

PRIORITY HABITAT FACTSHEET



*Field margin. (Diane Ling), Yellowhammer (Neil Rolph),
Brown-banded Carder Bee (Hawk Honey/Suffolk Naturalist)*

Arable Field Margins

Herbaceous strips between an arable crop and the field boundary, managed specifically to provide benefits for wildlife.

The field may be cropped, left fallow, managed as a temporary grassland habitat or as a more permanent tussocky grassland strip.

Provide links between important habitats; buffers sensitive habitats and helps to reduce diffuse pollution.

IMPORTANCE FOR WILDLIFE

Up to 75% of the biodiversity within an arable field is found in the margins, regardless of the farming practice. The margins link farmland habitats and buffer them against farm operations. They provide nesting sites for ground-nesting birds and hunting areas for barn owls and other birds of prey. The margins create over-wintering habitat for insects and spiders. Wild flower strips within margins attract important pollinators such as bees and hoverflies. They are important refuges for wildlife and conservation sites for rare arable plants.



IMPORTANT ASSOCIATED SPECIES

Birds

House Sparrow *Passer domesticus*
Stone Curlew *Burhinus oedicephalus*
Woodlark *Lullula arborea*
Corn Bunting *Miliaria calandra*
Eurasian Tree Sparrow *Passer montanus*
Grey Partridge *Perdix perdix*
Yellow Wagtail *Motacilla flava*
Turtle Dove *Streptopelia turtur*
Linnet *Carduelis cannabina*
Skylark *Alauda arvensis*
Yellowhammer *Emberiza citrinella*
Bullfinch *Pyrrhula pyrrhula*
Reed Bunting *Emberiza schoeniclus*
Barn owl *Tyto alba**

Mammals

Harvest Mouse *Micromys minutus*
Hedgehog *Erinaceus europaeus*
Brown hare *Lepus europaeus*
Pipistrelle Bat *Pipistrellus pipistrellus**
Soprano Pipistrelle Bat *Pipistrellus pygmaeus*

Reptiles and Amphibians

Great Crested Newt *Triturus cristatus*
Common Toad *Bufo bufo*

Bees and Wasps

Brown-Banded Carder Bee *Bombus humilis*
Large Garden Bumblebee *Bombus ruderatus*
Red-shanked Carder-bee *Bombus ruderarius*

Beetles

Necklace Ground Beetle *Carabus monilis*
Brush-thighed Seed-eater *Harpalus froelichii*
Stag Beetle *Lucanus cervus*

Moths

Grey Carpet *Lithostegia griseata* (Brecks)
Pale Shining Brown *Polia bombycina*
Four-Spotted Moth *Tyta luctuosa*

Mosses and Liverworts

Texas Balloonwort *Sphaerocarpos texanus*

Plants

Basil Thyme *Clinopodium acinos*
Red Hemp-nettle *Galeopsis angustifolia*
Grape-hyacinth *Muscari neglectum*
Fingered Speedwell *Veronica triphyllos*
Annual Knawel *Scleranthus annuus*
Corn Buttercup *Ranunculus arvensis*
Cornflower *Centaurea cyanus*
Fine-leaved Sandwort *Minuartia hybrida*
Shepherd's Needle *Scandix pecten-veneris* (boulder clay areas)
Small-flowered Catchfly *Silene gallica*
Spreading Hedge-parsley *Torilis arvensis*
Red-tipped Cudweed *Filago lutescens*
Broad-leaved Cudweed *Filago pyramidata*

*Suffolk Priority species



Images: Top – Brown Hare (Neil Rolph). Bottom, left to right – Linnet (Neil Rolph), Necklace Ground Beetle (Matt Berry/Greenwings Wildlife Holidays), Harvest Mouse (Neil Rolph), Stag Beetle (Paul Kitchener).

FACTORS AFFECTING HABITAT IN SUFFOLK

- Intensive arable production involves high use of herbicides and insecticides.
- Changes in farming practices including a shift to winter cropping and so the loss of winter stubble which previously provided food over-winter for birds such as corn buntings and yellowhammers.
- Changes in traditional management such as the reduction of grass in the rotation with arable crops.
- Agri-environmental schemes and Cross Compliance regulations.
- Campaign for the Farmed Environment aims to help farmers support the natural environment, whilst farming productively.



HABITAT MANAGEMENT ADVICE

- Maintain a mosaic of different habitats by retaining features such as boundary hedges, woodland, grass banks and bare ground.
- Create beetle banks from sown strips of native grasses within the cropped area. Mow regularly every 2 years or so and do not spray. These provide shelter for beneficial beetles and spiders that prey on arable crop pests.

Types of margin / in-field options

A) UNCROPPED CULTIVATED MARGINS

Lightly cultivated in spring or autumn to provide habitat for rare arable plants and foraging sites for seed-eating birds. No fertilisers or manures, herbicides only applied to spot treat or weed wipe to control pernicious weeds.

B) CONSERVATION HEADLANDS

Provides a food supply and habitat for birds, arable plants and insects within the growing crop. No fertiliser or manure before the crop is drilled. No insecticides applied between 15th March and the following harvest; herbicide application is restricted; may be left unharvested.

C) PERMANENT GRASS MARGINS

Provides varied habitat on arable or grassland; coarse tussocky grass is an important habitat for over-wintering insects and small mammals; finer grass and flowering plants provide nectar, seed and more open habitat. Field corner management provides undisturbed grassy areas, scrub and grass margins.

D) IN-FIELD ARABLE OPTIONS

Wild bird seed mixture plots, nectar flower mixture plots, beetle banks, skylark plots, overwintered stubble, low input cereal and/or reduced herbicide cereal.

For detailed advice contact:
Suffolk FWAG tel: 01728 748030 or
RSPB local adviser tel: 01603 697586

Image: Small-flowered Catchfly (Martin Sanford).



VISION FOR SUFFOLK

1. Improve knowledge of the extent and quality of arable field margins.
2. Maintain the existing extent of arable field margins to ensure no net loss.
3. Re-create arable field margins as opportunities arise.
4. Encourage the restoration and improvement of degraded arable field margins.



WHERE TO FIND FURTHER INFORMATION

Buglife – advice on managing BAP habitats

- <https://www.buglife.org.uk/resources/habitat-management/cereal-field-margins>

Buglife – Notable invertebrates associated with cereal field margins (pdf)

- <https://cdn.buglife.org.uk/2019/07/0420Notable20invertebrates20associated20with20cereal20field20margins-1.pdf>

Campaign for the Farmed Environment • <https://www.cfeonline.org.uk/home>

JNCC Habitat Description (pdf)

- <https://data.jncc.gov.uk/data/529a621b-e1a6-4283-ba82-408744d079b4/UKBAP-BAPHabitats-02-ArableFieldMargins.pdf>

MAGIC website – interactive mapping information including designations • <https://magic.defra.gov.uk>

Making Space for Nature, a Review of England's Wildlife Sites and Ecological Network 16 Sep 2010.

- Chaired by Professor Sir John Lawton CBE FRS. Defra website (pdf) • <https://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/ukgwa/20130402151656/http://archive.defra.gov.uk/environment/biodiversity/documents/201009space-for-nature.pdf>

Natural Environment White Paper June 2011 – *The Natural Choice: securing the value of nature* (pdf)

- https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/228842/8082.pdf

RSPB – Advice for Farmers, Arable Field Margins • <https://www.rspb.org.uk/our-work/conservation/conservation-and-sustainability/farming/advice/managing-habitats/arable-field-margins>

Suffolk FWAG • <https://suffolkfwag.co.uk>

Suffolk Wildlife Trust Habitats Explorer • <https://www.suffolkwildlifetrust.org/habitats/farmland>

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