



GLNP
GREATER LINCOLNSHIRE
NATURE PARTNERSHIP

Hedgerows

A guide to management



Hedgerows: A guide to management

Hedgerows are one of our most recognisable habitats but can vary significantly in terms of species diversity - largely related to both age and management activity. Although found across the farmed landscape of Greater Lincolnshire hedgerows are less widespread in parts of the coastal grazing marshes and the fens due to the drainage history and nature of farming practices.

Why are they important?

The significance of hedgerows has changed over time but their importance remains high. Where they were once essential for marking boundaries and keeping livestock in, they are now equally as vital in helping prevent soil loss and regulating water supply as well as providing habitat for a variety of both common and threatened species.

Since 1945, there has been a significant loss of hedgerows across the UK though this has slowed since the introduction of the Hedgerows Regulations 1997. Published figures vary significantly, but in 2007 it was estimated that 402,000km of 'managed' hedgerow existed in England.¹

There is currently no baseline figure for the extent of hedgerow in Greater Lincolnshire. Extensive planting under agri-environment schemes and other funding sources has helped to reinstate some of the past losses although herbicide damage is still a notable threat.

Hedgerows may vary considerably in appearance and can be made up of several components including the shrub layer itself, trees and flowering plants at the hedge base.

They are particularly important for a number of species of conservation concern in the UK, providing vital wildlife corridors across the

landscape. In Greater Lincolnshire they are key to the survival of species such as the brown hairstreak butterfly, as well as bats and farmland birds such as grey partridge and yellowhammer.

Hedgerow trees

Hedgerow trees are an important feature of the habitat, with many over a century old making them especially important for biodiversity. Of an estimated 1.6 million hedgerow trees in the UK, nearly a third are considered to be in danger of disappearing from the landscape at any time.²

As trees mature they may decay, lose limbs, become colonised by fungi and develop cavities, which create valuable habitats for wildlife. These features are a natural part of ageing and do not necessarily impact on the longevity of the tree. However, those located beside public roads and property should have a regular programme of inspection by a competent person.

Growth of ivy is common, but rarely detrimental, with autumn flowers and winter berries providing essential food sources for insects and birds.

Hedgerow trees can be particularly vulnerable to root disturbance and buffer strips can help to protect them while adding greatly to the biodiversity benefit of the complete hedgerow.

¹ Countryside Survey, 2007

² The Tree Council, 2016



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Managing your hedgerow

The selection of your land as a Local Wildlife Site is recognition of the management that has taken place to date in helping to provide a rich habitat for flowering plants and other species. It does not affect how you choose to manage your land in the future, but the GLNP is keen to support landowners who wish to maintain and improve the wildlife value of their site.

There are a number of good practice management techniques for hedgerows, however the methods you choose will depend to some extent on past management regimes and the time and resources available to you.

Top management tips

- Allow hedges to progress naturally through their growth stages
- Trim every two or three years
- Incrementally raise the cutting height or cut on rotation

All hedges require management to prevent them growing up into lines of woodland and/or encroaching on public highways but they can be affected by both over management and neglect.

The key consideration is allowing the hedgerow to progress naturally through its growth cycle without putting it under undue stress. The appearance of deformed stems can indicate over management of hedgerows through regular cutting back to the same height. Neglected hedgerows however may lose their shrub layer and be at risk of collapse.



Fieldfare © Mike Pickwell

Cutting with a flail or shaping saw can maintain a thick, dense hedgerow, but annual cutting back to the same point can place the hedge under stress, limiting new growth. If possible, trim every two or preferably three years allowing the hedgerow to develop the second and third year growth necessary for shrubs to flower and fruit, providing an important winter food source for birds such as fieldfares, redwings and other thrushes. Combining this with incrementally raising the cutting height avoids stressing the hedgerow. Another option may be to trim one side or a section on rotation to allow invertebrates to recolonise.

Depending on time and resources available, the once common technique of traditional hedge laying may be appropriate.

Cutting should be avoided during bird nesting season: 1 March to 31 August, with particular consideration given to any cross compliance or scheme rules which may apply.



Further information



Hedgerows provide important features in the Lincolnshire landscape © Barrie Wilkinson

A list of good practice links on managing hedgerows for wildlife is available on our website: www.glnp.org.uk/your-land/habitat-management/hedgerows

Funding to support management work may be available depending on individual circumstances. A list of both current national and local grant schemes is available on the GLNP website: www.glnp.org.uk/your-land/funding

If you are planning to change, or introduce, management on a site then you may need to consider whether protected species such as bats, reptiles or breeding birds use the site. For more information on this visit: www.gov.uk/wildlife-licences

The Lincolnshire Environmental Records Centre may also be able to provide useful species data for your site: www.glnp.org.uk/partnership/lerc

This leaflet is intended as a general overview only - different sites will have different requirements. It is advisable to obtain bespoke/professional advice before any work is undertaken. This guide should not supersede management plans linked to ongoing grant schemes.

Achieving more for nature

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Front cover photo: A Lincolnshire hedgerow © Barrie Wilkinson