

Case study: Chris Bailey, Grange Farm, Cambridgeshire



We first tried skylark plots in 2001 and were **amazed by the scale of recovery of our skylark population**. Numbers increased from 10 pairs in 2000 to a peak of 33 pairs in 2006. This year, there are likely to be between 25 and 30 pairs.

Bird researchers on the farm found that more skylarks continued to breed throughout the season and more chicks were reared per nesting attempt in fields with skylark plots. In total, skylark plots increases number of chicks reared per hectare by 50%.

Now that skylark plots are in Entry Level Stewardship, **they are the best paid option** in terms of payment per area out of production (£3125 per hectare!).

Sources of further information

RSPB Arable Farmland Adviser:
01767 680551
www.rspb.org.uk/farming

Smiths Gore – Farm Management
01962 857405
www.smithsgore.co.uk

Farming and Wildlife Advisory Group:
024 7669 6699
www.fwag.org.uk

The Game and Wildlife Conservation
Trust: 01425 652381
www.gct.org.uk

Visit www.farmwildlife.info to:

- Post your questions and ideas on the discussion forum
- Read case studies of how farmers are benefiting wildlife
- Find out about events and courses in farm wildlife conservation
- Use the comprehensive list of links to other websites concerned with farm wildlife conservation

RSPB regd charity in the UK no 207076
In Scotland no SCO 37654



Skylark plots



*How to integrate wildlife benefits
into your farming business*

Why create skylark plots?

The research into the decline of skylarks on arable farmland showed that cereal crops were the most favoured of the main arable crops, but that skylark productivity was significantly better in spring cereals than in winter cereals. Skylark numbers have declined on arable farmland with the decline in abundance of spring cereals.

Simply creating two small skylark plots per hectare in winter cereals boosts skylark productivity in these crops by 50% and could reverse the decline of skylarks if enough farmers take this option up.

In addition, skylark plots are known to be beneficial to **yellow wagtails** and are used for foraging by many other birds that feed on insects through the summer.

As the economic analysis opposite shows, it **pays well to have skylark plots in your winter cereals** within your Entry Level Stewardship (ELS) application.

What you can do

Skylark plots can either be created by switching the drill off whilst drilling winter cereal crops, or by drilling the crop as normal and spraying out the plots before the end of December.

Aim to create roughly two skylark plots per hectare across the winter cereal area. Research suggests that the skylark decline would be reversed if 20% of winter cereals in the UK had two plots per hectare.

The plots should be a minimum of 16m² in area and 3m wide (e.g. 4x4m, or 3x6m, depending on the width of your drill if you choose to leave them undrilled).

After establishment, you do not need to take any further action – **they can receive the same fertiliser and sprays as the rest of the field.**



Economic analysis

(by Smiths Gore farm management)

The analysis compares 100 plots (a total of 0.16 ha), established at drilling or by spraying out, with an equivalent area of winter wheat.

	Winter wheat on 0.16 ha	Skylark plot (undrilled)	Skylark plot (sprayed)
Income	£163	£500	£500
Variable costs	-£67	-£59	-£217
Gross margin	£96	£441	£283
Change in gross margin		£345	£187

Assumptions:

Wheat yield: 8.5 tonnes per ha

Wheat value: £120 per tonne

Income from plots: £5 per plot (ELS)

Variable costs:

- £50 / ha seed
- £200 / ha fertiliser
- £170 / ha sprays

Costs of knapsack spraying plots after drilling: 6 plots / hr @ £9 / hr labour.

For further details and help in doing your own calculations, visit

www.smithsgore.co.uk/publications