

# ENVIRONMENT

June 2023

## AGRES dates for your diary

Edited by  
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- Until July 1: no topping or mowing of extensively grazed pasture.
- By July 31, 2023: erect barn owl box.
- By August 31, 2023: establish 3, 4, 6 or 8m grass margins in tillage fields by sowing a grass seed mix (unless already established in the Green Low-carbon Agri-environment Scheme (GLAS)) – fencing only required where cattle are present.
- By August 31, 2023: establish 3, 4, 6 or 8m wide riparian strips and riparian zones in tillage fields by sowing a grass seed mix (unless already established in GLAS).
- By August 31, 2023: establish a 10m grass margin around selected archaeological monuments in tillage fields by sowing a grass seed mix.



*Lady's smock.*



*Ragged robin.*

## Scoring low-input grassland

Approximately 100,000ha of low-input grassland was selected under the Agri-Climate Rural Environment Scheme (ACRES). These fields will be assessed by ACRES advisors this summer to determine how they score for payment using the ACRES grassland scorecard. Ecological integrity is assessed. Scores in section A (shown in brackets below) are totalled and adjusted for the presence or absence of threats and pressures such as expansion of immature scrub, bracken, non-native invasive species, bare soil and erosion, damaging activities and risk to watercourses.

A1. What is the number of positive indicators in the field?

- Low 0-4 (0)
- Medium 5-8 (10)
- High 9-12 (20)
- Very high 13+ (25)

A2. What is the cover of all positive indicators?

- Low 0-4 (0) – none present or you can take several steps without encountering any positive indicators at all.
- Medium 5-8 (10) – you encounter a positive indicator with every few steps taken.
- High 9-12 (20) – you encounter positive indicators with every step taken.
- Very high 13+ (25) – you encounter multiple different positive indicators with every step taken (and in between steps).

A3. What is the combined cover of negative indicators/weeds throughout the plot?

- High >25% (-20) – occurring in dense patches or abundant throughout the field. Very visible in

the sward.

- Moderate 5-25% (-10) – occurring in medium to large patches in the field. Readily visible in the sward.
- Low <5% (5) – none present or scattered or small clumps of negative indicators. Where present, overall cover should be less than 5%.

A4. Vegetation structure: grazing

- Overgrazed (-10) – sward short throughout with little variation in height of vegetation. Few plants in flower.
- Moderate to overgrazed (10) – mostly short vegetation. >50% of field has short sward with occasional to frequent patches of tall vegetation.
- Good (25) – field sward medium height throughout with positive indicators flowering. Areas of taller and/or shorter sward also occur.
- Moderate to undergrazed (10) – mostly tall vegetation. 50-75% of field has tall sward. Litter and dead vegetation occurring.
- Undergrazed (-10) – rank vegetation present throughout the field.

A4. Vegetation structure: cut for hay or silage

- Poor (-10) – no field margins present. Field topped right up to the field boundary line. No grazing of aftergrass. Little or no variation in sward height.
- Moderate (15) – narrow field margins present (~1m). Low number of flowering plants and vegetation structure within the field margin poor to moderate. Some grazing of after-grass providing some structural variation.
- Good (25) – wide field margins present (2m+) and/or good headlands. Grazing of aftergrass

takes place providing variations in height of sward; sward does not look uniform in appearance.

A5 Marsh fritillary suitability assessment in primarily grazed grassland

- Yes/no

A6 Field boundary quality – worst 30m

- Poor (0) – wire fence only or very poor quality field boundary present.
- Moderate (5)
- Good (10)

## Arable grass margins



Shrew – Credit: John Hughes.



Ladybird.



Lady's bedstraw.

Linear habitats provide corridors of movement and networks for nature through the countryside as well as being habitats of high biodiversity value. Good structure is as important as species present. Lumpy and bumpy is good for associated invertebrates. Management which allows grasses and broadleaved plants to go to seed allows them to regenerate and provides flowers and seed for bees and birds:

- establish a 3, 4, 6 or 8m grass margin as selected;
- establish a grass margin by August 31, 2023 by sowing a suitable seed mix at a seed rate of 15kg/ha comprising cocksfoot at 10kg/ha, plus timothy at 4kg/ha plus red clover at 1kg/ha;
- soil cultivation must not be carried out once the margin is established;

- the margin must be managed annually by mulching or mowing between August 31 and January 15;
- livestock are not permitted to access the margin – where livestock are present, arable grass margins must be protected using a fence that is fit for purpose;
- chemical fertiliser or lime cannot be applied to arable margins;
- pesticides or herbicides are not permitted, except for the spot treatment of noxious or invasive weeds;
- field margins established under GLAS must not be ploughed, but must be oversown with the grass mix; and,
- the margin(s) must remain in the same location for the duration of the contract.

## Arable buffer strips and zones



Mayfly – Credit: Jan Robert Bars.



Dragonfly – Credit: Jan Robert Bars.



Trout – Credit: Jan Robert Bars.

Linear buffer strips provide corridors of movement and networks for nature through the countryside similar to arable grass margins. However arable buffer strips and zones also help protect water quality by intercepting sediment and nutrients from soil surfaces if they are mobilised, preventing their loss to the adjoining streams, surface drains, rivers, lakes or ponds.

Good structure is as important as species present. Lumpy and bumpy is good for associated invertebrates. Management which allows grasses and broadleaved plants to go to seed allows them to regenerate and provides flowers and seed for bees and birds:

- establish a 3, 4, 6 or 8m grass riparian margin or a riparian zone as selected – this must be in addition to any mandatory requirements for farmers in derogation – arable riparian buffer strips established under GLAS must not be ploughed, but must be oversown with a grass mix;
- establish grass by August 31, 2023 by sowing a suitable seed mix of at least three species, of which cocksfoot must make up at least 40%, along with timothy, meadow fescue, smoot

meadowgrass, red fescue and perennial ryegrass;

- ploughing is not permitted – non-inversion techniques must be used;
- keep seed labels and receipts safely for the duration of ACRES;
- chemical fertiliser or lime cannot be applied to arable margins;
- pesticides or herbicides are not permitted, except for the spot treatment of noxious or invasive weeds;
- cutting is permitted between September 1 and the end of February and offtakes are allowed;
- the margin(s) must remain in the same location for the duration of the contract;
- livestock are not permitted to access the margin; and,
- where a riparian strip or zone has been created within a parcel, no drinking points are allowed in that parcel.



Reed bunting – Credit: Colum Clarke.