



a million  
voices for  
nature

The RSPB newsletter for agricultural projects

# FIELD OF VIEW

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The island of Ynys Llanddwyn

Guy Rogers (rspb-images.com)

## It's new, and improved – and only 100 years young!

Welcome to our restyled newsletter for volunteers and farmers who are helping to create and restore wildlife habitats in Wales. We've listened to your feedback on our old newsletter, *Peewit*, and we're delighted that we are now able to offer more Wales-focused articles, as well as continuing to provide an EU and UK perspective. We really value your comments and suggestions, so please do tell us what you think on e-mail [v&fa@rspb.org.uk](mailto:v&fa@rspb.org.uk)

2011 is our centenary in Wales and we've been celebrating at RSPB events across the country. It's been great to meet so many people who share our passion for nature, and who have

helped in so many different ways to make our centenary such a success story. We had humble beginnings, protecting the tern colony on Llanddwyn Island, but our operations in Wales now include research into the causes of wildlife declines, testing land management solutions on our 18 nature reserves, promoting environmental policies to the Welsh Government, helping more people to see and enjoy their local wildlife as well as working together with land managers to help them improve their land for nature.

The curlew is the symbol of our centenary and you can read about our

project to help them in North Wales on page 12. Once a common bird of Welsh upland farms, the curlew has declined drastically in recent decades and it is thought that as few as 600 birds now breed in Wales.

Projects, such as this one for curlews, rely on the local knowledge, support and goodwill of many land owners and managers across Wales. If you are one, and are working with us to help promote wildlife recovery, a very big thank you. Together we can step up for nature.

For more information, visit the project website at [www.rspb.org.uk/farming](http://www.rspb.org.uk/farming)



The EU LIFE+ Programme funds RSPB work which supports wildlife-friendly farming that furthers sustainable development in the European Union.

In this issue: The Nature of Farming Award • Grasslands • Benefits of blanket bogs • Stepping Up For Nature • Dates for your 2012 diary • V&FA highlights • Special places

WALES



Chris Gomersall (rspb-images.com)

Woodland management, such as coppicing, helps woodland wildlife

## Woodland life

We all seem to take for granted keeping warm in winter and the availability of fencing stakes. Meanwhile, the woods and copses that scatter our landscape for the most part now lie untouched and quiet. Yet it is only half a century since woodcutters were harvesting firewood, fence stakes and making charcoal from these woods.

We also take for granted that woodland wildlife thrives in the peace and quiet of passive neglect, but for many species this isn't the case. Many woodland birds, butterflies and wild flowers that thrived under repeated

coppice cutting and thinning are suffering as shade darkens the woods.

Several bird species that rely on woodland, including the hawfinch and pied flycatcher, have declined markedly since 1970. Although we don't fully understand all that is wrong, we know that the features they need – coppice, sunny glades and rides, and mature trees with spreading crowns – are disappearing.

The cost of heating fuels is high, and likely to stay so, and this is driving a new demand for wood fuel (logs and woodchip) that is unlikely to be just a

passing fad. Harvesting to provide things such as wood fuel or fencing stakes also provides the woodland structure that wildlife needs, even in small copses that can contribute to local markets.

Returning woodland to management can be supported by grants from the Forestry Commission, or it can form part of a Woodland Management Agreement soon to be available via the Glastir agri-environment scheme.

**For more information, contact Nigel Symes at [nigel.symes@rspb.org.uk](mailto:nigel.symes@rspb.org.uk) or call 01767 680551.**

## Stepping Up For Nature



**Nature is in trouble – and millions of people are stepping up to help because our wildlife has been disappearing at an alarming rate. Small steps can make a big difference and if we all act together and get stuck in, we can save nature.**

Nature is amazing. It enriches our lives. It makes us smile, cry and laugh. It brings us happiness, exhilaration and calm. But it's in trouble. Nature is in a steady, desperate global decline and one which will make our lives all the poorer, and threaten our very existence. We're determined not to let this happen. We're determined that by 2020, we will live in a world that's richer in nature – more beautiful, healthy and inspiring – than it is today. But we can't do this alone. We have to work with our supporters and Government to make it happen. That's why we're calling on millions of people to step up for nature.

Alongside our network of nature reserves across the UK, we need to restore vast swathes of our countryside to its former glory. We are working in rainforests in Africa and Asia. We need to save albatrosses in the southern oceans. To do this, we all need to step up – and connect every step we take together. A volunteer carries out a bird survey, a farmer helps wildlife on his land, the RSPB creates a wetland and the Government changes a policy for the good.

On 200 reserves around the UK, we will continue to protect, restore and re-create some of the UK's most threatened habitats for the creatures that thrive there. On our farm in

Cambridgeshire, we will continue to test farming techniques to help farmland wildlife without affecting livelihoods. Through our Futurescapes programme, we will work with farmers, landowners and managers to restore and re-create habitats and to bring more wildlife-friendly features into farms and forests.

Some of the best examples of stepping up for nature are from our own Volunteer & Farmer Alliance volunteers, many of whom have been stepping up for years, taking them into the front line for wildlife. They make a difference. Not everyone has to take such direct or large steps for nature to feel the benefit, but their contribution is greatly appreciated.

We will encourage our supporters to take steps for nature, no matter how small. Millions of personal actions will help wildlife on the ground. But together, they will represent something much bigger – a vast movement of people determined to bring the nature we love back from the brink. This movement will strengthen the voice of conservation and encourage governments to make the right decisions for nature.

**Nature is amazing. Nature is in trouble. Let's step up and save it – together. For more information, visit [www.rspb.org.uk/steppingup](http://www.rspb.org.uk/steppingup)**



Andy Hay (rspb-images.com)

Stepping up for nature: both you and wildlife will reap the benefits

Linnets were present on 56% of the farms surveyed in Wales



RSPB (rspb-images.com)

## V&FA highlights in 2011

Wales has seen another year with a wealth of interest from farmers and volunteers across the country wanting to participate in the project.

It's always great to see so much interest being shown in the project and so many enthusiastic individuals eager to know more about the birds on their farm or in the local area.

With a little more than one year of LIFE+ funding currently remaining, we are likely to see a rush of interest from more landowners across the country and we hope that, now the BTO atlas project has come to an end, there might be a number of willing and experienced birders to help fill the gaps as well.

Many species have been recorded, far too many to list here, but the table

below shows the percentage of farms where birds were recorded.

On average, 40 species were recorded per farm across the country, and the highest species count on a single farm was 61.

### Notable moments of the year include:

- A large flock including: 100+ house sparrows, 60+ goldfinches and 40+ greenfinches and linnets in a well-managed hay meadow on a farm in south Wales.
- A volunteer helped to untangle a tawny owl which had become caught in some soft fruit netting. It was set free, unharmed.
- The completion of a survey in the Brecon Beacons for a farmer who

has been patiently waiting for the past six years for a local volunteer to be found.

If you would like to know more about this project please contact Mark Vercoe at [mark.vercoe@rspb.org.uk](mailto:mark.vercoe@rspb.org.uk) or call 01248 672850.

### Percentage of farms where birds were found in Wales\*

Cuckoo	29
Curlew	35
Grey partridge	3
Kestrel	26
Lapwing	23
Linnet	56
Skylark	47
Starling	29
Tree sparrow	6
Yellowhammer	29
Yellow wagtail	6

\* figures correct at the time of writing

# Keeping an eye on our special wildlife places

Regular monitoring of exceptional sites and important species is vital. The RSPB and Countryside Council for Wales (CCW) joined forces to start the Designated Sites Bird Monitoring Project in 2008. It aims to ensure that Welsh Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs) are monitored using approved survey methods, and has proved very successful for three years.

Last year's surveying highlights: the winter raven roost at Newborough

SSSI on Anglesey, with more than 700 individual birds counted; and curlews at Fenns Whixall, Bettisfield, Wem and Cadney Moss SSSI – with some very encouraging results, especially relevant, as curlews are RSPB Cymru's species of focus for its centenary year.

A number of woodland SSSI sites across Wales have been surveyed to assess the 'assemblage' of breeding birds, with species like willow tit, marsh tit and hawfinch being fantastic

highlights. As well as monitoring bird features on these SSSI sites, the project has also begun to monitor non-avian SSSI features on RSPB reserves. This is an excellent opportunity to survey other important wildlife on Welsh reserves and to find out how it is faring.

If you would like to know more, please contact Amy Vanstone at [amy.vanstone@rspb.org.uk](mailto:amy.vanstone@rspb.org.uk) or call 01248 672850.



Marsh tit

Ben Hall (rspb-images.com)

# NATURE OF FARMING AWARD WALES 2011

The Nature of Farming Award is run by the RSPB, Plantlife, Butterfly Conservation and *The Telegraph* with funding from the EU LIFE+ Programme. It has been a great success in Wales with a wealth of entries from across the country. The award seeks to recognise farms that produce food and provide places which support our wildlife. The standard of entries was incredibly high this year, which made choosing a winner all the more difficult. The judging panel, made up of representatives from each conservation organisation, were impressed by how far some farmers were willing to go in order to help wildlife on their farms, and were inspired by the rich diversity of habitats and species they found there.

## Winner 2011 Richard and Gethin Owen

*Nant-yr-Efail, Betws-yn-Rhos*

Nant-yr-Efail, a 69 hectares (ha) mixed lowland farm overlooking the North Wales coast, has been registered organic since 2008, and is part of the Tir Gofal agri-environment scheme. The farm is owned by Richard Owen and he and his son Gethin run it together. It is Gethin's passion for the wildlife on the farm that has led him to discover more about it, and then to manage the farm in ways that encourage the wildlife to thrive. For decades, the farm was entirely grassland and fairly improved, but now with support from agri-environment schemes, the farm is organic. With this background, and applying good business sense, decisions and changes have been made to increase the number of habitats and to farm less intensively.

The farm still has a wealth of grasslands, but now also boasts greater diversity and interest including unimproved acid grassland and gorse scrub with a wide range of herbs

and flowering species. Among the grass fields there are now spring cereals, winter stubbles, brassicas and potatoes, all sprinkled with the heads of fumitories, woundwort, sparges and deadnettles that support large flocks of birds like linnets and skylarks. Linking it all together is a corridor of thick, dense well-managed hedgerows, ditches, grassy margins, woodlands and scrub where birds such as bullfinches, tree sparrows, whitethroats and warblers thrive.

The Owens have not only applied good business sense in their decisions, but have gone above and beyond the requirements of Tir Gofal and their organic status, and found ways to work the land. These new ways often not only save money, but with seemingly little effort, also create space for wildlife.



Recognition also needs to be given to two other farms which, although pipped to the post by Nant-yr-Efail, so impressed the judging panel that they have been awarded the Highly Commended status as runners-up.

## *Penlan farm, managed by* Richard Gough

Penlan supplies a range of ingredients for Burns Pet Nutrition Ltd, including free-range eggs, cereals, potatoes and carrots. The farm is a haven for wildlife with some extremely innovative ideas on how to manage a commercial operation and still be literally crawling with wildlife! See the article on the next page for an insight into Penlan.



*Hafoty Gwyn*  
is an upland sheep and beef farm in the heart of the Hiraethog area in North Wales.

## Hywel Williams

tenant of the farm, was recognised in 2004 for his endeavours to help breeding lapwings at Hafoty Gwyn by being announced the Welsh winner of Operation Lapwing. Now he has been recognised for his efforts to make his farm a haven for all wildlife. You can read more about Hywel's farm, and especially his lapwings at [www.farmwildlife.info/case/details.asp?x=28](http://www.farmwildlife.info/case/details.asp?x=28)



Painted lady using field margin

Burns Pet Nutrition Ltd

## Farm focus – Penlan farm

Pet food is not something you would automatically associate with conservation, but at Burns Pet Nutrition it has always been part of the company ethos. In 1998, the development of a new range of locally-sourced and locally-produced moist pet food instigated the purchase of a farm to produce ingredients. The former dairy unit also provided an ideal opportunity for the company to put into practice its beliefs regarding conservation and animal welfare.

As well as free-range eggs and vegetables for the pet food range, Penlan farm currently produces crops to supplement the hens' diet and traditional meadow hay which is marketed as "Welsh Meadow Hay" and forms the base of the company's small animal range. Any eggs not required for production are sold via roadside honesty boxes.

Penlan farm is a long-term project and some plans will not come to fruition for many years. Some improvements have been prioritised, and are in hand, such as the restoration and repair of hedgerows, planting new woodlands and orchards, and the creation of broad field margins as habitat, food

sources and wildlife corridors. To give you an idea of the commitment to conservation, during the past year more than 5,000 native trees and shrubs have been planted around Penlan. These include willow and hazel, which eventually will be used commercially.

Burns Pet Nutrition is creating essential habitat for endangered species through working with a range of conservation organisations including RSPB and Butterfly Conservation. For instance, it is establishing bee havens covering more than 20 ha with the assistance of the Bumblebee Conservation Trust.

Burns aims to make the farm a flagship site which demonstrates that commercial farming can successfully coexist with conservation. With plans for public access and outdoor classrooms, what is certain is that Penlan farm is being managed with an eye on the future.

For more information, please visit Penlan's website and see their conservation blogs at <http://burnspet.co.uk>

To enter your farm in 2012 call 01767 680551

or visit [www.rspb.org.uk/farming](http://www.rspb.org.uk/farming)

## Supporting our farmers so they can support our wildlife

For many farmers in Wales, just making a living from their land can be hard enough – and then the pressures of natural resource protection and biodiversity complicate matters even further. It would be a meagre existence indeed for many farmers, without subsidies such as the Single Farm Payment and agri-environment schemes.

With so many of our iconic farmland birds struggling in recent decades, we need farmers to step up for nature and provide the habitat they need: the safe nesting sites and the abundance of summer and winter food resources. But to do this farmers need support, both from environmental organisations like the RSPB, and financially from the Welsh Government.

Agri-environment schemes are crucial support. They can be designed especially to fund habitat for wildlife. For instance, they might provide areas of grassland managed for nesting lapwings and curlews, wild bird cover crops that supply abundant winter food for birds like yellowhammers and tree sparrows, or grass margins teeming with insects that feed so many birds, such as grey

partridges. In order to stand any chance of success, these schemes have to work for the farmers as well as wildlife. Glastir, the Welsh Government's new agri-environment scheme, has had a bit of a rough ride recently. Following the first round of applications the level of interest has been described as "disappointingly low" and the scheme itself as "unpopular". If the scheme doesn't encourage farmers to enter, then it has fallen at the first hurdle.

RSPB Cymru remains a strong supporter of the scheme. We are lobbying hard to make the scheme attractive to farmers and effective for farmland species. Success now depends on the Welsh Government directing adequate funding towards wildlife-friendly measures so that Welsh farmers can receive the help and support they need. Anything less, and in a few years we'll be asking the Welsh Government why it failed to meet its 2020 biodiversity target.

**For more information please contact Arfon Williams at [arfon.williams@rspb.org.uk](mailto:arfon.williams@rspb.org.uk) or call 029 2035 3000.**

## Partnerships help deliver effective conservation

**A range of technical and practical challenges appear when we work to protect our wildlife and bring diversity back to our landscapes. Our aim is effective conservation and sustainable land management. This is best achieved if a suitable assemblage of native wildlife is in place (either by retention or restoration), and ecosystems are allowed to function naturally. A distinguishing feature of effective conservation effort is the focus on an evidenced-base approach, and ability to work at a number of scales, from the field to landscape level.**

RSPB Cymru and partners have undertaken conservation management and population monitoring of black grouse in large management zones across upland north Wales since 1998.

Areas include a range of habitats, such as open moorland, forest edge, agricultural and game management land.

Black grouse population is measured by trends in displaying (lekking) males, and in 2010 the population was back up to levels last seen in 2002. In 2011 the population has continued to show positive signs of recovery. More than 320 lekking males were recorded, the best result since annual monitoring started in the early 1990s (in the annually monitored areas) and better even than the first national survey in 1986 when 264-300 lekking males were recorded.

Our work is showing benefits for the Welsh black grouse population and emphasises the need to deliver

conservation across landscapes with a range of partners, both in the private and public sector. But much work remains to consolidate these gains and to restore the species to areas where it was once a key feature. This challenge will be met through the RSPB Cymru Futurescapes programme. The black grouse management areas are part of the North Wales Moors Futurescapes project, designed to bring together effective conservation and sustainable land management.

**If you would like to know more about this project please contact Stephen Bladwell at [stephen.bladwell@rspb.org.uk](mailto:stephen.bladwell@rspb.org.uk) or call 01248 672850.**

The future of farmland birds such as grey partridges depends on the support farmers receive for helping them



Chris Gomersall (rspb-images.com)

There were over 320 displaying male black grouse in Wales in 2010



Andy Hay (rspb-images.com)



Blanket bog supports specialist plants, such as round-leaved sundew

gor.govsps/mnu

## A wonderful wet blanket

A massive 8,447ha of upland habitat in mid-Wales has benefited from the LIFE Active Blanket Bogs in Wales project. The project's main aim was to substantially improve the condition of blanket bog across the Berwyn and South Clwyd Mountains and Migneint-Arenig-Dduallt Special Areas of Conservation (SAC) in Wales.

The project has been running for five years, and came to an end in March. As well as practical on-the-ground work such as re-wetting, the project also aimed, through advocacy and education, to raise awareness of the importance of this habitat with landowners, land managers and local communities.

The UK contains 12-15% of the world's blanket bog, and here in Wales we

have 4%. To be 'active', blanket bogs need to have a layer of peat forming vegetation, predominantly sphagnum mosses, and a naturally functioning water table.

Blanket bogs are home to many specialist plants, insects and birds including black grouse and hen harriers. They are an important source of drinking water; around 70% of the UK's drinking water comes from our uplands. Peat soils are an excellent carbon store, but where damaged, blanket bogs can release large amounts of CO<sub>2</sub> into the atmosphere. The Welsh uplands are part of Welsh history and culture, with upland farming and recreation being an extremely important source of income for the local economy. The restoration of these areas of blanket bog will have benefits

for both the local and wider communities.

The project addressed major threats to the habitat by blocking artificial ditches, removing non-native trees and mowing fire breaks to slow any accidental fire. In total, the project blocked over 485 km (that's Lake Vyrnwy to Aberdeen as the crow flies!) of drainage ditches, removed non-native Sitka spruce trees from more than 6,000ha of upland, and mowed at least 292ha of firebreaks at Lake Vyrnwy. This restored over 3,000ha more than the initial project aims.

**If you would like more information about the project then please contact Mike Morris at [mike.morris@rspb.org.uk](mailto:mike.morris@rspb.org.uk)**

## The grass could be greener for our yellowhammers

If you have been reading about bird conservation in Wales over the last decade you are likely to have heard about the RSPB's Yellowhammer Project in the Dyfi and Dysynni valleys of west Wales. This project has been working in partnership with farmers, landowners and other organisations for nearly eight years. Through the project, cereal-rich wild bird cover is grown – winter food for yellowhammers – in an important breeding area for these little yellow buntings.

This winter, two of the farmers who have been working in partnership with the RSPB will be trying something new. Based on trials that have been carried out elsewhere in the UK, these farmers, who farm in the Dyfi valley, will be growing grass especially for yellowhammers.

It may sound like a strange idea, but here in Wales we farm in a mostly grassland landscape, with arable farming less common than in the past. This reduction in arable farming has played a large part in the decline of some of our most iconic seed-eating farmland birds, including yellowhammers, grey partridges and tree sparrows. So how is growing more grass going to help them?

Cereals are relatives of grass, and our modern silage grass species, such as Italian rye grass, produces relatively large seeds. If this kind of grass is left uncut and un-grazed over winter, it has been shown in trials to attract large numbers of seed-eating birds such as reed buntings and yellowhammers.

These silage plots will be monitored over the winter for seedhead density and use by birds. Both the farmers and the RSPB hope that these plots of silage will attract yellowhammers, hopefully just as many as have fed in the wild bird cover planted in previous years. Could silage provide a new way for farmers and conservationists to put back some of the missing winter food for seed-eating birds like yellowhammers? Watch this space...

**For more information about the project or for information on how to help birds and wildlife on your farm, please contact Lesley Fletcher at [lesley.fletcher@rspb.org.uk](mailto:lesley.fletcher@rspb.org.uk) or on 07776 453360.**



Uncut silage could be a lifeline for yellowhammers

Ernie James (rspb-images.com)

Grip blocking at Lake Vyrnwy



gor.govsps/mnu

Forestry clearance



gor.govsps/mnu

Tree removal



gor.govsps/mnu

For specialist advice at your fingertips visit [www.farmwildlife.info](http://www.farmwildlife.info)

## Curlew project marks RSPB's centenary in Wales

**This year marks a wonderful 100 years of RSPB work in Wales, and the curlew is our Centenary Bird. So what could be more appropriate than to mark the occasion with a new curlew project in the Hiraethog area of central north Wales?**

Breeding curlews have declined by 80% in Wales in recent decades and the area around Hiraethog holds Wales' largest remaining population. Curlew numbers continue to decline and our understanding of the factors which affect them is limited. So we're trying to find out what makes the Hiraethog curlews tick. As well as recording our own observations, we've been quizzing local farmers about the curlews on their land, and sharing our observations with them.

Initial findings this year suggested that numbers of both curlews and lapwings were down, though not in all places. The dry April may have provided less than ideal conditions for curlews and the cold winter may have hit lapwings hard.

Part of the project is to raise awareness of these birds, so during the breeding season this year we ran four successful guided events. As well as good coverage in the printed media, this year's assistant field officer, Siôn Dafis, appeared on an episode of *Ffermio* (the weekly farming programme on S4C), helping to highlight the plight of these birds and the work we're doing. We've also met quite a few local farmers and others at local agricultural shows recently.

We hope the information from the study, combined with local knowledge, will mean farmers and landowners can be given better advice about how best to help curlews on their land. It might also mean we can help them to make the most of the new Welsh agri-environment scheme, Glastir.

**For more information about the project, visit [www.rspb.org.uk](http://www.rspb.org.uk) and search for "Hiraethog Wader Project" or contact Dave Elliott at [dave.elliott@rspb.org.uk](mailto:dave.elliott@rspb.org.uk) and if you would like to know more about how to help curlews or other wildlife on your farm, please contact one of our advisory officers at [lesley.fletcher@rspb.org.uk](mailto:lesley.fletcher@rspb.org.uk) or [sion.dafis@rspb.org.uk](mailto:sion.dafis@rspb.org.uk) or phone our Bangor office on 01248 672850.**



There has been an 80% decline in breeding curlews in Wales

Chris Gorneseall/rspb-images.com

## Big Garden Birdwatch

**Thank you to everyone who took part in the Big Garden Birdwatch in 2011. A record-breaking 609,177 people counted 10.2 million birds over the weekend of 29 and 30 January.**

The Birdwatch revealed that some of the smaller birds that had decreased in numbers last year managed to bounce back this year. What good news! Sightings of goldcrests doubled, long-tailed tits increased by a third, and coal tits increased by a quarter.

Although smaller birds can be particularly badly affected by harsh winters, a good breeding season can help reverse declines. These results suggest that may have been the case in 2010.

House sparrows retained their top spot for the eighth year running. Starlings and blackbirds swapped positions this year, with starlings now at number two and blackbirds at number three. Starling sightings have increased by a quarter since last year, but their numbers are still lower than they were when the Big Garden Birdwatch started in 1979.

Thousands of people were lucky enough to see waxwings. These birds flood to the UK from Scandinavia every so often and this year there was an influx, known as a waxwing winter. Waxwings are bold birds. They're comfortable feeding around our towns and cities, and over 7,000 were counted in this year's survey, in almost 1,000 gardens.

Next year the Big Garden Birdwatch takes place over the weekend of 28 and 29 January 2012. Please join in and help us make it even bigger!

Visit [www.rspb.org.uk/birdwatch](http://www.rspb.org.uk/birdwatch) for more information.



Every so often, waxwings flood to the UK from Scandinavia

Steve Blain (RSPB)



Andy Hay (rspb-images.com)

Corn bunting

## Still hunting for buntings

Farmers and the RSPB have teamed up to encourage corn buntings to breed. Last year we told you about the work carried out near the village of Bettisfield on the Wrexham County and Shropshire border to encourage the return of breeding corn buntings to the area and to Wales.

The streaky brown, rather dumpy buntings nest on the ground, often in spring-sown cereals. So, following on from the supplementary winter feeding that began in the winter of 2009/2010, two areas of unharvested cereal mixes were established to provide safe areas for corn buntings to nest. These areas were then left unharvested so the seed could be eaten during the winter by corn buntings and other seed-eating birds. A variety of species were seen using the seed over the winter: up to seven yellowhammers, 40+ of both tree sparrows and reed buntings, 100+ linnets and 200 greenfinches were spotted, as well as bramblings and goldfinches. Unfortunately no corn buntings were seen either nesting during the summer or feeding over winter,

and while this was an obvious disappointment we know they were not far away, as we received reports of a flock of 24 corn buntings not far from the border earlier in the year.

With the co-operation and goodwill of local landowners, this spring a further two 2ha plots of spring-sown barley were established especially for corn bunting. They weren't sprayed, providing somewhere safe to nest, and they were then left unharvested to provide winter food. The plots are being monitored by RSPB staff and a local volunteer and we hope to report some positive sightings next year.

**If you would like more information on the project or would like to know more about how to benefit wildlife on your farm please contact Mark Vercoe at [mark.vercoe@rspb.org.uk](mailto:mark.vercoe@rspb.org.uk) or call 01248 672850.**



Kathryn Smith (RSPB)

Agricultural shows are one of the best means of communicating with farmers

## Advice at agricultural shows in 2012 and online

As usual, we'll be out and about throughout the year at shows and events across the UK. Here are some we're going along to – please come and have a chat with us.

In the meantime, if you have any questions, please visit [www.farmwildlife.info](http://www.farmwildlife.info)

The website hosts a discussion forum where you can ask questions or post ideas. There are case studies of farmers who have adopted novel management strategies to boost wildlife on their farm. There's also an events calendar.

- **Balmoral Show**, King's Hall, Belfast. 16–18 May
- **Beef Expo**, Three Counties Showground, Malvern. 24 May
- **Cereals**, Boothby Heath, Lincolnshire. 13/14 June
- **Royal Highland Show**, Royal Highland Centre, Edinburgh. 21–24 June
- **Sheep**, Three Counties Showground, Malvern. 4 July
- **Royal Welsh Show**, Llanelwedd, near Builth Wells. 23–26 July
- **Dairy and Livestock Event**, NEC, Birmingham. 4/5 September

## Blog planted in fertile ground

Blogging has grown from almost nothing to a worldwide phenomenon in just a few short years. There are currently more than 166 million blogs available to read on the internet. This summer, the RSPB's agricultural team joined in and planted their farming blog on the virtual landscape.

It's germinating well. Many of our advisory, project and policy staff are sharing their latest news and views on the farming blog at [www.rspb.org.uk/community/ourwork/farming/b/farming-blog/default.aspx](http://www.rspb.org.uk/community/ourwork/farming/b/farming-blog/default.aspx)

We want to extend our blogging conversations to a wider audience, because they're a fantastic opportunity to tell people about our work. We want even more farmers and those with an interest in farming to get to know us, and to join in the conversation too.

There are two ways to join in – you can respond to posts that we put up on the blog, or you can create your own thread on the associated Farming Forum. Please join in and share your thoughts, concerns, advice and ideas.

You can always check out the latest posts directly from our farming home page at [www.rspb.org.uk/farming](http://www.rspb.org.uk/farming)



For specialist advice at your fingertips visit [www.farmwildlife.info](http://www.farmwildlife.info)

# What do farmers think of the V&FA?

**Hearing what farmers think about the V&FA means we can make improvements so we all benefit from the project as much as possible.**

Each year, questionnaires are sent to farmers who received a survey the year before last. This allows for any advice sought and management techniques to be put into practice.

The questionnaires from farmers who replied in 2010 show that:

- 96% of farmers felt that taking part in the V&FA was a worthwhile experience
- 96% of farmers found the laminated map useful
- 90% of farmers have put into practice the farmland bird management guidelines that accompanied the map
- 80% of farmers had species on their farms that they had not previously noticed

## And what do volunteers think?

The questionnaires completed by volunteers who took part in the V&FA in 2010 show that:

- 98% enjoyed participating in the V&FA
- 96% reported that no problems were encountered during the surveys
- 95% felt that the training they received was either good or excellent
- 94% were satisfied with the level of support they received
- 82% felt their understanding of farmland birds and conservation had improved
- 69% reported that they were now more aware of policies like the EU Birds Directive

## Keeping you informed

The RSPB is always updating its systems and processes for storing information. Farm information and other details that you give us will be held by the RSPB on paper and electronically. All details will be kept confidential. We will not make your name, address or any other information available to external

organisations without your permission. The RSPB is continually finding new ways to help farmers conserve wildlife. We may wish to contact you from time to time with such information. If you would prefer us not to use your details in this way, please contact project staff in your area – contact details below.

## The EU Birds Directive

The EU Birds Directive aims to protect biodiversity in Europe. The work described in this newsletter promotes the importance of the EU Birds Directive in conservation

management on farmland, creating a positive profile through promotional activities. [http://ec.europa.eu/environment/nature/legislation/birdsdirective/index\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/environment/nature/legislation/birdsdirective/index_en.htm)

**GET MORE INFO** [www.rspb.org.uk](http://www.rspb.org.uk) or e-mail: [v&fa@rspb.org.uk](mailto:v&fa@rspb.org.uk)

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The RSPB speaks out for birds and wildlife, tackling the problems that threaten our environment. Nature is amazing – help us keep it that way.



We belong to BirdLife International, the global partnership of bird conservation organisations.

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