

**Farmer: Jack Kelly**  
**County: County Down**  
**Farming system: Mixed (predominantly arable)**  
**Farm size: 36HA**

**What key conservation measures have been undertaken on the farm and what evidence is there of benefit for wildlife?**

### **Birds**

Jack's farm lies within the heart of County Down, Northern Ireland's main arable region. As a result, most of the measures taken have been directed towards seed-eating farmland birds. Key measures include sowing Wild Bird Cover and the retention of winter stubble after the harvest to provide an additional food source during the winter in the form of split grain and seeds. The hedges are maintained in the classic 'A' shape which provide a thick, dense cover for birds such as yellowhammer, which require cover for nesting and foraging. The grassy field margins provide an overwintering site for insects which the farmland birds feed their chicks with during the summer months.

Jack was involved in the Yellowhammer Recovery Project over a five year period (2006-2011). By the end of the project, yellowhammer numbers remained consistently high and tree sparrow numbers increased considerably. The priority species, yellowhammer, linnet, reed bunting and tree sparrow all thrive on the farm. Jack was involved in the Volunteer and Farmer Alliance Project in 2002 and 2010, which recorded 38 species. Barn owls have been sighted in the vicinity, so barn owl boxes have been put in place. Kestrel and tree sparrow nest boxes have also been erected in appropriate places. The judges were pleased to watch a population of tree sparrows actively using the purposely built nest boxes in late April.

Although the farm is predominantly arable, wading birds have also been sighted. This year, one pair of lapwing nested and two chicks successfully fledged. Jack also provides supplementary grain for ground-feeding birds during cold periods. Jack hopes to grow sunflowers this year (as he has done in previous years) to provide an additional resource for farmland birds.

Jack and his family have reported the sightings of 4 kingfishers along the river. Due to appropriate management, the river is clean, with overhanging branches which provide perching sites for kingfishers. The river supports fish such as sticklebacks which provide an excellent food source for the kingfishers. Jack and his family appreciate and support the house martins that are nesting under the eaves of their house. Jack has cut a section out of a farm house door so that the nesting swallows can fly in and out of the building at all times; a simple but important measure.

### **Butterflies**

Insects, including butterflies and moths, are benefitting from the knock-on effects of the measures put in place for farmland birds. During the summer months the Wild Bird Cover provides a nectar-rich habitat, as does the orchard and species-rich grassland. The grassy field margins are important sites for overwintering insects, which emerge in the summer, providing invertebrate food for chicks. As the field beans produce a bright purple flower, they attract bumblebees and with the growth of wildflowers between the beans, it is an important habitat for insects. To identify the butterfly and moth species that can be found on Jack's farm, we placed moth traps on two occasions, with the help of Catherine Bertrand, Regional Officer at Butterfly Conservation. All of Jack's family were very

interested in discovering what we had captured and we were not disappointed. Jack's ancient trees and thick hedges provide ideal habitats for the caterpillars. There is low input of fertilizers/herbicides and pesticides as a measure to conserve insects.

### **Plants**

There are a number of ancient trees in a wooded section of the farm. Jack has also planted sections of new woodland in recent years. There are a number of wildflower species growing in the species-rich grassland and around the base of the hedgerows. The species-rich grassland and bean field are rich in wildflowers, including self-heal, devil's bit scabious and tufted vetch.

### **Other wildlife**

The freshwater river is kept free from agricultural run-off to encourage aquatic wildlife such as frogs, fish, birds, mammals and freshwater invertebrates. Otters have been reported using the river in recent years. Bats were also recorded foraging close to the house during the initial visit in April. As this site lies close to the river, there is an abundance of night-flying insects which provide an excellent food source. Irish hares are a common sight on the farm; the judges noted three hares on a pastoral field, grazed by sheep. The well managed hedgerows provide shelter and commuting routes for small mammals, including mice, shrews and bats.

### **Is the farm a well-run commercial operation and on what basis has this been assessed?**

Jack runs a small business through locally selling cereal crops (oats, barley and wheat) which are rolled as meal for livestock. He also breeds and releases pheasants into the countryside as part of a small shooting business to provide an additional income. Wildlife conservation is well integrated into the small businesses. For instance, field beans are grown in one field as a food source for the free-ranging pheasants but, as Jack understands, this also increases the nitrogen content of the soil through nitrogen-fixing bacteria in the root nodules, which aids the subsequent growth of soil crops (a 'natural fertiliser'). Cereal crops and field beans are sown on a rotational basis. Jack also sells the beans to pigeon fanciers.

Although Jack's farm is small in size, he makes excellent use of the land available to satisfy the business needs and those of the wildlife. Jack's farm is an excellent example of how conservation can be incorporated into the running a small farm. The Kelly's are dependent on the farm for the survival of the business but Jack ensures that wildlife is supported at all times.

As Jack is no longer under the DARD Agri-environment scheme, the Northern Ireland Countryside Management Scheme (NICMS), he receives no additional payment for the conservation measures he continues to take.

### **How has the farmer demonstrated they understand how the conservation action benefits the wildlife on the farm and shown enthusiasm for the conservation work undertaken?**

Jack and his family are extremely enthusiastic about the wildlife on the farm. Jack understands the importance of his farm and County Down as a whole, as the main arable region of Northern Ireland. As a result, he directs his conservation efforts at seed-eating farmland birds. Due to a strong interest, Jack is knowledgeable about local wildlife and is always keen to discuss it with others. The management is targeted at the appropriate species, namely yellowhammer, linnet, reed bunting and tree sparrow, through the selection of the NICMS arable options. Jack understands that these options cannot be used in isolation and various options are required to provide birds with nesting sites and

food throughout the year i.e. the 'big 3' (e.g. wild bird cover as a food source and 'A' shaped hedges as a nesting site/summer food).

Due to sightings of barn owls and kestrels, Jack has installed suitable nest boxes for these species. As kestrels were observed over a particular field, Jack placed a kestrel box here and although kestrels started to nest in the box, jackdaws took over. Therefore, Jack took the initiative to move the kestrel box which was then successfully used. Similarly, Jack has installed multiple nest boxes specific to tree sparrow, which are being used successfully. Jack is also aware that his land includes areas of wetland, which lies adjacent to the Ballynagross Lower ASSI, thus he manages these areas sensitively to avoid damaging this priority habitat.

Despite changes in agricultural practices, Jack has deliberately continued in farm in a traditional way. For example, Jack continues to harvest hay/hayage, instead of silage, and uses classical smaller farm machines which are more suited to the small fields of the farm.

Jack takes pride in his 'A-shaped' hedges which he has trimmed in this way for over 20 years to benefit the wildlife on his farm. After reading about such hedges, Jack decided to trim them in this way on a 2-3 year basis. Jack shows initiative when providing for wildlife as he supplies supplementary grain for seed-eating birds to aid their survival during particularly cold periods.

#### **How has the farmer been successful in maintaining, restoring and creating habitats on the farm?**

The abundance of wildlife on the farm highlights Jack's success in maintaining, restoring and creating habitats suitable for a range of plants and animals. As mentioned previously, despite being out of the NICMS, the wild bird cover and retained winter stubble options have been maintained. New woodland has been created and is now established, which provides an excellent habitat for invertebrates, mammals and woodland birds such as tits, thrushes, sparrows and finches. There are a number of ancient trees which provide an excellent habitat for insects, including moth larvae, and fungi. The riverine habitats are well maintained and buffer zones around the river reduce the risk of agricultural run-off and subsequent eutrophication and/or pollution. In fact, an environmental organization recently gathered weed from the river to place in their ponds as a cleaning mechanism. The hedges have been well maintained to ensure they remain thick, dense and gaps are not able to develop. The farm has been used to demonstrate best practice and has been used by the RSPB policy group for training events.

#### **What future improvements does the farmer plan to make to further enhance the wildlife value of the farm?**

Due to the success of the nesting lapwing, Jack would like to encourage more nesting lapwing and he will continue to support his important populations of tree sparrow, yellowhammer, linnets and reed bunting. Jack and his son are aware of the importance of renewable energy and would like to produce fire wood by coppicing ash in the future. Jack would also like to be supported by the Agri-environment NICS once again so that he can continue to improve his farm for wildlife through the use of additional options.

#### **Has the farmer demonstrated a willingness, and/or ability to successfully promote the conservation messages of their activities to others?**

Jack is an extremely friendly and warm man and enjoys conversing with others. He is very humble in his approach and believes that he is "just doing his bit for wildlife" although it is much more than this. Jack is never without a smile on his face and thoroughly enjoys his

work on the farm. Every visit to Jack's farm is one greeted with plenty of laughs, cups of tea and stories to tell about the wildlife on the farm.

We believe Jack is an inspiration to other farmers. He shows that in a small farm, you can still create space for wildlife, all of which he does without payment. Jack is willing to promote the conservation messages of his activities to others through media. For example, a television company were interested in talking to Jack about his hedges, which Jack was happy to do and he also appeared in a local newspaper, Farming Life. Jack is everything that a Nature of Farming Award winner should be: enthusiastic, passionate and with a desire to continue to conserve the wildlife on his farm.