing population which can be seen on and around Salisbury Plain.

Great bustards have bred in Wiltshire for the last four years, although no females were successful this year. Birds are now being released at two sites, and the project is still on the look out for potential new release sites in the county.

Great bustards favour open, undisturbed farmland, especially where both arable and grassland habitats are available. By far the best option for them in Environmental Stewardship is the fallow plot for ground nesting birds. It is always worth keeping an eye out for bustards, especially on these plots if you have one. We would be delighted to hear from anyone who does see one, as they can be very wide-ranging – keeping track of them is always a challenge.

The project offers free one-to-one advice on managing land for great bustards and other farmland birds. Contact Andrew Taylor for details: 07703 607586, or e-mail andrew.taylor@rspb.org.uk
Stone curlews in Wessex

Stone-curlews - with their wide-eyed look of terror, slow and deliberate creeping movements, together with near-perfect camouflage and a haunting call, are something of a mystery to many people, but may be more familiar to those of you working the land in Wessex.

The Wessex Stone-curlew Project has been in operation since the mid-1980s, when the stone-curlew population across the UK was at an all-time low with only around 30 pairs in Wessex. Since then, partnership work between farmers, land managers and conservationists has seen the population increase to around 150 pairs and spread into the farmland across Wessex. This has been achieved by creating fallow plots providing suitable nest sites for the birds. These are available under Environmental Stewardship or as voluntary options and also provide habitat for lapwing, turtle dove and yellow wagtail. Stone-curlews like a rough fallow with very little vegetation, so they may be attracted to spring crops early in the breeding season, but creating the plots means the birds are safe from agricultural operations. A light cultivation in spring creates suitable conditions and some plots require additional management during the season if vegetation becomes too thick. The RSPB has a team working across Wessex to provide free advice regarding plot management.

For advice on management of fallow plots or to find out if you may be eligible to include one in your agreement, contact Nick Tomalin on: 01722 427232 or: nick.tomalin@rspb.org.uk

Upcoming events in the North Wessex Downs area:

2013 Feeding Farmland Birds through the Hungry gap event - 10am-1pm, January 15th, Alton Barnes, Wiltshire (includes lunch). Find out more about establishing & managing Environmental Stewardship or voluntary options to provide winter seed food for farmland birds. The new options available to existing and new agreement holders will be discussed and we will also look at other valuable options for farm wildlife present on the farm. Free but booking essential - contact Diane White (below) for details or to book your space.

North Wessex Downs AONB Woodland Forum - 6th February, Hungerford, Berkshire. Timings and programme for the day to be confirmed. For further details in the New Year, please contact Amanda Ingham at Hampshire & Isle of Wight Wildlife Trust on amandai@hwt.org.uk or 01256 381186, or see the AONB website: www.northwessexdowns.org.uk

Useful websites for wildlife-friendly farming:

RSPB - www.rspb.org.uk/ourwork/farming/advice
Natural England - www.naturalengland.org.uk
Game and Wildlife Conservation Trust - www.gwct.org.uk
Farmwildlife (information and discussion forum for farmers helping farm wildlife) - www.farmwildlife.info
UK Agriculture (set up by a Sussex farmer, a fantastic source of information on UK farming today including wildlife conservation, news, farms to visit, events for farmers etc) - www.ukagriculture.com

For free advice on Environmental Stewardship and how to help farmland birds on your land, contact: Diane White, North Wessex Farmland Bird Advisor

Email: diane.white@rspb.org.uk  Tel. 07540 013152 or 01488 680452