

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 broad-spectrum 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 double-drilled 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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