



# Arable Field Margins

## Local Biodiversity Action Plan

### Associated Species Action Plans:

- Farmland Birds
- Brown Hare



### Current status

An arable field margin can be described as a strip of land lying between a cereal crop and the field boundary, and extending for a limited distance into the crop. Arable field margins are usually sited on the outer 2-12m margin of the arable field, although when planted as blocks they occasionally extend further into the field centre. These areas can be deliberately managed to create conditions which benefit key farmland species, particularly important as this century has seen the extensive decline of a number of farmland species. In general terms, the physical limits of the arable field margin habitat are defined by the extent of any management undertaken specifically to benefit wildlife.

The following arable field margins are included in this habitat:-

- \* Cultivated, low-input margins. These are areas within arable fields that are cultivated periodically, usually annually or biennially, but are not sprayed with spring/summer insecticides and not normally sprayed with herbicides
- \* Margins sown to provide seed for wild birds. These are margins or blocks sown with plants that are allowed to set seed and which remain in place over the winter.
- \* Margins sown with wild flowers or agricultural legumes and managed to allow flowering to provide pollen and nectar resources for invertebrates.
- \* Margins providing permanent, grass strips with mixtures of tussocky and fine-leaved grasses.



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The Cheshire region is primarily considered as an area of pastoral agriculture but cereal production is on the increase. The extent of existing arable field margins is at present unknown within the Cheshire region. Under the Food and Environment Protection Act 1985 it is illegal to spray into hedge bases, unless there is a specific label recommendation.

A costed Action Plan for Arable Field Margins is included in the UK Steering Group Report (1995).

## Threats

- \* Intensification and mechanisation of cereal production
- \* Increased trend towards autumn sown cereal crops causing the reduction of stubble available over the winter period for birds and invertebrates
- \* Increased use of non-selective pesticides and broadleaved herbicides to ensure a weed and disease free monoculture
- \* Increased use and incorrect timing of the application of fertilisers
- \* Reduction in rotation of cereal crops with other land covers (inc. grass leys and fallows)

## How are we helping to conserve arable field margins in the Cheshire region?

- \* Environmental Stewardship options provide the opportunity for farmers and land managers to remove field margins from production and locate specific options on these areas to benefit a range of species such as farmland birds, invertebrates and wildflowers. Since 2005 over 200Ha of field margins have been placed under environmental stewardship options in Cheshire.
- \* Initiatives run by the Game Conservancy Trust are leading to the retention of headlands.
- \* The Soil Association recommend subdivision of fields into 25 acre plots by means of 'wildlife corridors' which can include grass strips and that areas adjoining hedges or other field boundaries should be left unsprayed by agrochemicals.

## Objectives, targets and actions

The objectives, targets and actions to help conserve arable field margins in the Cheshire region can be found on the [Biodiversity Action Reporting System \(BARS\)](#) along with full details of our progress so far.



## How to find out more about arable field margins

[UK BAP Definition](#)

## Contact details

Natural England

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## References and Glossary

British Agrochemical Association (1997): Arable Wildlife: Protecting Non-target Species.

Game Conservancy Trust: Guidelines for the management of field margins - Recommendations for the management of field margins, incorporating the field boundary, boundary strip and outer few metres of the cereal crop. Fact Sheet 2.

FWAG: Farming and Field Margins Booklet.

HMSO (1995): Biodiversity: The UK Steering Group Report, Volume 1: Meeting the Rio Challenge, London.

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Draft North West Regional Biodiversity Audit (unpub.): Cereal field margins habitat statement.

EFRC and University of Wales, Aberystwyth.

Organic Farm Management Handbook.

