

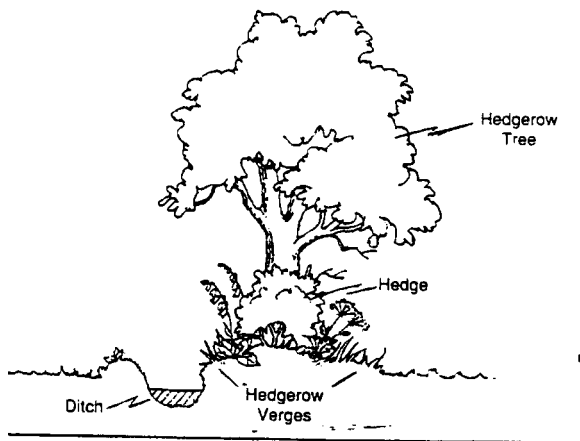
HEDGE FEATURES IMPORTANT TO WILDLIFE



Introduction

A hedgerow will be more attractive to a wider variety of wildlife if it has the following five structural features:

- Trees
- Continuous hedge shrubs
- Hedge bank
- Ditch
- Grass/herb strip



Hedgerow trees

These provide important nesting, roosting and feeding sites for birds, bats and the insects on which they feed. Old or dead trees can be particularly important as many insects feed on dead wood. Barn owls and bats are particularly reliant on the holes in older trees for roosting sites. Wherever possible, old and dead trees should be retained.

It is better to limb an overhanging tree than to remove it.

Song posts are important during the early breeding season in order to establish breeding territories. Hedges with trees or long top shoots are therefore favoured by these birds. Leaving a ragged top to a hedge will provide song posts as well as promoting shoots which can be selected to grow on as new trees in the hedge if desired.

To ensure the replacement of the existing stock of trees, there should be 6 new trees planted or allowed to grow up for every existing mature tree.

Hedgerow trees can be established at between 20m to 50m spacings. If ground nesting birds such as partridge are important, trees should be at no more than 100m spacings to discourage predation of nests by crows etc.

Hedge Shrubs

If allowed to flower and fruit, a variety of hedge shrubs provide food for wildlife at different times of the year as well as ensuring that insects with specific host shrubs are catered for. If a new hedge is planned

or an old one is to be gapped up, consider varying the range of species represented in the hedge.

A variety of existing shrubs can indicate that the hedge is very old (very roughly, 100 years for each species in a 30 yard length) Ancient hedges may be particularly valuable for some species particularly insects and lichens, because of the continuity of the habitat, and they are irreplaceable in wildlife terms.

Variety in the structure of the hedge is also important. Some hedges on a farm should be allowed to grow taller and wider to appeal to a different range of species. This will also allow sections of hedge to bear fruit, which annual trimming will not permit. Fruit from hedges is particularly important to overwintering migrant birds such as redwings. Allowing individual hawthorn trees to flower and fruit is a useful alternative to letting the whole hedge flower.

Hedges can extend the valued habitat of woods and ponds, and may act as corridors for movement of wildlife between other habitats

Birds that nest in hedges have been shown to favour territories that include at least one hedge junction, possibly due to the increased cover and feeding possibilities that it provides.

Therefore if only a small proportion of the hedges are to be allowed free growth or cut on a 2 to 3 year rotation, favour hedge junctions. This should also make management easier since the tractor mounted flail would no longer have to be backed into the corners in order to trim the hedge junctions.

The higher profile of such a junction will give a 'wooded' appearance to an otherwise flat, open farmscape, and may be of value as a point for pheasants to flush towards during a shooting drive, without occupying a significant area of land. If the field corner is allowed to develop a rough grass cover, the wildlife value to small mammals and owls etc will be further increased.

In general, research has shown that it is the volume or size of the hedge which is the most significant feature for wildlife. The wider or taller the hedge the more nesting, shelter or feeding opportunities there will be.

Hedge bank and field edge

These can be very important reserves for native plants, animals and insects. They are often the only places where native wild flowers can grow, and hence the insects and butterflies which rely on them are often restricted to these areas also.

They can be particularly important to ground nesting birds such as pheasant and

partridge which require cover from the herb growth in the hedge base, especially thick, tussocky grass and nettles. Control of grazing on the bank is necessary to allow the dense grassy matt to develop if game birds are to be encouraged. This will also benefit the small mammals and the owls which feed on them.

Ditch

Ditches can be important refuges for the wild flowers, insects and amphibians which rely on damp conditions. Flowers like ragged robin and meadowsweet can be found growing here, and birds such as wrens generally to prefer hedges with ditches, possibly due to the increased feeding opportunities.

Grass/herb strip

The boundary strip, between the field boundary and the crop edge can, if managed correctly, support native grasses and wildflowers which exclude weeds and are beneficial as an important overwintering habitat for predators of aphids.

Ideally they should be a minimum of 1m wide which will enable a stable flora to establish without interference from agricultural operations and will protect the hedge's roots from cultivations.

Avoid spraying or fertilizing the hedge bank, ditch or field edge.

Further Information

For details of your local FWAG Group, please contact FWAG at

the National Agricultural Centre, Stoneleigh, Kenilworth, Warwicks CV8 2RX. Tel: (01203) 696699.

We would like to acknowledge The Hedgerow Project, Leicestershire County Council for allowing us to use material from their information sheet series.

Every effort has been made to ensure accuracy in this information sheet. However, FWAG can not accept liability for any errors or omissions.

Ref: F3.26/