

LEAF E-Brief – May 2009

MANAGEMENT IDEAS FOR SPRING

The Farm Wildlife website at www.farmwildlife.info holds case studies of wildlife conservation on farmland and hosts a discussion forum for farmers and advisers to discuss wildlife conservation issues. This newsletter covers some of the 21 topics discussed over the period January to March 2009. The summaries below represent the views of individual authors and not necessarily those of any individual organisation. If any of these raise comments or questions then please post them on the discussion forum.

The website had an average of 343 visitors per day between January and March.

Drain blocking for wetland creation

An enquiry was posted about how to block drains in order to rewet fields for a wetland creation project. The advice was to block the drain in the middle of the field, where surface water was most desired, and to break the tiles at regular intervals across the field to spread the benefits across the field. Creation of shallow scrapes in areas where surface water is collecting will maximise the benefits.

Creating rides in wild bird seed mixtures to improve access for birds

An adviser asked if anyone had tried cutting rides through dense wild bird seed mixtures to improve bird usage. An important point made was that to do so in mixtures funded by agri-environment schemes will need a derogation. When tried in eastern England, cut rides did improve use by linnets, yellowhammers and tree sparrows, but for a short period only. An alternative would be to switch to a mix of annual and biennial mixtures, with annual mixtures providing grain for buntings and a more open crop every year. Perennial grasses can also prevent seed-eating birds foraging on the ground by forming a sward under the crop. If this happens, it is important to use glyphosate to clean the ground prior to re-establishment.

Clarification of ELS handbook wording for wild bird seed mix in grassland

An independent adviser asked how this option can be applied on a grassland farm, when the option wording states: "there should be no more than 3 ha in total per 100 ha of arable land". Natural England replied, stating that We need to refer to the definition of 'arable land' used for ELS, and given on page 55 of the 2nd edition Handbook: "Arable land is defined as land which has been in arable production, **including temporary grassland** and long-term set-aside, during the 5 years prior to the start of your agreement". So if the "sown grass" described in this query is temporary grassland, it falls within this definition and contributes to the 100ha of arable land criteria.

Coppice management of woodland – what to do with alder

A farmer is coppicing some overstood woodland, leaving some standards and retaining the ivy, but was unsure what to do about a few alders and spindly hazels. He was applauded for taking on coppice management – woodland bird declines are probably linked to the loss of management such as this. Alder coppices well, and used to be a valuable product. However, it also has great wildlife value as a mature tree; it is good at developing rot whilst remaining healthy so is good habitat for e.g. lesser spotted woodpecker etc., it is also a valuable seed tree for redpolls (declining rapidly) and siskins amongst others. The advice was to retain some as mature trees and coppice the rest. The hazel should respond positively to coppicing provided that deer browsing and shade do not prevent regrowth. It was suggested that leaving brash over the cut stumps would stop deer browsing.

Use of fodder radish in wild bird covers

In response to a query about the benefits of including fodder radish into a mix, advisers suggested using it at a rate of 1.5 – 2 kg/acre with crops such as millet and quinoa. It has the benefit of coping with late sowing, so enabling stale seedbed management to take place, if the preceding crop was weedy and there is no option of moving it. The seeds are particularly taken up by linnets.

Farmers should not leave dead stock out for kites

An EU Directive that came into effect in May 2003, states that fallen stock must be taken to/collected by an approved knacker, hunt kennel, incinerator or renderer either by private arrangement, or under the National Fallen Stock Scheme (a carcass collection scheme part set up by the government to help meet this legislation). This regulation has made the removal of dead animals much stricter.

All feeding activities need to meet with Animal By-Product Regulations, and anyone considering feeding should consult with their local Environmental Health Officer. See www.defra.gov.uk/animalh/by-prods/fallen/disposalqa.htm for more details.