

# Supporting guidance for Corn Buntings Mown Grassland

**This is an old version of the page**

**Date published: 23 February, 2022**

**Date superseded: 24 January, 2023**

To see recent changes to this guidance, [check the bottom of this page](#).

## Introduction



To survive and breed successfully, corn buntings need:

- safe nesting habitat within crops
- insect food for adults and young
- overwinter food and cover

The [Corn Buntings Mown Grassland](#) option aims to provide safe nesting areas for corn buntings by preventing nest destruction due to early mowing in grass silage or hay fields.

Only fields that are to be mowed should be entered into this option. A strip of grass at least two metres wide must be left uncut around the field boundaries and this must then be grazed down before the next exclusion period.

Corn buntings nest late, laying their first clutches between late-May and mid-June, and their second clutches as late as mid August. Young can be in the nest into September.

Delaying grass harvesting operations will ensure that more birds can successfully raise broods. Nesting success is greater in grass fields that are harvested after the beginning of August, compared to fields that are mown in June or July.

## Where to locate your corn buntings mown grassland

Corn buntings build their nests in dense vegetation on or near to the ground.

In the east of Scotland most birds nest in grass silage, hay or cereal crops, often in a tussock or weedy patch. Some will also nest in brassicas and rough grassland.

In the Uists, most birds nest away from cultivated ground, often in hogweed patches on machair. Therefore this option is not relevant for the Uists, although other options providing overwinter food and cover may be suitable.



*Perfect field for corn buntings mown grassland – Credit: Hywel Maggs*

*This option should be used on grass fields managed for silage or hay that already attract nesting corn buntings. Such fields are likely to be in open landscapes well away from woodlands, but where overhead wires or scattered trees or bushes provide song-posts for territorial males. Corn buntings also favour cereals, so this option will be most effective on mixed farmland.*

If waders are breeding in the area consider ceasing field operations before 1 April rather than 1 May to accommodate the wader interests. Waders start nesting early in spring and field operations after 1 April could damage nests.

Alternatively, the [Wader and Wildlife Mown Grassland](#) option provides support for ceasing field operations before 1 April where waders are the primary interest.

If you are unsure which species is the priority in the area you intend to manage seek further advice.

## [How to increase the success of this option](#)

Corn buntings will benefit most where you carry out this option with other arable options that provide overwinter seed food and insect food during the summer on the same farm, such as:

- [Wild Bird Seed for Farmland Birds](#)
- [Unharvested Conservation Headlands for Wildlife](#)
- [Grass Strips in Arable Fields](#)
- [Retention of Winter Stubbles for Wildlife and Water Quality](#)
- [Stubbles Followed by Green Manure in an Arable Rotation](#)



*Field margin – Credit: Allan Perkins*

*Adult corn buntings eat the seeds of cereals, grasses and weeds, but they feed their young mainly on insects such as caterpillars, beetles and spiders. Leaving an unmanaged strip around the margins of fields, or grass strips in arable fields, will increase these populations of insects and provide cover for fledged birds.*

## What else benefits from this option

As well as corn buntings, delayed mowing is likely to benefit a range of other species including meadow-nesting birds such as skylark and curlew, bumblebees, spiders, beetles, brown hare and other small mammals such as voles.

## Further information

The [Farmland Bird Lifeline](#) website contains more information about corn bunting conservation in eastern Scotland.

For information on corn bunting conservation in general visit the [RSPB advisory pages](#).

## Recent changes

Section	Change
Introduction	Removal of reference to fencing - now covered in option page.

## Previous versions

[Previous versions of this page](#)

## Download guidance

Click 'Download this page' to create a printable version of this guidance you can save or print out.