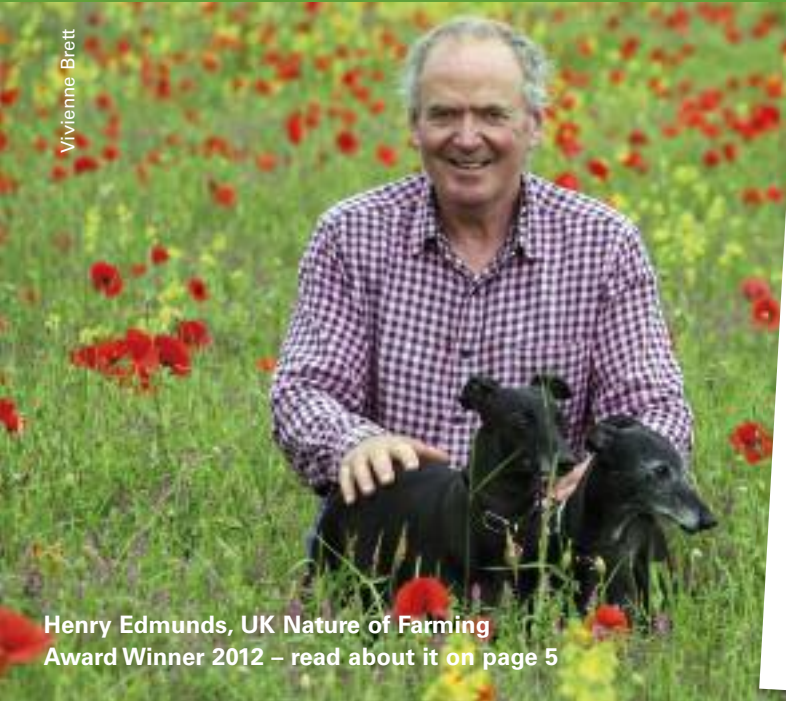




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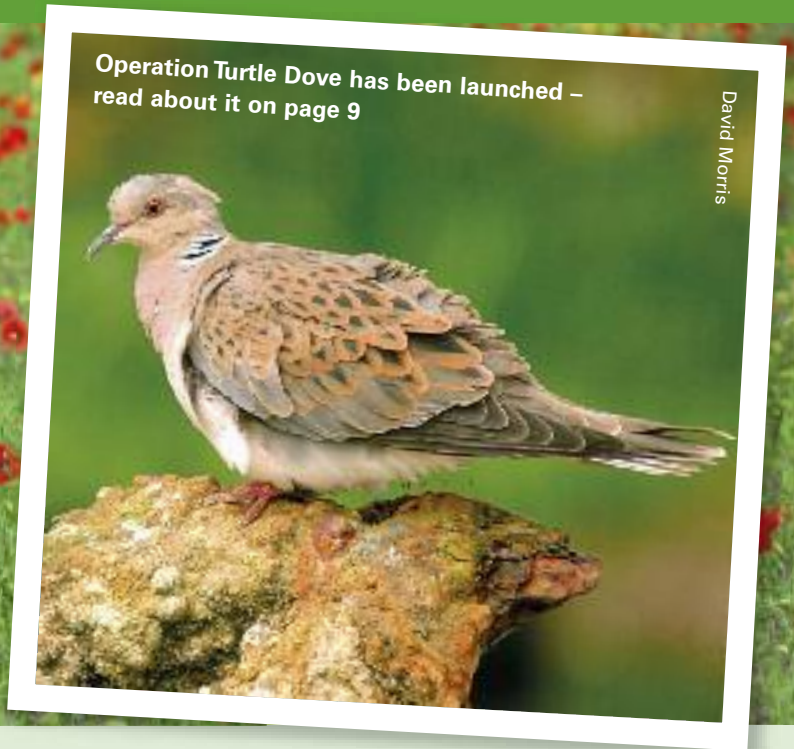
# The RSPB newsletter for agricultural projects **FIELD OF VIEW**

**ISSUE 11 NOVEMBER 2012**



Vivienne Brett

Henry Edmunds, UK Nature of Farming Award Winner 2012 – read about it on page 5



Operation Turtle Dove has been launched – read about it on page 9

David Morris

## Henry crowned NoFA UK champion

Welcome to the second issue of England's *Field of View*. We bring you another newsletter packed full of the latest on wildlife-friendly farming, our advisory and project work. We update you on how the RSPB is calling for greater support for environmental measures in the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) reform.

We report on how we have been working with UK farmers to urge for an increase in agri-environment funding. We've taken it to the heart of Brussels.

We profile our English finalists and the UK winner of the Nature of Farming Award (NoFA), where,

yet again, we have examples of farmers who are doing fantastic things for wildlife on their farms. The high calibre of highly commended winners is a reflection of how many farmers are delivering significant benefits for wildlife, alongside producing food. In 2012, over 17,000 people voted to show their support for those who farm with wildlife in mind, with more than 7,000 votes cast in the last week.

We work closely with farmers and farming organisations to develop practical advice to help farmers maximise the benefits for wildlife within different farming systems. Inside, we detail a new eight-point package for arable farmers and we

have a new case study of an upland farm that exemplifies the RSPB's vision of how upland farming systems can deliver benefits for society.

The Birds Directive is the EU's oldest piece of nature legislation. Inside, we explain more about how our work and the efforts of volunteers and farmers are contributing to delivering the Birds Directive on farmland in the UK.

We also have updates on Hope Farm, the Volunteer & Farmer Alliance (V&FA), Big Garden Birdwatch and feedback from you on the advice we offer. **For more information and a link to the farming blog, visit [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: NoFA results • CAP reform • V&FA results • Hope Farm update • Operation Turtle Dove • Farmer case study • The Birds Directive • Hill farming at Tarnhouse**



Farmers visit Brussels to tell their side of the story

RSPB

## Green Common Agricultural Policy reform – or just the *status quo*?

During 2012, EU governments and MEPs have been developing their negotiating positions on the reforms to the CAP. This includes alternative approaches to those suggested in the Commission's 2011 proposals.

The focus for many, and by far the most contentious issue, is Pillar I "greening". The RSPB views greening as a vital step to improve the environmental performance of EU farming. It is crucial if the natural resources that farmers need for food production are to be protected.

But this depends on well-designed measures in our policy. So it's imperative that things like Ecological Focus Areas are implemented in a way that raises the bar and doesn't undermine the great work already done by many farmers through agri-environment schemes.

However, despite the rhetoric, there is no guarantee that this round of reform will deliver a CAP that is equipped with the tools, and funding, to drive more sustainable and wildlife-friendly farming. There have been calls from

governments and MEPs for more flexibility on greening. This could mean that any steps forward are reduced to a shuffle. There's a risk that we'll just repackage our current CAP. Agri-environment funding could be cut in Pillar II. The parallel EU Budget process (which will be decided in late 2012 or early 2013) is likely to cut the money available for CAP, potentially falling most heavily on Pillar II. This will further undermine the more targeted environmental expenditure.

A famous frog once said: "It's not easy being green" and he wasn't wrong, but the alternative is simply not an option.

Decision makers will need to take some bold steps when they finalise the next CAP during 2013. They need to make sure the policy meets the needs of farming, the environment and society. And that means strong greening measures and adequate funding for agri-environment.

For more information, contact Jenna Hegarty at [jenna.hegarty@rspb.org.uk](mailto:jenna.hegarty@rspb.org.uk)

## Championing agri-environment at the European Parliament

Wildlife-friendly farmers from across the EU met in Brussels in March to call for greater support for environmental measures in the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) reform.

The RSPB (as part of BirdLife International) supported eight farmers from the UK, Ireland, Portugal and Latvia to visit their Members of the European Parliament (MEPs) on the Agriculture Committee. They told their stories about the importance of Pillar II agri-environment schemes on their farms.

The farmers explained to MEPs how these schemes allow them to step up for nature, as well as producing agricultural commodities. They also

provide benefits for the environment, their businesses and society. They urged MEPs to increase funding for agri-environment in the 2014–2020 CAP and invited them to visit their farms to see these amazing schemes in action. We also highlighted the urgent need to channel CAP funding towards vulnerable High Nature Value farming systems.

Dan Skinner, one of the participating farmers, said: "I was really pleased to represent UK farmers involved in agri-environment schemes. MEPs often get told about the shortcomings of these schemes, so it was really important to tell them how fantastic the benefits of a well-run scheme can be and why

they should protect Pillar II funding in the CAP reform."

As the European Parliament plays a significant role in determining the design and funding of the next CAP, this visit was a great opportunity. It shows how farmers and the RSPB are joining forces on key issues.

We hope that these powerful messages from farmers will make sure that Parliament's negotiating position on CAP calls for adequate funding for valuable agri-environment schemes and vulnerable High Nature Value systems.

For more information, contact Jenna Hegarty at [jenna.hegarty@rspb.org.uk](mailto:jenna.hegarty@rspb.org.uk)

## Congratulations to the silent partner: agri-environment

The Nature of Farming Awards are over for another year, and we have another host of brilliant wildlife-friendly farmers who deserve our heartfelt congratulations. There is another winner that we should applaud though: the humble agri-environment scheme.

We hope that many of the farmers reading this would agree that their agri-environment scheme provides them with an invaluable tool that allows them to make space for nature on their land.

Providing payments for vital public goods that society needs, schemes such as Higher Level Stewardship (HLS) in England have been shown to reverse declines in wildlife at the farm level, and have proven pivotal to the recovery of iconic species such as the curlew and corncrake.

It has been 25 years since the first Environmentally Sensitive Area agreement led the way for agri-environment

in the UK, and countless farmers have made great use of them since. However, as the current set of UK Rural Development Programmes comes to an end, we are once again in the position of having to make the case for these indispensable tools.

We at the RSPB would like to think that it's as simple as pointing to the great successes that farmers have had with these schemes to date, and encouraging the powers that be to listen. This task is made a lot easier, though, when voices from the farming community lead the way in singing the praises of agri-environment. Thank you for stepping up for nature.

For more information, contact Thomas Lancaster at [thomas.lancaster@rspb.org.uk](mailto:thomas.lancaster@rspb.org.uk)

## V&FA highlights in 2012

England has seen yet another busy year for the Volunteer & Farmer Alliance (V&FA) with a great deal of interest from farmers who would like to know more about the birds on their farm.

As always, this is made possible by the fantastic volunteers who support the project sharing their expertise in bird identification and time to provide the detailed bird data for the V&FA.

The bad weather during the breeding season had an impact. The weather made it very difficult to fit in the surveys, but despite the challenges, the results have poured in.

### Notable moments of the year include:

- A volunteer recorded 42 avocets on a farm in the east of England
- One lucky volunteer in Gloucestershire had a very close encounter with a brown hare – it sniffed his wellington boot!

- A farm in East Yorkshire clocked up the most species for a farm in the region, with 67 species identified

- A volunteer recorded twite on a farm in Northumberland. This is a great record for the area.

### Feedback from a Norfolk Farmer:

"We are very encouraged and also excited to see so many birds we didn't know were about. We are also most grateful to you and the volunteers for your time and enthusiasm. We didn't realise when we requested the survey that you would all put so much effort in – thank you so much. We look forward to receiving the RSPB report and perhaps we will be able to encourage even more birds in the future. The Natural England visit went well and we are to submit an application for HLS!"

If you would like to know more about this project please e-mail [v&fa@rspb.org.uk](mailto:v&fa@rspb.org.uk)



Corn bunting

### Percentage of farms where birds were found

	Eastern England	Midlands	Northern England	South East England	South West England
Corn bunting	29%	13%	9%	18%	17%
Cuckoo	30%	25%	35%	51%	15%
Grey partridge	46%	46%	50%	17%	10%
Kestrel	70%	69%	58%	66%	33%
Lapwing	43%	35%	63%	24%	8%
Linnet	83%	77%	67%	71%	56%
Skylark	100%	90%	64%	77%	67%
Starling	72%	67%	75%	75%	33%
Tree sparrow	9%	35%	44%	4%	1%
Turtle dove	10%	6%	2%	20%	1%
Yellowhammer	83%	21%	27%	78%	53%
Yellow wagtail	38%	94%	48%	14%	2%

## Protecting farmland birds through the Birds Directive

The Birds Directive 1979 provides protection for all wild birds in the EU. All the elements of the EU LIFE+ funded project have contributed to improving the conservation status of farmland birds, the fastest declining group of birds in the EU.

Bird surveys by volunteers have enabled farmers to know what special birds they have on their farms so that they can target their conservation efforts towards them.

The follow-up advice has encouraged many farmers to enter agri-environment schemes targeted specifically at improving the quality of wildlife habitats on the farm. The NoFA, demonstration farm visits and case studies of wildlife-friendly farmers have raised awareness of what farmers can do, why they do

it and how to get the best from their efforts. The feedback from farmers and volunteers is helping us to determine how best to take this work forward into the future.

The RSPB believes that the Birds Directive is key to ensuring the UK and the EU play their part in halting biodiversity loss by 2020.

So what exactly does it do?

- Member States are required to designate Special Protection Areas (SPAs) for threatened species and all migratory bird species.
- The Wildlife & Countryside Act 1981 consolidated and amended existing legislation to implement the Birds Directive in Great Britain. This banned activities that directly threatened birds, such as deliberate killing, destruction of their nests

- Rules were established to limit the number of species that can be hunted and the periods during which they can be hunted in order to protect them during periods when they are particularly vulnerable, such as migration and during the breeding season. It also defined rules on hunting methods.
- EU Species Action Plans were established to help the most threatened species recover.

The LIFE programme is the EU's funding instrument for the environment. Our agricultural projects and advisory work are currently funded by LIFE+, which raises awareness of the needs of farmland birds and the implementation of the Birds Directive among farmers and the public. For more information, go to the RSPB website and search for Birds Directive.



Most wild birds, including yellow wagtails, are protected under the Birds Directive

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



Andy Hay (rspb-images.com)

We manage Hope Farm as a commercial arable farm, so we can trial and demonstrate solutions to farmland bird declines

## A mixed year for Hope Farm

It has been a year of extremes and difficult crop management decisions at Hope Farm. Until the end of March, we were facing a third cropping year with well below average rainfall. The oilseed rape fared reasonably well last year, but this year all three crops – wheat, oilseed rape and field beans – were likely to suffer. Much was made of the impending drought, particularly in areas where vegetables are grown, with water abstraction and irrigation a major issue.

But no-one had consulted the weather! The jet stream moved south, and rain-bearing low-pressure systems crossed England, bringing much-needed rain. Between 2007 and 2011 we had three years with no rainfall at all in April. This year it rained. 180 millimetres fell in April! Of course, it was needed. But such a large amount in a short period made cropping conditions difficult. Despite this, our contractors and agronomist have done an excellent job and all our crops look very good. We hope for a much better harvest than the last two years.

It has also been a challenging year for the farm's wildlife. After a warm and dry March the starlings started laying eggs early – the earliest we have recorded. The breeding pairs on the farm rose from three in 2000 to 22 last year. Not bad, considering there was a 50% decline across England between 1995 and 2009. Productivity (or chicks fledged in each nesting attempt) has been very good during the last eight years, averaging 2.7 chicks per nest.

This year the hatching period coincided with the arrival of heavy and persistent rainfall. Although it softened the ground which made for easy food foraging for the adults, it also caused a problem. Chicks need to be kept warm during the early days of their life through brooding by the adults, but of course they also need to be fed regularly. As the weather deteriorated, and remained cold and wet for days on end, the decision whether to brood or feed became critical. Unfortunately this year, the challenge became too great, and in some cases whole

broods failed. This is very unusual for starlings. Just 45 chicks fledged from 22 nesting attempts. Last year 77 chicks fledged from the same number of nests.

The weather has made surveying birds and butterflies on the whole farm quite difficult. Bird surveys should take place every 10 days, on calm dry mornings, from April to June. Butterfly surveys start in April, requiring calm and sunny afternoons, and run through until September. The conditions required for these surveys have been in very short supply, although we have managed to complete sufficient bird surveys to continue calculating a breeding bird index based on territory mapping.

At the time of going to print, it's too early to say how birds have fared, but we have had a few highlights. Two pairs of lapwings have nested on the farm, in our spring sown field beans,

both hatching young; quails have been heard calling; two pairs of barn owls are on the farm with at least one pair hatching eggs; corn buntings have held territory for the second year in a row and skylark numbers appear to be as impressive as ever.

Butterflies have had a terrible time though. Last year we regularly recorded 150 butterflies of 10 species. It has been a challenge to record double figure counts of all butterflies combined this year, which is really disappointing. The bad weather during April and May appears to have taken quite a toll.

However, despite all the challenges that this year has thrown at us, visitors to the farm have continued to be very impressed with how we manage to achieve the balance of farming to produce good yielding and quality crops while successfully managing to provide excellent habitat for a range of wildlife, not just birds.

### Would you like to visit Hope Farm?

We are keen to invite more groups to visit Hope Farm to see what we have done to combine productive arable farming and boost wildlife populations.

These visits are fully interactive: we are keen to find out what farmers think they could do on their own land, as well as showing them what we have done on ours. We think this is a good way for us to find out how farmers can take up the measures that are most beneficial for wildlife.

Once we've identified the problems, we might be able to work out the best ways to address the issues that stop the uptake. If you are a member of a farmer's club, why not find out if they would be interested in a group visit?

To arrange a visit, please e-mail farm manager Ian Dillon at [ian.dillon@rspb.org.uk](mailto:ian.dillon@rspb.org.uk) or call 01954 267438.

Barn owl



David Morris

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

# NATURE OF FARMING AWARD 2012

This year the UK's largest farmland wildlife award – the NoFA – pulled in the largest number of entries from farmers so far.

The award recognises and celebrates the hard work and dedication that many farmers put into helping wildlife. The farmers involved reflect the passion and commitment of wildlife-friendly farmers across the UK. The award is run by the RSPB, Plantlife and Butterfly Conservation, with sponsorship from The Telegraph and funding from the EU LIFE+ Programme.

## UK WINNER 2012

### We have our first English NoFA Winner!

Wiltshire

#### Henry Edmunds

Sustainable farming is the guiding principle at Cholderton. For the past thirty years Henry has aimed to achieve a balance between modern agriculture and the preservation

Our other finalists from England also demonstrated that conservation and wildlife-friendly farming can be a core part of a profitable farming business.

West Sussex

#### Peter Knight

Peter has managed the Norfolk Estate for 24 years, and has supervised the change from a fully production-based system to a commercially-managed Estate that has conservation at its heart.

Farming systems and conservation management are designed to benefit each other, providing quality food and abundant wildlife through an ethic of "more output, less impact". This has achieved great increases in birds, insects, plants and mammals. All this is being demonstrated and communicated to a wide range of audiences through walks on the Estate. Peter also gives talks to many different groups. He has been instrumental in this process, using his knowledge and passion to affect lasting change.



Vivienne Brett

of the countryside, with a belief that farming is a close co-operation between productivity and conservation.

The chalk grassland, grazed by the native Hampshire Downs sheep, is alive with flowers and buzzing with insects. There are rare bumblebees, moths and butterflies, and among them flits the stunning Adonis blue.

Elsewhere on the farm corn buntings, lapwings and grey partridges thrive, as well as brown hares, diminutive harvest mice and rare arable plants such as cornflower and Martin's rampion fumitory. The abundance of wildlife sits neatly alongside food production. The harvest here delivers a healthy landscape, economy and environment.



Bruce Fowkes

Suffolk

#### Jason Gathorne-Hardy

Biodiversity, landscape and sustainability are at the heart of Jason's revolutionary 110 hectare (ha) farm. He produces and brands Alde Valley Lamb and works timber on site, as well as hosting school visits, food and art festivals.

His arable crop production bulges with wild bird seed and nectar flower mixtures. Jason continuously trials new ways to re-connect people with the landscape, nature and food. He has established a network of nature trails to take in river banks, flower enriched grassland and woodland coppice.



Simon Tonkin



Anna Broszkiewicz

Oxfordshire

#### Rob Allan

Upton Estate is farmed sustainably. It delivers a balance – food for us and food for wildlife. Rob is very proud and extremely passionate about the huge range of diverse habitats on the Estate.

The habitats support a rich variety of wildlife, including barn owls, corn buntings, skylarks and tree sparrows. He will continue to make sure there's space for wildlife and the habitats needed in the future. Rob believes that wildlife options can be incorporated into and improve farming rotations, ensuring that farms remain sustainable.

North Yorkshire

#### Iain Hurst

Rosemount Farm is a productive 365 ha arable farm managed by Iain in the Yorkshire Wolds. Winter wheat, malting barley, oilseed rape, vining peas and potatoes are grown on the farm, where there's a vast range of wildlife.

Through careful dedication and environmental management, grey partridges, corn buntings, lapwings, curlews and skylarks all thrive on the farm through Iain's HLS options and voluntary habitat creation. Hares, bees and butterflies all make their homes on the farm's lovingly restored chalk grassland.



Chris Tomson

Recognition also needs to be given to the 24 Highly Commended Farms, which although pipped to the post by the winners featured here, so impressed the judges that they have been awarded the Highly Commended status. If you would like to know who they are, go to the RSPB website and search for Nature of Farming Award, Highly Commended.

To enter your farm in 2013 call 01767 680551

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



We recommend devoting 1% of land to flower-rich habitats

## Telling a hill farming story

This year, we've launched a case study of Tarnhouse, a hill farm in the north Pennines. It exemplifies the RSPB's vision of how upland farming systems can deliver a host of benefits for society. The farm has 92 suckler cows and 500 breeding ewes, and is managed by tenant farmer John Errington. It's part of the RSPB Geltsdale reserve.

Through sensitive land management, the farm provides many benefits alongside food production. Some of the UK's most important habitats and species are dependent on the grazing systems chosen here. The farm is making a major contribution to the conservation of vulnerable upland soils, to carbon stewardship, water quality improvements and to flood risk management. Several land management changes have been made over the years to benefit farm wildlife. They include an increase in cattle grazing and a reduction in sheep numbers. Blue grey and Aberdeen Angus cattle, and Scottish black faced sheep, have helped restore a range of important upland habitats. Iconic species such as black grouse, lapwings and curlews are all benefiting from the change. In the case of black grouse, numbers have increased spectacularly, at a time when numbers across the north Pennines have nearly halved.

The case study highlights some of the threats to extensive livestock systems such as those in place at Tarnhouse. Stand-alone agricultural activity on upland livestock farms is often economically fragile.

The public benefits provided at Tarnhouse are underpinned by agri-environment schemes, but this important funding stream is vulnerable in the 2014 CAP reform. The political focus on so-called "sustainable intensification" poses particular issues for extensive livestock systems. Claims that extensive systems are less efficient and carbon-friendly than intensive livestock systems often fail to take account of the full range of benefits and costs that different farming systems convey.

The case study uses carbon footprint tools currently available to the farming industry and illustrates the dangers of focussing on just a single type of analysis, particularly those which ignore the importance of wider carbon stewardship, such as the carbon locked up in soils.

If you would like details, or would like to visit Tarnhouse, e-mail Gethin Davies at [gethin.davies@rspb.org.uk](mailto:gethin.davies@rspb.org.uk)

## A new environmental package for arable farmers

Over the last year, the RSPB has been working closely with a wide range of farming organisations to create the best environmental package for arable farmers. It's based on what is available in agri-environment schemes and evidence from the whole range of research into the conservation of soil, water and wildlife. We've summed up the eight-point package here:

1. Look after existing wildlife habitats.
2. Maximise the environmental value of field boundaries.
3. Create a network of grass margins, especially to buffer watercourses.
4. Have 1% of land as flower-rich habitats.
5. Use wild bird crops on 2% or stubbles on 5% of arable land to feed birds through the winter.

6. Use skylark plots in winter cereals or fallow plots for nesting lapwings.
7. Consider establishing a winter cover crop after harvest to prevent nitrogen losses before spring crops.
8. Prevent soil erosion and run-off by grassing down any in-field areas that might act as channels.

Visit [www.rspb.org.uk/farming](http://www.rspb.org.uk/farming) for more details. We want to get it spot on, so we're working with farmers to make sure the advice in this package meets farmers needs, and to get the right measures in the right place and manage them in the right way. Our advisers are using this package for farmers across the UK.

Dale Clanfield (above) has adopted this package on his 45 ha farm in Norfolk,

using Entry Level Stewardship (ELS) and advice from his RSPB adviser, Niki Williamson. The environmental features are on his poorer land and awkward field corners, and so complement his farm business perfectly. He paid particular attention to weed control in his nectar flower mixtures in the first year, and this has successfully encouraged a good return of flowering plants in subsequent years. This year, he has three corn bunting nests and a covey of grey partridge, as well as a wealth of the pollinating insects he wanted to encourage. The flower-rich margins in particular have won him praise from people using the adjacent bridleway.

If you have any thoughts or questions on this package, then please send them to [farm-advice@rspb.org.uk](mailto:farm-advice@rspb.org.uk)

## Making space for nature alongside producing milk

This spring we started a project with some of the dairy farmers who supply milk to Tesco. We want to find practical methods that farmers can integrate into their systems to help wildlife.

We started with bird surveys of farms through the V&FA. Once we know what birds are on a farm, we can follow up with a visit to the farmer, so we can work out potential land management options.

This will be a two-way process: we generate ideas based on the needs of the wildlife living there, and listen to farmers' thoughts on the pros and cons of fitting the ideas into their system.

Dairying is a challenging sector for integrating measures to help wildlife. Making space for nature within the

farmed area, especially within grassland, is particularly tricky: the focus on high productivity and efficiency invariably means leaving less behind for wildlife.

There are fewer options available in agri-environment schemes to suit dairy farmers, and the economic pressures have been unrelenting over recent years.

Dairy farmers have been declining as fast as some of our farmland wildlife. In the past ten years alone, the number of dairy farmers has halved in England and Wales, and fallen by a third in Scotland and Northern Ireland.

But our advisory staff around the UK have worked with many dairy farmers who have gone out of their way

to help wildlife alongside running productive dairy enterprises: farmers like Robert Kynaston from Shropshire who was one of the NoFA finalists last year. We will be building on the experiences of these farmers in developing our ongoing work with the dairy sector.

This project is part of a new partnership between the RSPB and Tesco called Together For Trees. It aims to reduce the environmental footprint of commodities from tropical forests, as well as making supply chains more sustainable.

If you would like more details, please e-mail Gethin Davies at [gethin.davies@rspb.org.uk](mailto:gethin.davies@rspb.org.uk)

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

# Advice at agricultural shows in 2013 and online

Here are a list of some of the agricultural shows and events we will be attending across the UK in 2013. As always, staff will be on hand to answer any questions you have on wildlife conservation. Do come and visit us.

- Balmoral Show, Balmoral Park, Maze Long Kesh, Lisburn 15–17 May
- Cereals, Boothby Graffoe, Lincolnshire 12–13 June
- Royal Highland Show, Royal Highland Centre, Edinburgh 20–23 June
- Livestock 2013, NEC, Birmingham 3–4 July
- Royal Welsh Show, Llanelwedd, near Builth Wells 22–25 July

In the meantime, if you have any questions, please visit [www.farmwildlife.info](http://www.farmwildlife.info) as this website hosts a discussion forum to ask questions or post ideas, case studies of farmers adopting novel management to boost wildlife on their farm and an agricultural events calendar for farmland wildlife conservation.

# RSPB training events

Each year, the RSPB runs training courses on getting the maximum wildlife value out of Environmental Stewardship on arable farmland and livestock farms.

Courses on "How livestock farming can integrate the needs of farmland wildlife" will be held at these venues:

- Great Wollaston Farm, Shropshire 24 April 2013
- Duchy College, Cornwall October 2013 (to be confirmed)

For details of the courses, visit [www.rspb.org.uk/conservationtraining](http://www.rspb.org.uk/conservationtraining)

# Testing whether wildlife-friendly farming makes a difference

Over the last 13 years, the V&FA has done a fantastic job in helping farmers recognise the birds on their farm that need the most help. Going forward, we are looking to develop the role of volunteer birdwatchers further by monitoring farms that are putting conservation management into practice to assess what difference their efforts make to the bird populations.

In 2012 we tried a new survey method on eight dairy farms. It can be repeated several years later to evaluate whether populations of key farmland species have changed.

Richard Winspear was one of the volunteers. He said: "I volunteered to survey a farm in Leicestershire and, as always, found the volunteering experience very rewarding. The survey method was slightly more onerous than usual: four visits and a walk within 100 metres of every point in the survey area. We are looking to refine the method before rolling it out further in the hope that we can get the survey time down to a maximum of four hours per visit. I had not expected the farm to be in such a farmland bird hotspot, with grey partridges, yellow wagtails, tree sparrows and corn buntings all breeding. Corn buntings are rare in the

east Midlands now, and virtually extinct in my home patch of south Derbyshire less than 10 miles away. Tree sparrows (below) were nesting in virtually every ash tree around the farm. The farmer is already in HLS but was keen to learn more about the birds on his farm to inform future agreements."

For more information contact Richard Winspear at [richard.winspear@rspb.org.uk](mailto:richard.winspear@rspb.org.uk)



# Big Garden Birdwatch a success

Thank you to everyone who stepped up for nature by taking part in this year's Big Garden Birdwatch. Now in its 33rd year, this was the second biggest Birdwatch ever, with an incredible 592,475 people getting involved. Over nine million birds of 73 different species were counted over the course of the Birdwatch weekend.

House sparrows top the list for the ninth consecutive year. However, their numbers are much lower than they were back when the survey began in 1979. They were seen in over 60% of gardens, with an average of four per garden, compared with 10 per garden in 1979.

Blue tits have overtaken blackbirds to take third place, with an overall increase of 21% since 1979. Goldfinches are also up one place to number seven this year. This colourful bird has been steadily increasing in UK gardens and first reached the top 10 in 2008.

This year's results have also shown that starling numbers are at an all time low since the survey began. Starlings have been on a downward trend for the past 25 years and have declined by almost 80%. In 1979, the average number

of starlings seen in UK gardens was 15. This year, that number fell to its lowest ever with an average of just three starlings seen per garden.

These declines are being mirrored across much of northern Europe too, and because of this drop in numbers, the species is red-listed as a bird of high conservation concern. We've been monitoring this decline and research is already underway to find out more about the disappearance of these birds. Possible reasons could include changes in their feeding habitats and changes beneath the soil reducing their insect food.

After an unseasonably warm winter across much of the UK, many people weren't seeing the levels of bird activity in their gardens they usually would at the end of January. Our garden birds are much less dependent on us for food when there are plenty of berries, insects and seeds for them out in the wider countryside.

**In 2013, the Big Garden Birdwatch takes place over the weekend of the 26 and 27 January 2013. Please join in and help us make it even bigger!**

# Agri-environment schemes can halt farmland bird declines

We now know which common practical farmland measures have the greatest impact on increasing numbers of farmland birds, thanks to the latest research.

After working out what might be causing declines and finding practical solutions to halt them, we now have some answers. Agri-environment schemes across the UK already provide fairly comprehensive measures to tackle farmland bird declines.

Research is now looking at how effective these measures are when they are adopted on a landscape-scale by farmers through these schemes.

We have already seen clear benefits from very targeted action for rare

species such as corncrakes in Scotland and cirl buntings in Devon, but not much evidence of benefits from entry level schemes for our more widespread farmland birds. New research from the British Trust for Ornithology has shown that seed-eating birds, such as grey partridges, are doing better in England where farmers are leaving over-winter stubbles or creating wild bird seed mixtures through Entry Level Stewardship.

Other measures that were tested included low-input grassland, buffer strips, hedgerow management and ditch management. These measures did not show clear benefits for declining birds, probably because they do not directly address the causes of the decline. These birds

need seed food through the winter, insect food in the spring and safe places to nest.

For more information contact Richard Winspear at [richard.winspear@rspb.org.uk](mailto:richard.winspear@rspb.org.uk)



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

# Introducing Operation Turtle Dove – and how you can help a bird on the brink

Once the sound of the British summer, the turtle dove is embedded in our literary culture as a symbol of fidelity and love. It is our smallest and arguably most beautiful dove, returning home from its wintering grounds in Africa every spring to pair up with the same mate.

From April to September they raise their young, when you may hear them “purring” in scrub near ponds and farmland. The turtle dove is the only dove that migrates long distances – up to 4,000 kilometres – and the only exclusively seed-eating bird that crosses the Sahara.

Turtle doves have declined by a drastic 91% in England since the 1970s and their range has alarmingly contracted towards the east of the country in the last decade. The species faces UK extinction within the next 10 years unless we act now.

Operation Turtle Dove is a project partnership between the RSPB, Conservation Grade, Pensthorpe Conservation Trust and Natural England (NE), with aims to research

the causes of the declines and implement direct actions that land managers can take.

Current research suggests the major limiting factor for turtle doves is access to seed during the summer months. The project's ongoing research into food preferences and nutrition is giving us a much clearer picture of how we can help turtle doves.

A specially designed seed mix for turtle doves can be created by cultivating margins or plots on light land, to provide that essential summer seed resource.

If you see or hear a turtle dove next spring or summer, please call the turtle dove hotline on 01603 697527 or e-mail [turtledove@rspb.org.uk](mailto:turtledove@rspb.org.uk). We will map this information, enabling Operation Turtle Dove to target advisory work and help save a bird on the brink.

For more information on the project, go to [www.operationturtledove.org](http://www.operationturtledove.org)

## Short-haired bumblebees returned to Britain

There's been a buzz of activity as farmers and volunteers work in a partnership with NE, the RSPB, Bumblebee Conservation Trust and Hymettus (the premier source of advice on the conservation of bees, wasps and ants in the UK) to restore large areas of flower-rich grassland to farmland in England. It's all to make life easier for bumblebees, butterflies and hoverflies, and other species will benefit too.

The main focus of the project is the re-introduction of the short-haired bumblebee *Bombus subterraneus*, one of 27 native UK bumblebees. But it disappeared from our shores – it was last recorded near our Dungeness reserve in 1988 and was declared extinct in the UK in 2000.

Several other 'long-tongued' bumblebee species have also declined

through the loss of the particular flowers they needed. Species included vetches, birds-foot trefoil, red clover and knapweed, all with specially-shaped flowers and loaded with nectar or pollen.

Thanks to a massive effort, there are now more than 650 ha of suitable bumblebee-friendly habitat in the Dungeness and Romney Marsh area. You'll find it in strips sown along paths and tracks, among the uncut vegetation on sea walls, in field edges within stewardship schemes, and whole fields reverted from arable to flower-rich meadows, as we have done on our reserve. Some farmers on Romney Marsh have maintained their tradition of rotational grazing, allowing the fields to flower every other year.

A team of volunteers went to Sweden with the Project Officer this spring,

where 89 newly-emerged queen bees were caught under licence. The queens spent two weeks in quarantine at Royal Holloway, University of London, and 51 were released on our reserve in May. We're watching their every move.

For more information, contact Jane Sears at [jane.sears@rspb.org.uk](mailto:jane.sears@rspb.org.uk)



## Increasing the wildlife yield

Andrew Hughes (below) of Trinley Estate, Hampshire, tells how his farm maintains high profit levels and high quality products, while using sustainable farming practices.

"I am the managing partner in the family farming business. The 727 ha Estate grows wheat, barley and oilseed rape, and has a small herd of white park cattle. Since I returned to the Estate eight years ago, I have demonstrated that we can farm sustainably, increase wildlife, and at the same time maintain high levels of profitability.

I believe the secret to meeting the food needs of a growing world population is through good soil health and by caring for the biodiversity that lies within it. For this reason, we ceased ploughing eight years ago and have moved to a system that involves only light tillage. Earthworm numbers have significantly increased and, with the application of organic matter, we have considerably reduced input costs and increased crop yields. We use modern technology to target inputs and as a result reduce carbon emissions.

I am passionate about increasing biodiversity and the results we have achieved have come from working closely with wildlife organisations. The RSPB carries out surveys to

monitor birds, while bumblebees, butterflies, dormice and bats are recorded by other wildlife groups. Our bird populations have increased year on year. Grey partridges and other farmland birds are given particular attention when considering conservation options.

Winning the NoFA gave me a platform from which to tell the general public that we, as farmers, are aware of our responsibilities to nature on our farms as well as producing food."



## Futurescapes: connecting wildlife

Futurescapes is the RSPB's answer to a growing conservation method known as "landscape-scale conservation". As the name suggests, this is a shift towards nature conservation on a large scale, across the landscape, rather than being confined by the boundaries of small protected areas such as nature reserves. It's about getting nature into large "landscape-scale" chunks of the UK. It's a big concept.

For this huge challenge, the RSPB needs to work in partnership with lots of landowners and other organisations towards a shared vision. We all need to aim for a sustainable future for the English countryside.

**The Shropshire wetlands of the Meres and Mosses**  
It's hardly a household name, but the peat-rich landscape of the Meres and Mosses is the largest group of lowland lakes in England, has the highest density of ponds anywhere in Europe and is home to important wildlife such as lapwings, corn buntings, dragonflies and water voles.

This massive rural area, spanning Shropshire, Cheshire and the fringes of Wales, is one of the RSPB's Futurescapes – the Shropshire wetlands.

In partnership with NE, the Environment Agency and the Shropshire Wildlife Trust, the RSPB's work to restore the boggy splendour of some of the 13,500 ha of peatland in the Meres and Mosses began in 2009. A team of local volunteers surveyed over 3,500 ha of participating farmers' land in north Shropshire for breeding waders. These farmers received conservation advice from the RSPB, and help with starting and carrying out agri-environment projects.

Last year, the SITA Trust awarded a small grant to help with wetland restoration works on three farms in the Shropshire wetlands. For farmer Kevin O'Neil, who farms north of Telford, this means new sluices and scrapes to re-wet his reverted grass fields. For his neighbour, Neil Dobson, it means some specialist machinery to help address invasive rush in his existing wet grassland. For the breeding waders of the area, it adds up to more habitat, in better condition. We hope that this will be part of a lasting partnership that makes a difference for wildlife forever.

For more information on Futurescapes, and how you might get involved, please visit [www.rspb.org.uk/futurescapes](http://www.rspb.org.uk/futurescapes)

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



# What do farmers think of the V&FA?

**Feedback from farmers about the V&FA allows us to review and make improvements so it continues to be beneficial for all involved.**

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

The questionnaires from farmers who replied in 2011 show that:

- 98% found the laminated map useful
- 97% felt that taking part in the V&FA was a worthwhile experience
- 88% have put the farmland bird management guidelines that accompanied the map into practice
- 84% had species on their farms that they had not previously noticed
- 65% reported they were more aware of policies such as the Birds Directive.

# And what do volunteers think?

The questionnaires completed by volunteers who took part in the V&FA in 2011 show that:

- 97% enjoyed participating in the V&FA
- 97% felt the training they received was either good or excellent
- 97% were satisfied with the level of support they received
- 82% felt their understanding of farmland birds and conservation had improved
- 75% reported that no problems were encountered during the surveys
- 70% reported that they were more aware of policies like the 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 Birds Directive

**The Birds Directive aims to protect biodiversity in Europe. The work described in this newsletter promotes the importance of the 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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**Eastern England Regional Office** Stalham House, 65 Thorpe Road, Norwich NR1 1UD Tel: 01603 661662  
**Northern England Region** 1 Sirius House, Amethyst Road, Newcastle Business Park,  
Newcastle upon Tyne NE4 7YL Tel: 0191 256 8200  
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East Sussex BN1 1UF Tel: 01273 775333  
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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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