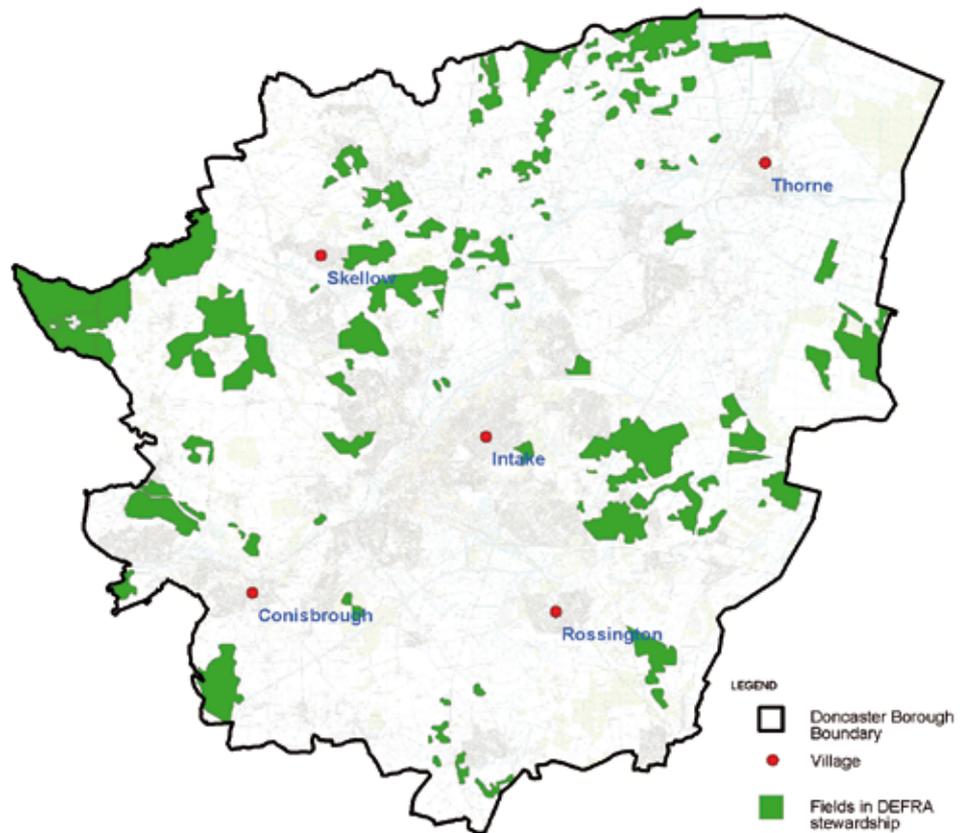


Arable Field Margins

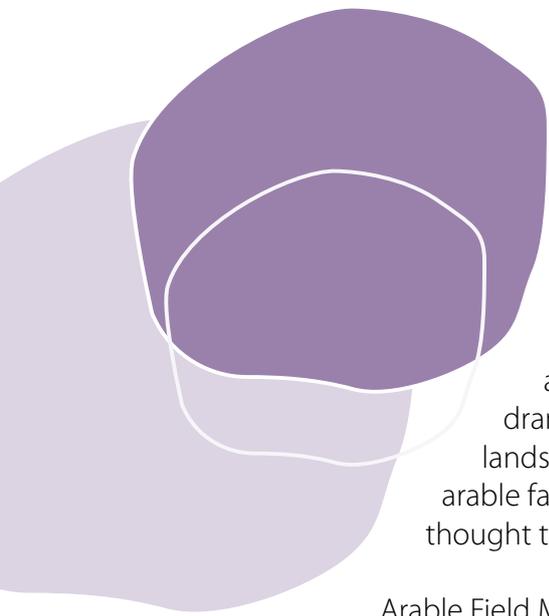
Summary Habitat Action Plan

Doncaster Local Biodiversity Action Plan
January 2007



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1 Habitat Description

Arable Field Margins were once a common feature of agricultural landscapes, as traditional farming methods and machinery did not extend fully to the field edges and subsequently they were left to the benefit of farmland wildlife. They are commonly known as grass margins, wildlife strips, or conservation headlands and can be managed as grassland or as a cultivated strip. Technological advances in arable farming have dramatically changed farming methods, outputs and the farmed landscape. The animals and plants that co-existed with traditional arable farming are now becoming very rare, with some specialist species thought to have been lost completely.

Arable Field Margins provide a feeding habitat for several farmland birds, including the grey partridge and a variety of passerines such as the corn bunting. Dry bare ground in field margins is also good for the dust-bathing chicks of the grey partridge. Arable Field Margins are also particularly beneficial for invertebrates such as ground beetles, cover and feeding areas for brown hare and other small mammals, with the latter drawing the hunting barn owl.

The recognition and implementation of the UK HAP for arable field margins, not just cereal field margins, would benefit more wildlife by bringing more areas into sensitive management. Nationally, if the 1,403,000ha of arable land not used for cereals had a 6m margin a further 95,600ha's of land would be brought into sensitive management.

2 Characteristic species

Grey partridge
Corn bunting
Brown hare
Barn owl

Corncockle
Cornflower
Gold-of-pleasure
Shepherd's needle

Fools' parsley
Corn marigold
Red hemp-nettle
Hairy buttercup

3 Current factors causing loss or decline

- Intensification of arable production and the use of herbicides, pesticides and fertilisers have lead to a reduction in species diversity.
- Ploughing closer to the base of the hedge boundary.
- The shift from spring to winter crop planting and the resulting loss in winter stubbles.
- Reduced crop rotation of cereal crops with other land covers such as grass leys and fallow land.
- Removal of field boundary hedges to make large arable fields.
- Deliberate field margin management to keep them neat and tidy.

4 Objectives, targets & proposed actions

Objective	Target	Ref	Action	Lead & Partners
1) To ensure the protection and maintenance of existing arable field margins.	By 2008.	1.4	Identify with Natural England the extent of arable field margin management in the Doncaster area.	Natural England (NE), Farming and Wildlife Advisory Group (FWAG), DMBC
	Continuous.	1.6	Monitor the existing resource of arable field margins on council owned sites leased to farmers, to ensure that there is no net loss on each holding.	DMBC
3) To create or increase the arable field margin resource by 20%, particularly where the margins can be linked into existing sites of biodiversity value.	New 24 m field margins on 2 new sites by 2009.	3.2	Actively encourage 24 metre field margins on very large (agri-farmed) fields.	FWAG, NE, DMBC
	Increase in arable field margins on council owned land by 20% by 2010.	3.3	Focus on areas of high biodiversity value to increase the network of existing field margins.	DMBC, FWAG
4) Raise public awareness of the importance and special characteristics of arable field margins.	A new local demonstration farm in the Borough by 2010.	4.2	Support the work of FWAG by encouraging local demonstration farms.	Yorkshire Wildlife Trust (YWT), Doncaster Naturalists' Society (DNS), RSPB, DMBC NE, FWAG



5 This habitat in Doncaster

For further information about this habitat and where it can be found in Doncaster see the 'Arable Field Margins Habitat Action Plan'.

The land use survey of the Doncaster Borough identifies 17,731 hectares of field crops, 8,724 hectares of ploughed fields and 328 hectares of fallow fields. If the Borough's field margins were managed sympathetically, potentially over 1800 hectares of improved wildlife habitat could be created. The 1997 DMBC land use survey estimates the current level of field margins at a mere 116 hectares. Wherever there is agricultural land there is the potential for field margins to be managed in a beneficial way.

6 How to take part

'Backyard Biodiversity – Nature in your Neighbourhood'

This is a new initiative launched by Doncaster Council to enable local people to learn about, protect and enjoy nature where they live. Community Groups and Organisations can loan activity packs and equipment to enable them to take part in activities such as bird watching, pond-dipping, building bird and bat boxes and bug hunting. The service is available FREE of charge from selected Customer Service Centres in Doncaster. A pack of Wildlife Gardening fact sheets has also been produced, which provides advice and information on how you can help the wildlife in your own garden.



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