

## Delivering a farmland bird package at Hope Farm

At Hope Farm we have demonstrated that farmland bird populations increase if you provide a package of options designed to give three key things: in-field nesting habitat, winter seed food and summer insect food. This is now called the Farmland Bird Package, and is one of the key messages of the Campaign for the Farmed Environment. So what does it entail and how much do you need?



Chris Birtwell (RSPB)

### In-field nesting habitat

Some farmland birds, such as skylarks, require in-field nesting habitat. Simply leaving two skylark plots per hectare in winter wheat allows the skylarks access to the ground, on which they nest and feed. First trialled at Hope Farm, this simple measure has allowed these birds to breed for longer and produce more young. There are 100 plots within our Entry Level Scheme agreement. If every 100 hectares of arable land had at least 20 skylark plots, this would halt the decline of this species.



Darwin Mowbray (RSPB)

### Winter seed food

Although we have spring beans in our rotation, we cannot retain our stubbles until mid-February and get a decent crop established on our heavy clay soils. Therefore we use wild bird seed mixes and sacrificial crops instead of stubbles to provide seed food for birds. Approximately 2% of the land provides winter seeds.

### Summer insect food

Both the adults and chicks of a variety of farmland species including grey partridge, yellowhammer and skylark need insects in order to breed successfully. We use nectar-rich flower mixtures and sown wild flower headlands to provide flower-rich habitats for insects. The alternatives, such as low-input crops would give us problem grass weeds rather than a diverse array of flowering plants. Ideally, flower-rich habitats should be created on 1% of arable farmland.



Becky Bennett (RSPB)



Emma Jansell (RSPB)

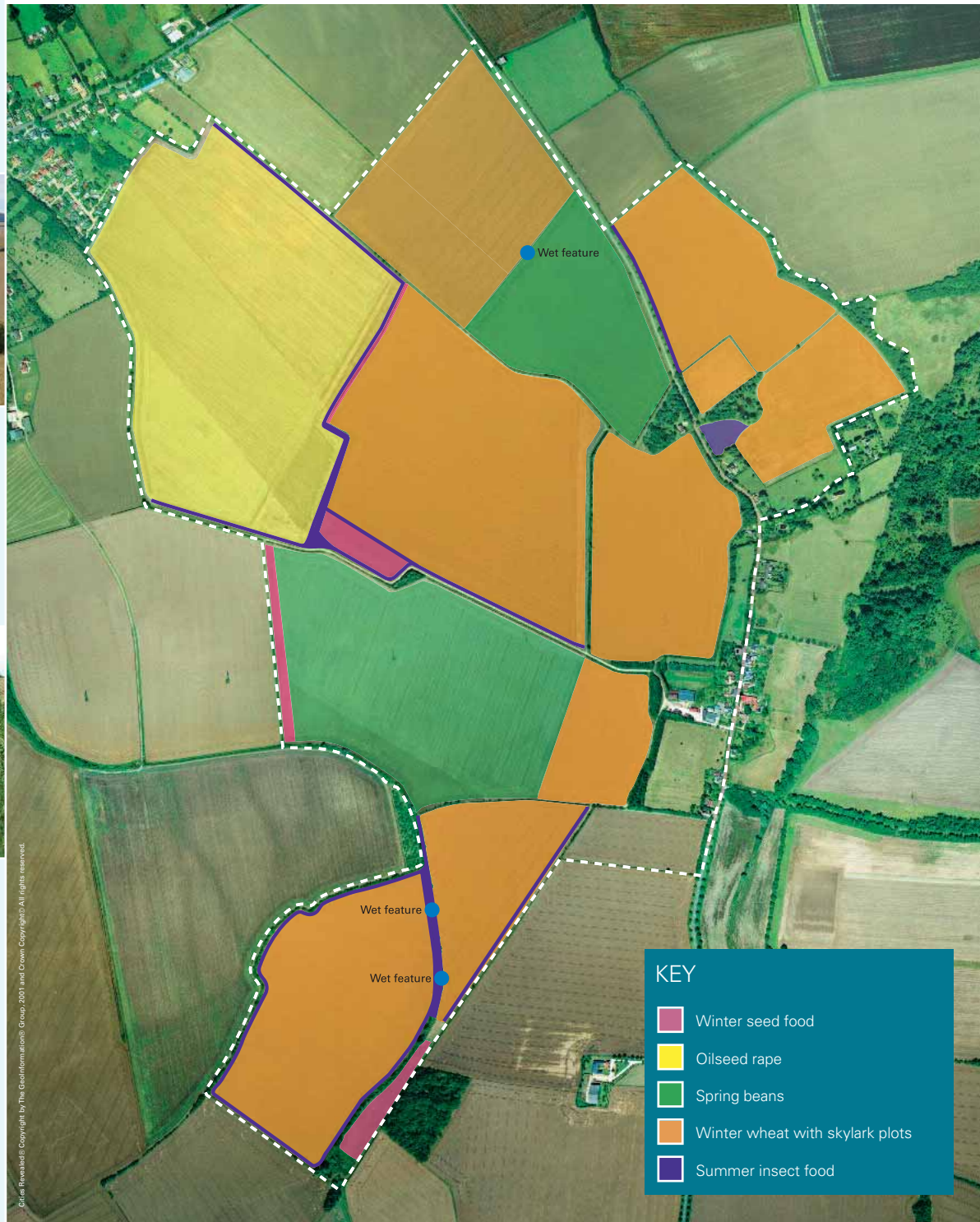


Andy Giddens (RSPB)



Chris Birtwell (RSPB)

# Hope Farm harvest 2012: Stepping up for nature.



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## Research trials

### Flower-rich margins

It is widely recognised that adding wild flowers to a standard grass mix increases its attractiveness to wildlife. Establishing these, however, is often more expensive, with some mixes more than 10 times the price of a standard grass margin. In these trials, we have tried to maximize the value of the flower-rich grass margins by using three different management techniques. This has shown that scarification, a method which disturbs 60% of the soil, benefits a wider range of insects than either using a herbicide or cutting. The research trials are now testing how frequently we should scarify each margin.

### Pasture pockets

The small area of grassland is a very important feature on Hope Farm, providing valuable feeding opportunities for the insect-probing starlings. We are using three of the paddocks to study the influence of sheep grazing on insect numbers and grass structure, with each paddock grazed under a different regime.

## Future challenges

### Diffuse pollution

European legislation has set farmers challenging targets for reducing the environmental impact of farming on water quality. We have created three features to test their ability to clean fertilisers and pesticides from our watercourses. Wildlife also benefits from their creation with damselflies, dragonflies and other insects regularly recorded. These insects can be a good source of food for farmland birds, including reed buntings and yellow wagtails.

### Environmental footprint

We have looked at our greenhouse gas footprint and aim to reduce it by 15% in the next five years. We propose to develop and demonstrate measures to reduce the farm's greenhouse gas footprint in line with the proposed target for the agriculture sector. We are currently assessing how effective some of our existing measures have been. These include using precision techniques to apply our fertiliser.