

Spring 2013



Red data list bird

Found on CG Farm

CAP Reform

Update on greening

Honeybees can't do it alone

Other important pollinators

**Two new licensees
join the movement**

Inside this issue of the Conservation Grade newsletter:

- 2 New Licensees join CG
- 3 Red data list bird on CG farm
- 4 Yorkshire Post's 'Farm of the week'
- 5 Ecosystem Markets Task Force
- 6 IFST Conference
- 7 Agri-environment in 2014 & beyond
- 8 CG research paper published
- 9 CAP Reform update
- 10 Thompson's topical tips
- 12 Honeybees can't do it alone!
- 13 10% means a lot to nature!
- 14 EU to ban three neonicotinoid insecticides
- 15 BEST options for birds
- 16 Operation Turtle Dove update

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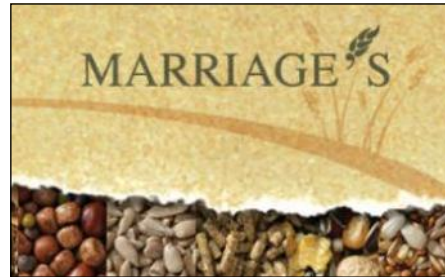
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Marriage's Specialist Foods and Forevergreen Foods join the CG stable

We would like to welcome two new licensees to Conservation Grade...



Marriage's Specialist Foods will be using wheat and oats and as well as other crops in due course for inclusion in their wild bird food products. Their bird food mixes are sold via one of the UK's largest online bird food companies and one of the most progressive suppliers in the Garden Centre sector. The RSPB estimate that 55% of house-

holds feed wild birds. In the last decade this sector has experienced significant growth with an estimated worth of £260 million p.a. "It seems common sense that the bird food in the pack helps save wildlife back on the farms where the ingredients were grown" says Ed Olphin. "We are looking forward to working with Sam Marriage and his team to help us grow the business".



Forevergreen are pioneers in high welfare egg production. Nigel Williams's free-range hens will be enjoying 'gourmet' nature friendly ingredients in their feeds. "Why should the eggs we

eat be laid at the expense of other wildlife? It doesn't make sense and it doesn't have to be this way" says Ed. "Pioneers like our Conservation Grade farmers and Nigel Williams are proving that when consumers are offered food that's fair to nature it's a choice that more and more of them are keen to make".

Half the UK's wheat goes to animal feed or industrial use according to Nabim. The horsemeat debacle has made big businesses look closely at their supply chains. Many manufacturers are realising that providing value to consumers is important, but not if it comes at the expense of values, which are increasingly an essential element of 21st century branding. 'Doing good' certainly seems to be good business, with 50% of eggs now Free Range and the Fairtrade logo on KitKats, Mars Bars and Cadbury's Dairy Milk. Values are therefore high on the menu for UK consumers who are increasingly looking for substance and not spin.

The recent endorsement of Conservation Grade by our partners at the RSPB demonstrates the excellent evidence based farming protocols and on-farm wildlife delivery. "Our message is simple. Conservation Grade means food that's fair to nature" says Ed "Fairtrade is about being fair to people (abroad) and that's now a £1.5bn market. Our time at CG is coming and over the next year we will be speaking with some of the UK's biggest brands".

Research by the Co-operative in their 2012 ethical report shows that 50% of consumers surveyed would avoid a product based on a company's

(Continued on page 3)

(Continued from page 2) *Marriage's Specialist Foods and Forevergreen Foods join the CG stable*

responsible reputation. "We are here to help find solutions for brands to switch their supply to Conservation Grade. It makes sense for consumers, our environment, for nature and for future generations. We are therefore redoubling our efforts to convey our message simply, often and with more impact" said Ed.

Biodiversity loss is getting more headlines. The Times recently reported the plight of the hedgehog in the UK and that it could become extinct with estimated UK numbers plummeting from fifty-five million to less than one million since 1955. The hedgehog is not alone. Since 1970 a 70% decline in bees, a 71% decline in butterflies and a 52% reduction in farm birds in the UK has been recorded. Conservation Grade, the RSPB, Natural England and the Pensthorpe Conservation Trust have teamed up to save the Turtle Dove which has suffered a 93% decline in numbers in the UK and is threatened with extinction.

With Ed joining the team, the marketing capability of Conservation Grade has been significantly boosted; alongside plans for a new website with embedded videos and more social networking links. So if you've got any good ideas of how we can access to new markets for your crops, drop him a line on: ed.olphin@conservationgrade.org.

Red data list bird found on CG farm



New CG member, and keen environmentalist, Graham Birch (pictured left) was delighted to spot a rare Ring Ouzel on his Hedge End Farm in Dorset during early April.

The **Ring Ouzel** (*Turdus torquatus*) is a European member of the thrush family Turdidae. It is the mountain equivalent of the closely related Common Blackbird, and is a summer migrant to Europe, where it is characteristically associated with upland areas. The British population has declined steadily since early in the 20th century, and the species range contracted by 27% between 1970 and 1990. A national survey in 1999 suggested that this decline was continuing and estimated that fewer than 7,600 pairs remained. As a result, the species is now of high conservation concern in Britain.



Ring Ouzel (*Turdus torquatus*)

British and continental ouzels winter in similar areas of Spain and north-west Africa, and although the species has declined in Britain its numbers are thought to be relatively stable on the continent. It is therefore thought that the decline in British breeding ouzels is due to factors in Britain, rather than elsewhere.



Fieldfare (*Turdus pilaris*)

Graham is a relative newcomer to farming, following retirement from a successful career in the city; where he was manager of Blackrock's \$6.9bn World Gold Fund. He now runs a dairy farm in Dorset with a 300 milking cow herd, 200 youngstock and 900 ewes; as well as an arable farm near St Albans.

Graham said "Hedge End Farm has also been the temporary home of large numbers of Fieldfares all winter; they like to follow the cultivations. But the Ring Ouzel was especially exciting; it's the first time I've seen one on the farm, although I think it was just passing through".



CG Farm is Yorkshire Post's 'Farm of the Week'



Photo: Ben Barnett/Yorkshire Post

New CG members David and Helen Rhodes (pictured left) were recently featured in the Yorkshire Post as its 'Farm of the Week'. David and Helen, who joined CG last year, farm at New Hall Farm in Ardsley, on the urban fringe of Wombwell near Barnsley. They are one of two new CG farms in Yorkshire who are growing CG milling wheat for Allied Mills for use in their Allinson and Burgen bread loaves.

The Yorkshire Post chose to feature David and Helen's farm when they heard of their membership of Conservation Grade and especially their involvement with the Conservation Grade Barn Owl Project.

Conservation is something they passionately believe in on their 800 acre farm, having started-out planting hedgerows, as recipients of hedgerow incentive payments from their local council over 30 years ago.

Helen says: "It's really important to get the right balance between food production but not to wipe out the biodiversity. By effectively having ten per cent of our farm dedicated to conservation measures we're specifically targeting and supporting wildlife". "We feel as though we're doing something we can pass on to another generation. We're not leaving something that's been totally denuded. Producing affordable food whilst respecting biodiversity is really rewarding" she said.

Conservation Grade Regional Updates

Our Summer 2013 Regional Update days for farmer members are coming up soon. On the 4th June we are visiting Moundsmere Estate near Basingstoke, Hampshire for the Southern Region Update; on the 25th June we will be at Stoke Plain Farm near Towcester, Northamptonshire for the Central Region Update; and the Eastern Region Update on the 3rd July will see us at Lark Hall Farm near Newmarket, Suffolk.

We hope you can join us for a morning of discussion and updates from Brin Hughes and our new

Business Development Director, Ed Olphin; a talk from Plantlife expert, Cath Shelswell; followed by a farm tour in the afternoon to walk off the delicious lunch and talk wildlife habitats with Peter Thompson.

If you haven't booked your place, please give Helen a call on **01767 679950** or email helen.cox@conservationgrade.org



Realising Nature's value: Ecosystem markets task force



The 'Ecosystem Markets Task Force' recently published its Final Report¹, which states the business case for why nature matters.

Conservation Grade certification is highlighted as a key market-led approach to nature-based certification and labelling and plays an important role in connecting consumers with nature.

The report makes practical recommendations for both Government and business where interventions would assist in the creation and development of new markets, enhancing opportunities for growth that also benefit the environment. The report affirms that business is often unaware of its true reliance on nature, and that a new approach is needed to maximise opportunities and manage future risks.

Five 'headline' or priority recommendations are put forward as follows:

- 1) Biodiversity offsetting: securing net gain for nature from planning and development
- 2) Closing the loop: anaerobic digestion and bioenergy on farms
- 3) Local woodfuel supply chains: active sustainable management supporting local economies
- 4) Nature-based certification and labelling: connecting consumers with nature
- 5) Water cycle catchment management: integrating nature into water, waste water and flood management.

For each recommendation the Report highlights the size of the opportunity, both in terms of its economic value and its potential benefits to nature. In arriving at these recommendations the 'Task Force' looked for priorities that will deliver both opportunities to business and real gains to nature. As part of this process, a significant evidence base was generated, which has helped to inform 'Task Force' thinking, including a wide-ranging analysis of areas of opportunity.

¹The Final report is available at:

<http://www.defra.gov.uk/ecosystem-markets/files/Ecosystem-Markets-Task-Force-Final-Report-.pdf>

A banner for the 'Cereals' event, 'The Arable Event', held on 12-13th June 2013 at Boothby Graffoe, Nr Lincoln, Lincs. The banner features a background of a field of colorful wildflowers (red poppies, purple cornflowers, white daisies). The text is overlaid on a white background. The word 'cereals' is in a large, red, lowercase font. Below it, 'The Arable Event' is written in a smaller, green, lowercase font. To the right, the dates '12-13th June 2013' are in a large, red, uppercase font, and the location 'Boothby Graffoe, Nr Lincoln, Lincs' is in a smaller, grey, uppercase font. A white text box at the bottom of the banner contains the following message: 'Conservation Grade will be on the Kings Game Cover & Conservation Crops stand (10-J-1012) on both days at Cereals once again this year, courtesy of Richard Barnes at Kings. We would be delighted to see as many CG members and prospective members as possible so please take a moment out of your day to come and say 'hello'.'

cereals
The Arable Event

12-13th June 2013
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Conservation Grade at the IFST Conference

On the 17th April, Conservation Grade chairman, Bill Jordan, gave the after-dinner speech to over a hundred delegates at the conference dinner of the Institute of Food Science and Technology. Entitled “Embedding biodiversity into the supply chain - Getting more buzz, tweets and splash for your cash”, Bill’s speech centred on the key sustainability issue facing the food industry - biodiversity loss. Leading scientists have indicated that biodiversity loss is by far the largest and most critical breach of the ‘planetary boundaries’ that mark the ‘safe zone’ essential for human survival.

Here is an excerpt from that speech:

“.....leading conservation ecologist Gretchen Daily claims that “it’s time to confront the hard truth that traditional approaches to conservation, taken alone, are doomed to fail. Nature reserves are too small, too few, too isolated and too subject to change to support more than a tiny fraction of Earth’s bio-diversity”. The challenge is to make conservation attractive - from both the economic and cultural perspective. We cannot go on treating nature like an all-you-can-eat buffet. We depend on nature for food security, clean water, climate stability, seafood, timber, and other biological and physical services. To maintain these benefits, we need not just remote reserves but places for nature everywhere - ‘ecosystem service stations’ across the countryside. Integrating conservation and farming is therefore the biggest sustainability game in town.

This is where Conservation Grade comes in. The Economics of Ecosystems and Biodiversity (TEEB) process, commenced under Angela Merkel’s chairmanship of G8 (which specifically cites Conservation Grade), has identified that the ‘certified agricultural products’ sector will grow from \$40bn today to \$210bn by 2020 and \$900bn by 2050, dwarfing growth in other environmental certifications such as forest products (\$5bn, \$15bn and \$50bn) and biocarbon offsets (\$0.2bn; \$10+bn and \$10+bn) over the same time period.

Some leading players in our sector are beginning to get the message. Gavin Neath CBE of Unilever, not known for its soft and gentle

approach to business, has recently stated “biodiversity management has to be carried-out as THE baseline for the supply chain” and the recently-retired Defra Chief Scientist Sir Bob Watson says “we need to integrate biodiversity into every acre of farmland”. As HRH the Prince of Wales puts it: “the entire system of production and consumption is generating a systemic risk to the environment we rely on”.

But how can we pay to fix the problem without beggaring the economy? In the UK at least, to date taxpayers have led the charge through agri-environment schemes such as ELS and HLS, but even this isn’t enough and with a structurally declining tax base and aging population can it be sustained into the future? The RSPB and Natural England have their doubts and have teamed up with Conservation Grade and its licensee brands, to lead a charge to engage consumers with the magnitude of the problem and how buying food that’s ‘Fair to Nature’ can help reverse it. You can read the full speech on the CG website - www.conservationgrade.org.



Agri-environment schemes

If you want to follow progress with regard to any developments regarding Agri-environment in 2014 and beyond a good place to look is Natural England's **Scheme Development Bulletin** - (http://www.naturalengland.org.uk/Images/scheme-development-bulletin-april-2013_tcm6-35630.pdf)

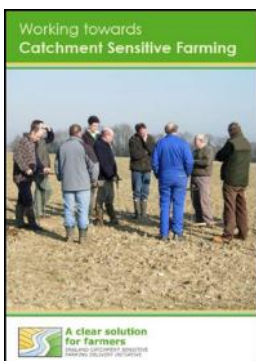
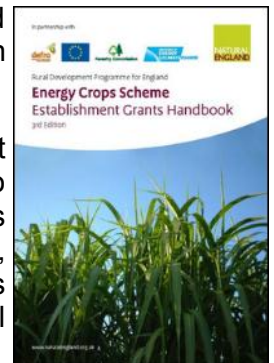
In the 2nd edition they focus on the key dates which you need to be aware of as we approach the end of the Rural Development Programme for England (RDPE) in December this year.



2013 applications - Scheme processing and key dates Remember that the current RDPE ends on 31st December 2013.

Environmental Stewardship (ES): The latest possible start date for all ES agreements is 1st December 2013; however the timeline for submitting applications differs for ELS and HLS applications. All ELS applications need to be submitted by 1st September, whilst HLS agreements will need to be submitted by the date agreed with the local adviser – please see the Information Note for further details.

Energy Crops Scheme (ECS): Any application for new agreements under the current Energy Crops Scheme must be submitted by 31st August 2013 for new agreements to start by the end of December 2013. No decision has been made on how energy crops will be supported after the current scheme comes to an end, although all existing agreements, along with all new agreements (that are finalised and signed before 31st December 2013), will continue until their agreed end date.



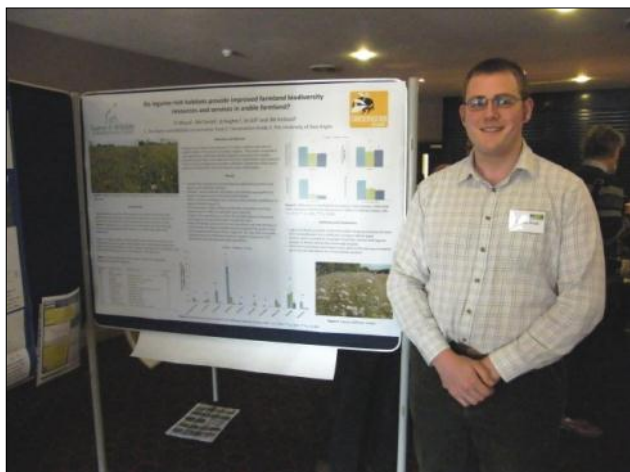
Catchment Sensitive Farming (CSF): The CSF project is entering the last year of this third phase of work which will be completed in March 2014. Discussions are underway concerning a continuation of the project's work to mitigate diffuse pollution from agriculture. Natural England hopes that further information will be available in their next Bulletin.

Soils for Profit (S4P): This project is only available in the South West region, funded by Natural England for Defra. It works with farmers across the region to help them improve their soil, manure and nutrient management whilst also signposting to other sources of support. The project ends in December 2013 with the last events available to farmers in the autumn. There are currently no confirmed plans for the project to continue into 2014.

English Woodland Grant Scheme (EWGS): The Forestry Commission have issued information regarding the application and claim dates for EWGS for the end of the current RDPE. The dates vary for the different EWGS grants – please have a look at the following website for further details:
[http://www.forestry.gov.uk/pdf/Email-Alert-130305.pdf/\\$FILE/Email-Alert-130305.pdf](http://www.forestry.gov.uk/pdf/Email-Alert-130305.pdf/$FILE/Email-Alert-130305.pdf)



CG Research paper published

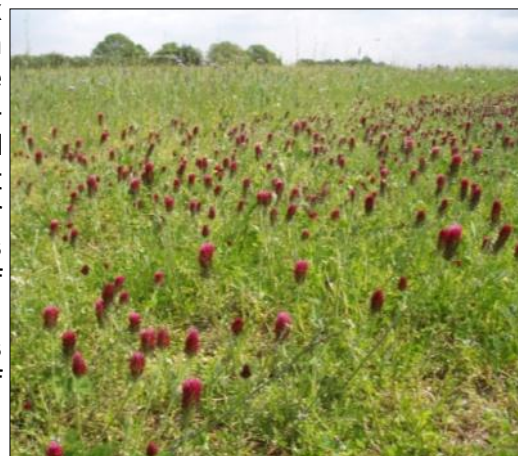


Conservation Grade's on-going trials at Pensthorpe in Norfolk were used by University of East Anglia student Tom Wood for his MSc thesis. Tom (pictured left) investigated the ability of legume-rich field margins to provide foraging resources for both pollinators and farmland birds.

Our trials are being carried out in conjunction with the Game & Wildlife Conservation Trust and are looking at the longer term rotation of CG habitats between 'Pollen & Nectar' mixes and Wild Bird Food mixes and their ability to deliver multiple biodiversity resources from the same field area.

Tom's thesis was recently published in the Aspects of Applied Biology (Vol 118, 2012, Environmental Management on Farmland) and was also the subject of a Poster at the recent AAB conference on Environmental Management on Farmland at Brigg, North Lincolnshire on 23-25th April.

In the project Tom investigated a newly designed CG legume mix and compared it to existing wildflower and basic grass margin options. The results showed that the legume strips attracted the greatest abundance and diversity of pollinators. Both the long-tongued *Bombus pascuorum* and the relatively short-tongued *Bombus lapidarius* showed a preference for the legume strips but no significant pollinator preferences were observed for other habitat types. Most interestingly, whilst all three habitats supported the same total abundance and biomass of invertebrates, only the legume strips provided sufficient foraging resources to support developing game bird chicks. The results confirm the potential value of legume-rich habitats as a means of supporting multiple taxa within agricultural environments.



Supporting Conservation Grade members

We'd like to remind Conservation Grade members that Kings are offering a 10% discount against the RRP as listed in their 2013 catalogue for all orders of conservation and game cover products. This applies to standard products and special mixtures for ELS and HLS.

To order your copy of the Kings 2013 catalogue, please call 0800 587 9797 or email kingscrops@frontierag.co.uk.

When ordering, please state 'CG2013' and have your CG membership number to hand.



CAP Reform - update on 'greening'

On 20th March 2013, the European Parliament finally adopted the Agriculture Council's general approach on the reform of the EU farm policy. However, the final shape of the new policy will be decided by the European Parliament, EU farm ministers and the European Commission, in three-way negotiations which are set to begin on 11 April.

MEPs have already voted in favour of allowing existing environmental schemes (e.g. ELS/HLS) to qualify farmers for the 30% of direct payments conditional on "greening" measures under the CAP reform proposals.

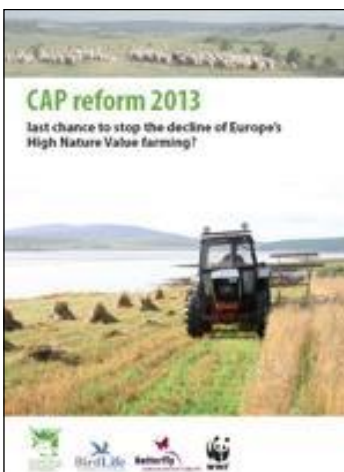
Also the proposed Ecological focus areas (EFAs) have been reduced to at least 3% of farmland rather than 7% originally proposed (possibly increasing to 5% from 2016 and 7% from 2017)

This would exempt anyone in recognized agri-environment schemes from setting aside an ecological focus area as well as having to meet greening requirements on permanent pasture and crop diversity, as long as the schemes they are in have at least an equivalent effect to that of the greening measures.

In addition, farmers with holdings certified under national or regional environmental certification schemes (e.g. Conservation Grade) would be deemed to be compliant with the greening measures. The certification schemes will need to be validated by the Commission to ensure that they are 'equivalent' and it is proposed that they could include measures such as: an on farm nutrient management plan; an on farm energy efficiency plan on their holding, including optimisation of the use of effluents; a biodiversity action plan – including creation or maintenance of biodiversity corridors; a water management plan; soil cover; or integrated pest management.



The reactions from different stakeholders, NGOs and environmental campaigners have been mixed. WWF, Friends of the Earth Europe, EEB and BirdLife Europe, all worry that the compromise agreements, if accepted, would be environmentally damaging, not just limiting the potential of farming to deliver environmental benefits but marking a "step backwards" in terms of the very real environmental advances made by farmers in response to past reforms.



Defra Secretary of State, Owen Paterson, meanwhile is pursuing the idea of increasing funding for Agri-environment schemes by way of increasing the level of 'Voluntary Modulation' funding transferred from 'Pillar 1' (direct payments) to 'Pillar 2' (rural development).

Conservation Grade and its licensees agree that without modulation, we wouldn't have been able to afford the entry level stewardship scheme in England as well as the higher level scheme. Whilst the premium that CG farmers earn for their CG accredited crops is crucial, without that extra ELS/HLS payment many farms would struggle to afford to maintain the all-important nature delivering habitats. CG and its licensees have therefore written to Owen Paterson, formally supporting his intention to continue with voluntary modulation.





Thompson's Topical CG Tips

Rodenticides

The Health and Safety Executive (HSE) have moved to ban the use (away from buildings) of difenacoum and bromadiolone rat poisons. Residues of these chemicals turn up in a high percentage of predators and scavengers and the HSE says the only way to reduce this is to limit their use to 'in and around buildings'.

Many organisations connected with managing the countryside, including pest control companies, are very concerned about rat control across farmland and in particular open areas like parks and recreation grounds, where there is a serious public health risk and often shooting, trapping and gassing simply cannot be used.

The current situation is that all old difenacoum products, labelled for outdoor use, must stop being used that way from 24 October 2013. The equivalent use-up period for old-labelled bromadiolone products will end in spring 2014. New products (both compounds), now being labelled for 'in and around buildings only' must all be used in that way, even now.

The HSE has responded to pressure by calling a meeting of all stakeholders on 23 April. There are indications that the HSE may back-track, at least for outdoor rat control linked to public health. They are also now suggesting a licensing route for exceptional outdoor use for other reasons.



A little reminder on establishing wild flowers!!

If you are planning to renew (or create) wildflower pollen & nectar areas this summer, here are some tips:

Firstly, use *Glyphosate* to burn-off the chosen areas and then cultivate. You can leave the cultivated area for a while to let it green up again through natural regeneration, then use another spray prior to sowing, as this would certainly help knock the weeds back and give you a nice clean area in which to sow. Docks, Thistles, Ragwort etc., can all be a nuisance in later years, so getting rid of these at the beginning will save you a lot of hassle in the future. Aim to sow the wildflower seeds in July or August, as these are the best months to establish a mix.

Suitable mixes are suggested in your CG Training Manual but basically choose flowers such as Knapweed, Scabious, Birds foot trefoil, Oxeye daisy, Meadow cranesbill, Cowslip and Yarrow, and broadcast then roll them in – do not drill them, as it will be too deep for the seed. Add fine grasses, such as Sheeps fescue, Crested dogs tail, Common bent etc. and either drill them separately or broadcast with the flower seed into a clean seedbed.

Sow the grasses at about 20kg/hectare (18lb/acre) and wildflowers at about 1.25kg/hectare (1lb/acre) - which is half what many seed suppliers recommend. But on heavy, more fertile ground, where establishing flowers is more difficult, it usually pays to increase the wild flower seed rate.



This mix of flowers will give you a succession of colour through the year. Thereafter, in year one after sowing – mow at least three times – more if possible; basically don't let anything grow above about 4 inches in height until the flowers have successfully established. In year two and onwards

(Continued on page 11)



(Continued from page 10) *Thompson's Topical CG Tips*

– mow once a year in the autumn or winter and remove the cuttings if possible. You can buy 'readymade' mixes for various soil types, or make up your own mix as suggested above. Do not waste money by adding annuals (Cornflower/Corn marigold/Phacelia etc.) to the perennial mix – as you need to cut this area regularly in the first year.

If there are patches of weed species such as Creeping thistle in year one – spot treat these BEFORE they spread and become a real problem on a wider scale. In the August after establishment (a year after planting), you could scatter some seed of the plant "Yellow rattle" which is an annual, but survives in a perennial sward as long as you let it seed each year before cutting. It is parasitic on grasses and therefore reduces their competitiveness, allowing better establishment of the flowers. It also has a pretty yellow flower much favoured by bees.

Remember, all the real effort is in year one – spraying, cultivation, sowing, rolling and mowing – but once established, we always say that the wild flower meadow should see you out and still be there to pass on to others!!

Wild bird seed mixes



I'm sure that many of you, after last year's problematic season, will be feeling rather negative about the thought of trying to establish wild bird mixes again this year, but try not to be – a new year means a fresh start. Our message is don't be in too much of a hurry. Soil temperatures are low for the time of year (at the time of writing!) and many plots need tidying-up after last year, where weeds seemed to replace sown crops in many cases! Take time to spray off weed growth with *Glyphosate* and then make a good seedbed. If you are still worried about the plot becoming weedy, then choose a mix that could be sprayed such as Cereals, Millets (red & white), Spring Triticale and Linseed.

As long as there is moisture, (and that does not seem to be an issue at the time of writing!) planting mixes from mid May to mid June often gives the best results. Try to deliver a range of seed size from tiny brassica sized seed, through medium millets to the larger cereal grain or Sunflower seed size. This will then supply seed through the whole range of different farmland bird species.

I know that fertiliser is expensive, but Nitrogen is fundamental to growing these crops and ideally a minimum of 50 kgs per hectare should be applied, more if you can. The difference of crops grown with and without good fertility is huge – just as it would be with your commercially grown crops!

One idea that is becoming increasingly popular is to plant a three metre Chicory strip around the outside of the plot or along the prevailing wind side of the plot. This provides really important late winter and spring cover for Grey partridge when they pair up and become very vulnerable to Sparrowhawk attack. GWCT research has shown that up to 60% can be predated at this time of year. A number of estates have built this into HLS agreements already and it seems to help in reducing the problem. When mixes are renewed this cover remains which appears crucial. It also gives shelter and warmth around the mix, and Goldfinch love the seed and Song thrush spend a lot of time 'snailing' in the bottom! This would ideally be drilled on very wide rows (36 inches) otherwise it becomes too thick in the bottom.

Supplementary feeding

Don't forget to apply for the new option of supplementary feeding. It is easiest to ask your Natural England HLS advisor. Those of you with Corn buntings resident often ask if it is OK to put barley in the feed as they have been told that Corn buntings love barley – and that is why they are sometimes known as the "fat bird of the barley". The addition of barley in the feed is not really necessary though, as Corn buntings love barley when it is growing in the field, as it is the first grain to start to ripen and therefore sought-after in June and July. In the winter, in a supplementary feeding situation, they are just as happy with wheat!



Honey bees can't do it alone!



The declines of honey bees and bumblebees, is well documented. There is huge interest in the media about how they can be protected and even suggestions that increasing their numbers is essential to the welfare of the human race, due to the important pollination services that they provide. But there are many other pollinators that need protecting too, like beetles, flies and butterflies, and perhaps more importantly wild solitary bees.

Recent research¹ challenges the widespread assumption that insects can be replaced by a single domesticated species, the honey bee; without a loss in crop production.

The researchers compared fruit set by insects in 600 fields in 41 crop systems ranging from annual and perennial fruits, seeds and nuts to stimulant crops like coffee. The results were impressive, showing that wild insects pollinated crops more effectively and enhanced fruit set by twice as much as honey bees, which only managed to increase fruit set in 14% of the systems surveyed. Hives of honeybees are frequently used for improved pollination on farms, so these results confirm that honeybees will not compensate for limited abundance and diversity of wild insects and fully maximize crop harvest.

Solitary bees, as their name suggests, live alone rather than in large colonies like honeybees or bumblebees. Many survive for just a few weeks – enough time to mate, make a nest and lay their eggs. They are particularly good at pollinating plants, for example it takes around 600 solitary bees to pollinate one hectare of orchard yet it takes an enormous 60,000 honey bees to pollinate the same orchard. Consequently, the researchers say their results suggest that new practices for integrated management of **both** honey bees and diverse wild insect populations is what is required to enhance global crop yields. Which is, of course, precisely what Conservation Grade farms achieve through the creation and management of suitable habitats for the widest range of insect pollinators; including wild solitary bees.

In the context of bee population declines the evidence points to the complexity of the issues in the field, and there is no *single* smoking gun. We know that the principal drivers of the declines have been habitat and land use change, leading to reduction in natural variety and seasonal availability of food plant species as well as agro-chemical impacts, particularly biocides, and the spread of pests and pathogens.

Conservation Grade farms adopt those essential land management practices which encourage landscape integrity, biodiversity and ecological networks to provide for the breeding and feeding needs for pollinators. This concurs with the policy emphasis in the England White Paper on Environment which emphasises the importance of landscape level ecological management and the creation and maintenance of networks. So, our approach has policy support and provides one of the key options to be pursued to help mitigate against the loss of breeding and feeding resources.

Supermarket giant Sainsbury's has taken solitary bees to its heart by appointing its very own full time bee-keeper and designing custom built bee hotels, a hundred of which it has put up in its stores and head office.

¹**Wild Pollinators Enhance Fruit Set of Crops Regardless of Honey Bee Abundance.** Lucas A. Garibaldi et al. Science 29 March 2013: Vol. 339 no. 6127 pp. 1608-1611



North America agrees that 10% means a lot to nature!



Margaret Carney, a wildlife writer from Durham County in Ontario, Canada, recently bought a packet of Jordans breakfast cereal and was so impressed with Conservation Grade that she dedicated her blog to spreading the word in North America.

Margaret writes "I've had a cereal box sitting on my desk for months. It's empty, flattened and ready for recycling, but I can't throw it out. Not till I share the fine print on the side of the carton."

"This cereal box has a small green-and-white logo in the bottom corner saying 'Conservation Grade/ Farming for Wildlife' - interesting, eh? And on the side panel, after the quality guarantee, there's a picture of a grain field, some faraway hills and a big monarch butterfly, underneath which is the intriguing statement: We insist that our cereals be grown in a way that respects nature and the environment."

"It turns out anyone who uses the 'Conservation Grade' seal on their product is buying grains from farmers who have devoted 10 per cent of their land to wildlife habitat creation. That includes maintaining ponds and hedges, establishing flower-rich grasslands and planting crops from which birds can feed in winter. They claim that on such farms there's been a 41-per cent increase in breeding birds and up to 22 different species of butterflies."

"My box of cereal was produced in Great Britain and imported to Ontario. Wouldn't it be wonderful if we imported the idea as well? So many of Ontarian's favourite birds - meadowlarks, bluebirds, bobolinks, upland sandpipers, Henslow's sparrows, Grasshopper sparrows - are suffering huge population declines because of pesticide use as well as more intense agricultural practices since the demise of the family farm. If every grower earmarked 10 per cent of their land for wildlife habitat, there could be a big turnaround in a very short time."



"Better yet, why don't we all do that? Every homeowner could preserve 10 per cent of their yard as a wildlife corner, planting wildflowers for butterflies, fruit-bearing bushes and trees for birds. Every industry could keep 10 per cent of their property as a wildlife sanctuary, instead of having asphalt cover every square inch. Every strip mall could have a 'wildlife corner' with a bench or two, where shoppers could rest their feet and listen to birds sing, before lugging home their purchases."

"Many Ontario primary schools already have a 'wildlife corner' planted by students. Many enlightened municipalities have also been naturalizing their public parks for years, and butterfly gardens are proliferating, bringing beauty to the world. I think a 'Conservation Grade' world is the next step to take."

"There, I've done it. I can put my cereal box in the recycling now, and start thinking about which 10 per cent of the yard is going to go wild."

You can read more from Margaret on:
<http://www.durhamregion.com/columnist/984522>



EU to ban three Neonicotinoid insecticides

On 29th April the European Commission confirmed they would be imposing a two year restriction on the use of neonicotinoid insecticides, starting from 1st December 2013. The decision was put to a vote by the member states but a qualifying majority was not achieved. Fifteen countries voted in favour of the ban and eight (including the UK) voted against, with four abstentions; so the Commission made the final decision.



The ban applies to Imidacloprid (e.g. Gaucho, Tripod plus), Thiomethoxam (e.g. Cruiser) and Clothianidin (e.g. Deter) and will apply to use for seed treatment, soil application (granules) and foliar treatment on “crops attractive to pollinators”; which includes arable crops such as oilseed rape, beans, maize, some cereals (but not winter cereals), and some horticultural crops such as fruit, vegetables and flowers.

There may be yet be derogations issued for specific circumstances, but these are likely to be limited to the possibility to treat bee-attractive crops in greenhouses, and in open-air fields only after flowering.

Background and CG advice

Conservation Grade has continued to monitor the debate regarding the reported effects of Neonicotinoid insecticides on pollinating insects which recently culminated in the UK Parliament’s green watchdog (The Environmental Audit Committee) urging Defra to follow a proposal by the European Commission to suspend the use of three neonicotinoids from use on “crops attractive to bees”. However, Defra did not support a ban and their recently published report¹ maintains that risks to bee populations from neonicotinoids are low.

This highlights the complexities of the debate, where recent emerging science^{2 & 3} has suggested possible sub lethal effects of certain neonicotinoids on some bee populations but, due to significant remaining knowledge gaps, such studies have not yet established convincingly that the exposures employed experimentally are likely to occur in nature^{4&5}. Indeed, a long awaited study into the effects of these seed treatments on bumble bee colonies in oilseed rape crops⁶ recorded no clear consistent relationships.

During this period, and pending the outcome of significant further on-going research⁷ and independent investigations, CG has advised its farmer members to consider using potential alternative treatments, where they exist (CG Technical Bulletin No 009, April 2012), but also highlights the significant environmental risks associated with the use of alternatives, especially those of older provenance, many of which have a greater toxicity to pollinators than neonicotinoids⁸.



(Continued on page 15)



(Continued from page 14) **EU to ban three Neonicotinoid insecticides**

Conservation of biodiversity in the agricultural landscape lies at the heart of the CG certification scheme which requires all accredited farms (unlike many conventional farms) to provide a suite of wildlife habitats designed to assist ecosystem resilience, including significant areas of pesticide-free wildflowers. The provision of these important foraging and nesting areas has been proven to increase both pollinator numbers and beneficial predators, which may in turn allow reductions in overall farm pesticide usage (a subject currently being investigated in CG's collaborative 3 year research project with Rothamsted Research).

References:

¹ *An assessment of key evidence about Neonicotinoids and bees – March 2013*

² "Neonicotinoid Pesticide Reduces Bumble Bee Colony Growth and Queen Production." *Science Express*, March 29, 2012. Dr. P.R. Whitehorn, University of Stirling, UK.

³ Henry 2012 - A Common Pesticide Decreases Foraging Success and Survival in Honey Bees. Mickaël Henry, INRA, UR406 Abeilles et Environnement, F-84914 Avignon, France

⁴ <http://www.efsa.europa.eu/en/supporting/pub/340e.htm>

⁵ <http://www.defra.gov.uk/news/2012/09/19/neonicotinoids-bees/>

⁶ Defra Project PS2371. Effects of Neonicotinoid seed treatments on bumble bee colonies under field conditions. March 2013)

⁷ BBSRC's 'Insect Pollinator Initiative (see <http://www.bbsrc.ac.uk/pollinators>

⁸ 'Combined pesticide exposure severely affects individual- and colony-level traits in bees', Richard J. Gill, Oscar Ramos-Rodriguez & Nigel E. Raine, *Nature Online*, 21st October 2012: <http://www.nature.com/nature/journal/vaop/ncurrent/full/nature11585.html>



BEST options for birds - New web based tool

BEST stands for Bird Environmental Stewardship Tool, and is a web based decision support tool to help you make the best choice of Entry Level Stewardship options easier and more effective.

It has been developed by Professor Jon Timmis from the University of York, with funding from Syngenta and input from the BTO, RSPB and Natural England and is designed to advise farmers on the optimal choices of Entry Level Stewardship options for any combination of 14 declining farmland bird species on the farm.

All farmers have to do is enter their postcode to see their farm and a list of farmland bird indicators that used to be more common. Then describe the farm briefly by ticking boxes and receive a list of best ELS options for the species selected. The recommendations rely on evidence-based research and algorithms that work out the best options for the farm.

To have a go, visit <http://www.cs.york.ac.uk/nature/dss-tool/farmLevel.html>



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BEST - Bird Environmental Stewardship Tool



An update on Operation Turtle Dove



Since late March/early April, Turtle Doves have been making their way back to the UK from their winter quarters in sub-Saharan Africa to breed. There has been a slow start to the main migration this year, probably due to the prolonged cold weather. We have a few had reports via the Operation Turtle Dove hotline of turtle dove sightings in late January and February, but then the hotline went quiet until early April. All the

sightings we receive will help us to update our sightings map. You can view last year's map on the Project website - www.operationturtledove.org. If you see a Turtle Dove, don't forget to tell us! The hotline number is **01603 697527** or email turtledove@rspb.org.uk.

For up to date news about Operation Turtle Dove, visit the Turtle Dove Talk pages on the website. Regular blogs from the project partners are interspersed with reports and pictures from the hotline. A new addition to the website is the advisory page, which currently contains the advisory sheets for farmers and gardeners. As more information on managing habitats for Turtle Doves emerges from the project research it will be made available on this page.



Project partners, Pensthorpe Conservation Trust, have a small number of captive bred Turtle Doves in a large aviary at Pensthorpe Wildlife & Gardens in Norfolk. They have

set up a camera near one of the nesting sites and have been able to capture wonderful footage of a female dove (pictured right) sitting on two eggs. We are hoping that we will soon have a link to this footage on the Project website.



Over last Christmas and New Year the Project ran a competition to find names for the two Turtle Doves in the Operation Turtle Dove logo, left. Following a public vote, the Turtle Doves were christened Heart and Hope by 6yr old Alice Stavert-Dobson from Sheffield. Alice said: "I chose 'Heart' to represent love and 'Hope' because I hope Turtle Doves will still be here in the future. I was really pleased to win the competition and I can't wait to go and see the turtle doves this summer in Pensthorpe Nature Reserve."

