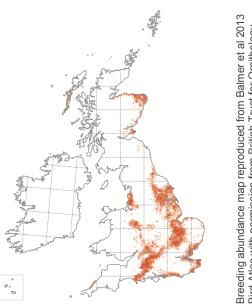


LAND MANAGEMENT FOR WILDLIFE

CORN BUNTING (Emberiza calandra)







Corn buntings live on lowland farmland, usually arable and mixed farming areas.

The UK population of corn buntings fell by 88% between 1967 and 2012. This is mainly because fewer seed and insect food sources are available to them on farmland. Also, because corn buntings are a late nesting species, their nests can be destroyed during harvesting of crops or cutting of silage.

WHAT DO CORN BUNTING NEED?

A nesting habitat that remains available throughout summer

Corn buntings nest on the ground in cereal fields or wide grass field margins, favouring taller swards with dense ground cover. In East Scotland and other areas where first cuts are late, they often nest in silage fields. Insects and spiders to feed to chicks in the spring They start nesting late in the spring, usually late May or June, but will rear two broods where possible and can have flightless chicks into late August.

Lots of seeds throughout the year

Adults feed mainly on seeds, especially cereal grains.

Places where they can find seeds include winter stubbles, harvested root crops, weeds in the crop margins, areas of spilt grain or places where cereals are fed to outdoor livestock.

and summer

Corn buntings take insects from crops, grassland and field margins to feed their chicks. Breeding success relates directly to the availability of insect food, which is usually greater in crops that receive fewer insecticides and herbicides.

ANNUAL LIFECYCLE

	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
Winter flocks may moves to find food												
Males start to return to and hold territories												
Breeding season												
Adult moult												
Winter flocks formed												

HOW CAN I ENCOURAGE CORN BUNTING?

On arable land

Only use pesticides (insecticides, herbicides and fungicides) when the infestation exceeds the economic threshold. Try to avoid using broadspectrum insecticides after 15 March. These remove beneficial insects and spiders that move into the crops in the spring. The loss of this food source is particularly damaging to corn buntings.

Spray and cultivate stubbles as late as possible. This provides important winter feeding habitat. Seed-rich wild bird cover crops are very important on farms where overwinter stubbles are not a viable option. Cereals are an essential component of wild bird cover crops in areas with corn buntings, and new crops need to be sown annually to ensure a rich supply of grain in each winter.

Create grass margins around arable fields to increase food availability close to the nesting habitat. Alternatively, flower-rich margins can be established to boost numbers of a greater variety of insects. Corn buntings are more likely to use margins that have no boundary feature or just a post and wire fence, and may nest in margins that are greater than 10m wide.

Use beetle banks in fields greater than 16

hectares to provide nesting cover for corn buntings and over-wintering habitat for beneficial insects. Beetle banks are grass strips that are at least two metres wide through the middle of arable fields. Such fields can be managed as one unit, as the headland is still cropped.

Corn buntings nest in thicker areas of the crop and can be encouraged to nest by having doubledrilled strips through the middle of cereal fields.

On grassland

Introduce arable fodder crops or create small plots of wild bird cover to provide a seed-rich habitat in pastoral areas. Avoid crops that are harvested before the end of July. Maize is probably not of value to corn buntings unless it is undersown with a seed-bearing crop. Undersown cereals often produce a thicker crop that may be used for nesting. The lack of cultivation in the autumn as well as restrictions on herbicide use will produce an abundant supply of insects. They may also provide seed food through the winter.

In East Scotland, corn buntings often nest in silage fields, where delayed cutting is practiced to improve breeding success. Fields are shut off from all agricultural operations throughout May to July and cut in August.

KEY POINTS

- Ensure that the farm provides safe nesting habitat between mid-May and August
- Boost insect food using buffer strips or flower-rich habitats
- Provide seed food, especially cereal grain, through the winter with over-wintered stubbles or cereal-rich wild bird cover crops

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