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THE GAME  
CONSERVANCY  
TRUST

# Beetle banks

*Beetle banks are 2 m wide grass banks that run through the middle of large arable fields. They don't have to connect with the field edge, so the field can still be farmed as one unit. These banks are generally appropriate for fields larger than 16 ha and more than 400 m wide – fields larger than 30 ha may warrant more than one beetle bank. Grass buffer strips can be used on either side of the bank to create wider features, boosting the wildlife benefits further.*

Beetle banks can be used to provide more tussocky grassland within large-scale arable farmland, which is important for a wide range of wildlife.

## BENEFITS FOR WILDLIFE

### Beetle banks boost numbers of beneficial insects and spiders on arable farmland

A tussocky grass strip through the middle of a field will provide essential over-wintering habitat for many insects and spiders, which will then move into the crop in spring to feed on crop pests. These species can travel up to 250 m from grass field margins in spring, so they do not reach the centre of large fields. Beetle banks provide over-wintering habitat that enables

predatory insects to cover the whole field. The increased abundance of insects also provides food for many birds and their young.

### Beetle banks provide habitat for ground-nesting birds and small mammals

A tussocky grass strip through the middle of a field provides habitat for species that prefer to nest in open farmland away from field boundaries, such as corn buntings and skylarks, and mammals such as harvest mice.



## HOW CAN I CREATE AND MANAGE A BEETLE BANK?

### CREATING A BEETLE BANK

- September is the best month to establish the grass sward on a beetle bank.
- Plough furrows towards each other from either side during cultivation of the field to create a raised bank of about 0.4 m along the plough line. The headland at each end of the beetle bank can remain cropped.
- The grass mix should include a high proportion of tussock-forming species such as cock's-foot or Timothy grass. The rest of the mix can consist of fescues and bents. All species should be of native origin.
- The seed should be broadcast at a rate of 30 kg/ha (3 g/m<sup>2</sup>) immediately after cultivation to get good establishment.
- Three cuts may be necessary in the first summer (when the sward reaches 10 cm in height) to encourage the grasses to tiller and help control invasive weeds. Weeds can also be controlled by spot spraying or use of a weed-wiper.

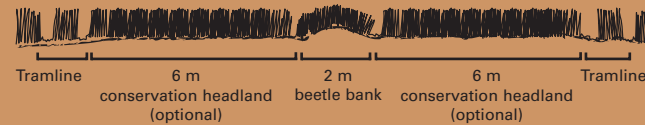
- After establishment, the grass strips should only be cut when there is a need to prevent scrub encroachment or to get the dead tussocks to regenerate (this should be no more than once every three years).

### PROTECTION FROM SPRAYS

- Beetle banks are particularly vulnerable to the effects of pesticide drift because these narrow strips are sprayed on either side.

- On light soils with low weed burdens, conservation headland management on either side of the bank, whenever the adjacent crop is a cereal, will enhance its value for insects and birds.
- Alternatively, grass buffer strips, pollen and nectar mixtures or wild bird seed mixtures can be created adjacent to the beetle bank to buffer it from pesticides and boost the wildlife benefits further.

### 1 Drawing of profile of beetle bank plus conservation headland



### 2 Drawing of plan view showing how field is still farmed as one unit



## KEY POINTS

Beetle banks can boost predatory insect numbers that help pest control.

The field headland can remain intact so the whole field is still farmed as one unit.

Benefits can be boosted by measures to protect the banks from pesticide sprays.

You can get further information on this and other ways of managing your farm for wildlife from:



Agricultural Adviser, The RSPB, UK Headquarters, The Lodge, Sandy, Bedfordshire SG19 2DL. Tel: 01767 680551  
[www.rspb.org.uk/farming](http://www.rspb.org.uk/farming)



Farming and Wildlife Advisory Group, NAC, Stoneleigh, Kenilworth, Warwickshire CV8 2RX. Tel: 024 7669 6699  
[www.fwag.org.uk](http://www.fwag.org.uk)



The Game Conservancy Trust, Fordingbridge, Hampshire SP6 1EF. Tel: 01425 652381  
[www.gct.org.uk](http://www.gct.org.uk)

The Defra ELS and OELS schemes can fund this type of management. For full details, refer to the scheme handbooks.

**ELS** = Entry Level Stewardship

**OELS** = Organic Entry Level Stewardship

See also the RSPB advisory sheets on:  
Conservation headlands  
Buffer strips on cultivated land  
Pollen and nectar mixtures  
Wild bird seed mixtures