

Factsheet

Environmental Stewardship in the Farmed Environment

Environmental stewardship schemes help farmers to safeguard some of the UK's most cherished species, habitats and landscapes, and remains of the utmost importance. A significant number of farms the North Wessex Downs are a part of these schemes, including the original Countryside Stewardship Scheme (1991-2004), the Entry Level and Higher Level Stewardship schemes that replaced it (2004-2015) and the current Countryside Stewardship programme that launched in 2015.

Current Scheme

Countryside Stewardship provides incentives for land managers to look after their environment. It is open to all eligible farmers, woodland owners, foresters and other land managers.

The main priority for Countryside Stewardship is to protect and enhance the natural environment, in particular the diversity of wildlife (biodiversity) and water quality.

Other outcomes include:

- flood management;
- the historic environment;
- landscape character;
- genetic conservation; and
- educational access.



North Wessex Downs Farmland Bird Project

Farmland birds are currently the fastest declining group of birds in England, however hotspots still exist, scattered throughout the country where many of the hardest hit species can still be found. The sweeping, open landscape of much of the North Wessex Downs is preferred by some of the UK's most threatened farmland birds and the area is one of these hotspots.

Farmland birds have three main requirements throughout the year:

- Safe nesting habitat (often on the ground in grass or a crop)
- Insect-rich habitat for summer food (many species rear their chicks on insects)
- Seed for winter food (some species migrate but many remain for winter and feed on seeds)



The North Wessex Farmland Bird Project works with farmers and landowners, using a package of options available through Environmental Stewardship to benefit farmland birds. The project concentrates on farmland bird species of most concern, including:

Corn bunting (pictured, left)
Grey partridge
Turtle dove

Tree sparrow
Yellow wagtail
Lapwing

