

Hedgerows



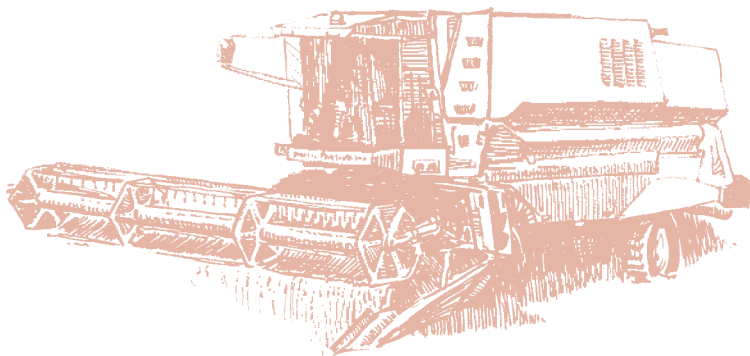
Loss of hedgerows

Most hedges are relatively new features of our landscape having been created only 150 to 200 years ago when the land was divided by enclosure. There are older Saxon boundaries dating back 1000 years but these are rare.

The creation of a network of hedgerows allowed trees and creatures to 'overspill' from the woodlands into the hedgerows and they became more and more important habitats as areas of woodland were removed by 18th century farming practices.

Trends in Britain's farming in the 1950's were working against the survival of hedgerows themselves:

First, mechanisation of farming became more common. In arable farming the advent of the combine harvester had a big impact on hedges.



The combine is an expensive piece of machinery to run and its large size meant it needed a lot of space to manoeuvre around the fields. A bigger field is easier to navigate so hedges between small fields were grubbed out.

Second, farm labour declined as the workforce left for other jobs. Hedgerows required labour intensive management and became an unwanted financial burden to many farmers.

Third, after the Second World War dairy and sheep farming declined especially in eastern counties. As the land went to many other uses, machinery required access and hedges seemed to serve little purpose.

Changes in farming have not been the only cause of decline. Urban development of farmland resulted in the loss of a thousand miles of hedgerow *each year* between 1925 and 1939. Other causes include military, mining, motorways and reservoirs.

The Hedgerow Regulations 1997 were formulated to protect exceptionally species-rich hedgerows and those having landscape, archaeological and/or historic importance. Unfortunately, many agricultural and urban hedgerows do not meet the Hedgerow Regulations criteria but they are still important habitats that need preserving.

Hedges V Fences

Hedges:

Advantages

- Provide shade for stock
- Provide a wind break for crops
- Produce useful by-products (fruits and berries)
- Are a habitat for flowers, birds, insects and other wildlife
- Visually pleasant
- Permanent feature with good management will always be stockproof

Disadvantages

- Stop air from circulating in edges of the crops - can encourage disease and poor growth
- Roots extend into the field and remove nutrients
- They are relatively wide and reduce the field size
- Cannot be moved around
- Can support pest species of weed and insect

Fences:

Advantages

- Do not shade crops
- Take up little room
- Can be moved around
- Have fairly low maintenance costs

Disadvantages

- No shade or shelter for stock
- Can cause injury to stock if damaged
- Provide no useful by-products
- No wildlife value
- Need to be replaced periodically which increases the costs in the long term

Wildlife & Hedgerows

Hedgerows provide a habitat for many species of birds, animals and insects. Hedges can link areas of woodland, gardens and nature areas. The type of species found in a hedge depends upon its position, soil conditions and types of tree and shrubs growing within it. Single tree species hedgerows have a less varied collection of plants and animals associated with them. However, they still provide good shelter and nesting opportunities for birds.

Birds

Birds use hedgerows to feed, find cover, nest and raise young. A hedgerow's use by birds will depend upon how it is managed and its position in relation to

other habitats. A taller hedgerow is of more value than an intensively managed hedge. Studies show that, on average, there are twice as many birds in a 4m high hedge than in one only 2m high. Heavily trimmed hedges tend to have fewer berries to support birdlife. Birds favour mixed hedges with more hawthorns (the thorns provide good protection). Hawthorn bushes are leafy with lots of spring flowers and autumn berries and they support a lot of insect life.

All of the birds in this table find their food in the hedge and the ground around it.

Nesting in:

Hedge Trees	shrubs	under hedge on ground or in brambles
Wood pigeon	Tree Sparrow	Partridge
Magpie	Dunnock	Pheasant
Mistle Thrush	Bullfinch	Willow Warbler
Kestrel	Wren	Yellowhammer
Rook	Chiffchaff	Robin
Crow	Blackbird	
Little Owl	Song Thrush	
Tawny Owl	Long Tailed Tit	
Greater Spotted Woodpecker	Goldfinch	
Starling	Greenfinch	
	Robin	
	Collard Dove	



A Kestrel hovering above its prey.

E Moss

Mammals

Shrews, voles and woodmice find homes in hedgerows, which makes them an attractive hunting ground for predators. Foxes, stoats and weasels can often be found patrolling the edges of fields and hedgehogs grub around the bottom of hedges for food and places to hibernate.

Amphibians and Reptiles

As hedges are often associated with ditches they can also be an important habitat for amphibians such as frogs, newts and toads. They use the hedges for shelter and hibernation. Grass snakes and other reptiles may use hedges as safe corridors between areas of more open habitat.

Invertebrates

There are thousands of species of invertebrates which live and feed in hedgerows. Many beetles, aphids, flies and bugs live on or under hedges. Certain butterflies prefer specific types of tree, shrub or plant associated with hedges. For example, the caterpillars of the holly blue butterfly will only be found in hedges containing holly. The brown hairstreak butterfly will only lay its eggs on the young shoots of blackthorn. Orange tips rely on jack-in-the-hedge. Brambles provide food for the adults and young of several species of butterfly including gatekeeper, speckled wood, peacock and comma. Honeysuckle attracts and supports hawk moths.



Although found in ponds during the breeding season, newts are just as at home in a hedgerow ditch.

E Moss



Peacock butterfly (on Ox Eye Daisy).

Hedge planting & management

Hedge planting should take place over the autumn months and early in the new year (no later than mid-March). Winter is often too harsh. Newly planted hedges are generally planted in a zigzag pattern, with six plants per metre. The plants are generally two-year old saplings, called “whips”, which are about 60cm high.

Rabbit guards or rabbit fencing is often needed to protect the plants as they grow. Weeding may be necessary if a mulch or pesticides is not used to stop weeds outgrowing the saplings. A good wildlife hedge will usually comprise around 50% hawthorn or blackthorn and a selection of other species.

Pruning in each of the early years of the hedge's life is important to encourage dense bushy growth (and it is easier than trying to reshape a hedge after a few years' growth). Too frequent trimming as the hedge

becomes older can reduce its wildlife value. As the hedge grows older tractor-mounted flails will be used to keep the hedge's shape manageable. After about ten years growth an alternative way to manage the hedge is to “lay it”. Like pruning, laying a hedge will encourage growth but hedgelaying also improves the density and stock-proofing capability of the hedge. But it is a skilful job and its relatively high cost means that farmers prefer to trim with machinery.



A well-laid hedge is completely stock-proof .

Another element to hedgerow management that will increase its wildlife value is leaving grass margins of usually 2 or 6 metres around the perimeter of the field. This is uncultivated grassland, self-seeded, or sown with a carefully chosen wildlife mix and with a diverse range of perennial broadleaf plants. The vegetation is cut annually or once every three years to prevent scrub invasion.



Hawthorn berries and blackberries are an important food source for birds in autumn.

