



Upper Clun Community Wildlife Group



MANAGING WETLANDS FOR



Gors Bank
©Michelle Frater

WILDLIFE

Most of the wetlands, the rush pastures, wet meadows and mires, in the hills above the Clun Valley have been drained over many years. The few remaining sites, such as Gors Bank, are important havens for wildlife, and support birds and plants that are now very scarce elsewhere in the area. Many of them are used as rough grazing, but a few are hay meadows rich in wild flowers and butterflies. Gorse bushes and hedgerows on and around the wet grasslands provide valuable additional habitat for scrub & hedgerow birds.



Reed Bunting is
dependent on the wetlands

© Mike Richards (rspb-images.com)

Skylark, Meadow Pipit, Stonechat, Linnet and Reed Bunting are the typical birds of these wetlands, while Lapwing, Curlew, Snipe, Barn Owl and Cuckoo also feed at some of them, and Yellowhammer nest in the surrounding hedgerows.

Most of these birds are target species for the *Environmental Stewardship Higher Level Scheme* (HLS) in the area, and in the *Shropshire Biodiversity Action Plan*. They are also national *Farmland Bird Indicator Species*, and listed as *Birds of Conservation Concern*.

The wetlands are also important for plants, and Shropshire Wildlife Trust has adopted many of them as County Wildlife Sites. Plants dependent on these habitats include Marsh Violet, Yellow Mountain Pansy, Bog Asphodel, Cottongrass and Bog Pimpernel, and they are threatened by its loss.

Ways to improve Wetlands

At present, little management work is carried out to ensure these sites retain their value for wildlife, but farms moving into HLS in the next few years will have the opportunity to be paid for carrying out such work. ESA agreements can also be extended.

- sites dominated by Soft Rush should be cut in rotation on a three year cycle, so that the vegetation is of variable height and density; this could be maintained by carefully-managed cattle grazing



Marsh Violet

© Fiona Gomersall

Curlew and other target birds

- opening up the rushy swards would benefit plants such as the scarce Marsh Violet, the food plant of the locally-threatened Small Pearl-bordered Fritillary butterfly, a target species in the *UK Biodiversity Action Plan*.
- the few remaining patches of gorse need rotational management to create a variety of ages and densities from seedling through to mature bushes, ensuring thick cover for birds such as Linnet to nest in, and a good food supply of invertebrates and seeds



Working with Farmers

We are already working with farmers willing to improve habitat for Lapwing and Curlew. Two farmers have been helped with Environmental Stewardship HLS applications, and four more have been helped with extending their existing Environmentally Sensitive Area (ESA) agreement. This has increased the farm incomes.

However, the conservation and enhancement of all the scarce rush pastures, mires and species-rich grassland is also vitally important. We particularly want to encourage the rotational management of Soft Rush and Gorse on farms with such habitat, especially on the wetland sites.

We will help and support any farmer who wishes to enhance an existing ESA Agreement with Natural England. More importantly, we will help any farmer to apply for HLS when an existing ESA agreement comes to an end, provided that the application to Natural England includes maintaining and enhancing Wildlife Sites and / or habitats for the priority bird and plant species.

Financial Help

Farmers can apply to Natural England for money for work to help these Target Birds and Plants.

- Those in the ESA can still get additional capital and annual revenue grants to upgrade the "Tier Category" for fields that are managed sympathetically, and a "Wet Area Supplement" for creating and maintaining wet grassland areas and damp patches.
- The Environmental Stewardship Higher Level Scheme also offers revenue and capital incentives to reward farmers for managing fields to benefit these Target Birds.

Farmers can get more information and advice from James Griffiths at Natural England, telephone 0300 060 0608.

The Community Wildlife Group will help farmers with Target Birds and Plants to make an application

More Information

HLS details can be found on the Natural England website [www](http://www.naturalengland.org.uk).

Further information can be provided on behalf of the Upper Clun Community Wildlife Group by

Leo Smith 01588 638577

Further advice and information on this and other ways of managing your farm for wildlife can be obtained from Shropshire Farming & Wildlife Advisory Group 01939 262150

RSPB / FWAG / GCT Farming for Wildlife leaflets, including one on rush management, and other RSPB information leaflets can be obtained from Leo Smith, and they, together with other advice, can be found at www.rspb.org.uk/farming

Official Support

This initiative by the Upper Clun Community Wildlife Group, and the advice to farmers given in this leaflet, is endorsed and supported by:-



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