

Creating the ultimate... *conservation headland*



Peter Thompson is our biodiversity advisor. He is a specialist on agri-environment schemes and is interested in habitat creation and wildlife.

A conservation headland as invented by the GWCT, is simply a strip of cereal crop that has little or no inputs, so that it basically resembles an old-fashioned cereal crop grown prior to herbicides being invented. This means that weeds are allowed to grow up among the cereal, bringing in plenty of beneficial insects on which farmland birds chicks, such as the grey partridge, can feed.

This cereal strip can be funded as a rotational option within the Countryside Stewardship scheme, allowing you to move the option around the farm, so that severe weed burdens do not establish themselves. The option can also be 'de-coupled' from the main commercial crop, allowing you to drill this option separately.

You are also allowed to plant this option in the autumn, which for the more northern parts of the country, might be a sensible option, so that it grows in time to offer both good cover and abundant numbers of insects in early summer. But remember, you might be more likely to have grass weeds such as barren brome and black-grass appearing in an autumn-sown headland.

The two options to look for within the Stewardship scheme are:

- Harvested low input cereal – establish a cereal crop every year in the spring between February and April or in the autumn between October and December, as strips six metres to 24 metres wide.
- Unharvested cereal headland – establish a cereal crop (not maize) between February and April in strips between six metres to 24 metres wide or on a part-field or field scale.

For more advice please contact us on 01425 651013.

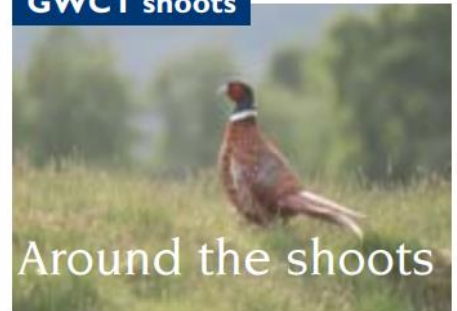
The option can also be placed around commercial crops that are not cereal based, letting you place the option around an oilseed rape crop for instance.



You can leave the cereal headland un-harvested, providing the equivalent to a long cereal and weed seed filled bird table over winter. However, be careful as it can occasionally lead to an infestation of unwanted over-wintering rats.



GWCT shoots



Around the shoots

GWSDF Auchnerran Shoot

With the drought-like conditions experienced in Scotland this summer, wild game has experienced a mixed year. Early broods came out strong but dwindled. However, we have noticed several second broods on the farm which is promising and our wild gamebird counts in the autumn will give us a much better understanding of productivity this year. There are two mixed species days booked in for this coming season, which incorporate a significant amount of walking and rough shooting across challenging hill-edge terrain true to Scottish sporting fashion. We have a further 10 rabbit shoot days during the season and these normally start in September and run

The minimum width for this option is six metres and this is what I would choose, rather than going wider, unless you have a specific reason to do so. This is because it is more beneficial to have long, linear strips supplying insects during the summer, so that birds nest sites are more likely to be next to the option, than if it is in a block.

