

Local Wildlife Sites – South East Wales Project

The following information outlines the best practice guidelines for managing the habitat type listed below in a manner that is sympathetic to wildlife. It is part of a series relating to various habitat types and management issues that have been produced by your local Wildlife Trusts.

No.8 Hedgerows

What are Hedgerows?

Hedgerows are an important feature of the countryside, bordering many fields. They provide a stock-proofing and sheltering function for the landowners. They are also a great wildlife habitat and provide vital connectivity for wildlife within the landscape. The most ecologically valuable are generally old hedgerows with a good variety of woody species and associated ground flora.



Bluebells



Hedge

What wildlife do they support?

Characteristic hedgerow tree and shrub species include Field Maple, Hawthorn, Blackthorn, Dog-Rose and Holly. Hedgerows can also be a haven for numerous wildflowers such as Bluebells and Primroses. A healthy hedgerow will be teeming with numerous insects such as Orange-tip butterflies, bumblebees and ladybirds. Additionally hedgerows provide nesting, feeding and hibernation places for birds such as Yellowhammers and Linnets, as well as bats and other small mammals such as Dormice.



Holly



Orange-tip butterfly

Why manage, preserve and enhance them?

As outlined above, hedgerows are a great resource for wildlife so need to be preserved. Sadly in just the short period between 1984 -1990, 25% of hedgerows were lost in Wales. Thankfully this decline has now been halted but the resource is still depleted. Hedgerows do however need management to retain their intrinsic value for stock-proofing and wildlife, as well as preventing them adversely impacting on the value of adjacent valuable habitats, such as species rich grassland. It is therefore of great importance that they are retained and managed appropriately and we would very much like to assist you in achieving this goal by providing management recommendations.



Yellowhammer



Dormouse



Linnet

Threats

This can be subdivided into threats to the hedgerows themselves and threats to other habitats that can result from lack of hedgerow management:

- Threat to hedgerows
 - ❖ Development i.e. building of roads, housing etc.
 - ❖ Agricultural intensification, removal of hedgerows to increase field size and productivity.
 - ❖ Lack of management – Hedgerows can become leggy and gappy and lose value.
 - ❖ Cutting too severely or at inappropriate times of year – This does not allow the flora and fauna opportunity to flourish.
- Impact of hedgerows on adjacent habitats
 - ❖ If hedgerows are allowed to grow too tall, particularly where they are on the southern edge of species rich grassland, they can shade the grassland reducing its value.
 - ❖ If hedgerows are not maintained and stock-proof it can hinder the ability to graze grassland appropriately.
 - ❖ If neglected, hedgerows can spread outwards into adjacent grassland to form scrub on valuable grassland. This is particularly the case where Brambles or suckering species such as Blackthorn are present in the hedgerow.

Management Recommendations

The following is recommended to ensure the Hedgerows are managed sympathetically for wildlife and are thus preserved and/or enhanced:

Preservation/Enhancement of Hedgerows

- Cutting should ideally be undertaken in January/February – This is to avoid breeding bird season and also to maintain a source of nuts and berries over the winter.
- Cut on rotation – This should be undertaken every 2-3 years so that part of the hedge always remains un-managed some of the time to provide optimum shelter/food source. Alternating between cutting each side or leaving the top uncut can also be beneficial for wildlife.
- Cut coarse grasses at base – to allow wildflowers to flourish.
- Plant up any gaps – This should be done with native species (ideally of local provenance) such as Hawthorn, Blackthorn and Hazel amongst others. Check local hedgerows to see what grows naturally.
- Add occasional tall trees – These are a feature of old hedgerows and can add structural diversity. Oak or Ash can be added at intervals.
- Hedgelaying – this is another way to manage a hedge which should be carried out every 15-20 years and is useful for preventing sheep pushing through the base. It encourages new growth helping to thicken and strengthen the hedge.

Creation of new Hedgerows

- Planting new hedgerows is a great way of enhancing the biodiversity of your land. This can be undertaken to supplement existing fence-lines, if a parcel of land needed to be divided off, or to provide shelter. Hedgerows can also be created for purely wildlife reasons i.e. providing connectivity between existing hedgerows or woodland areas.
- However, ideally avoid planting trees in areas where there is already wildlife value, or where a waterbody may become shaded.
- Plant from November – March, clearing any grass and vegetation and planting in groups of about 5 of the same species.
- A generalised, suggested mix of native trees is: 50% Hawthorn, 25% Blackthorn, 15% Field Maple, 2% Holly, 2% Wild Privet, 2% Guelder Rose, 2% Dog-rose, 2% Buckthorn – but as above look at what naturally grows in the local landscape.
- If buying trees try to ensure local provenance and buy 'whips' or small trees which will grow more quickly and survive better than large trees.
- Use tree guards to prevent rabbit, deer and stock grazing them.
- Water regularly through the first summer and control weeds. A layer of mulch can help suppress weeds.

Should you require any further advice regarding the management of your Local Wildlife Site please do not hesitate to contact your local Wildlife Trust:

Gwent Wildlife Trust

Tel: 01600 740600

e-mail: info@gwentwildlife.org

Wildlife Trust of South & West Wales

Tel: 01656 724100

e-mail: info@welshwildlife.org

Other toolkits available are:

No.1 Neutral Grassland (Hay Meadows)

No.2 Neutral Grassland (Pasture)

No.3 Acid Grassland

No.4 Calcareous Grassland

No.5 Marshy Grassland

No.6 Marsh Grassland (with Marsh Fritillary)

No.7 Heath

No.9 Saltmarsh & Coastal Grazing Marsh

No.10 Ponds & Lakes

No.11 Scrub control

No.12 Bracken control

No.13 Invasive weed control (natives – thistle, dock etc.)

No.14 Invasive weed control (aliens – Japanese Knotweed, Himalayan Balsam etc.)

Further useful documents include:

❖ General information on Hedgerows: www.wildlifetrusts.org/wildlife/habitats/hedgerows

❖ Hedgerows a Guide to wildlife and management: www.ptes.org/files/310_hedgerow_guide_web_version.pdf

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