



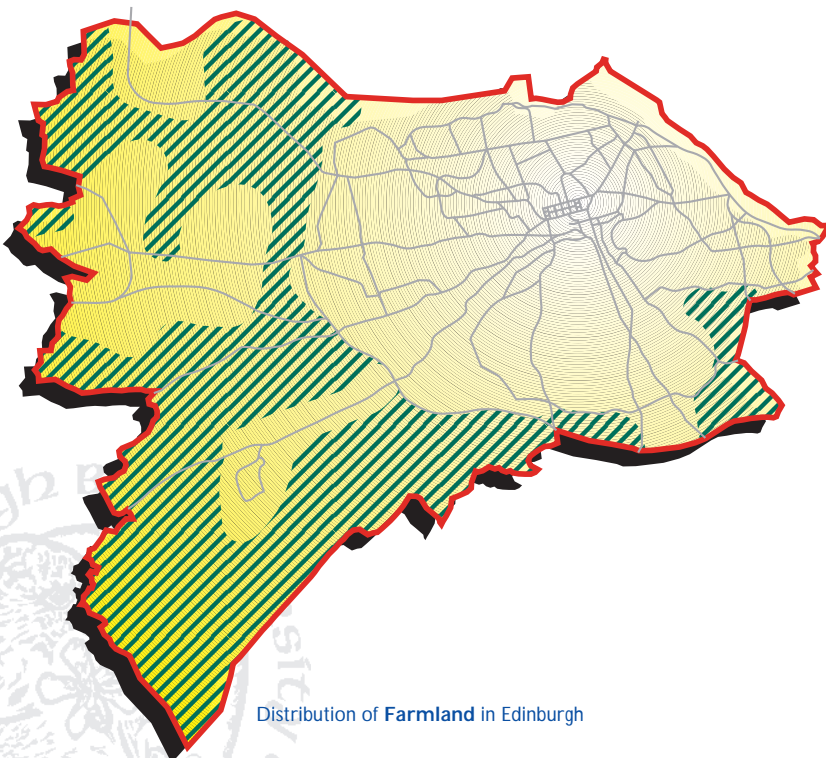
Farmland

STATUS & ECOLOGY

A surprisingly large area, almost 52%, of Edinburgh and its surrounding countryside is managed for agriculture. This figure excludes managed moorland, which is covered by a separate action plan. Three quarters of Edinburgh's farmland is managed for arable and vegetable crops, the remainder being predominantly improved and semi-improved grassland supporting dairy, beef and sheep production.

Over the centuries, farming has created and maintained many features and habitats of wildlife value. It continues to play a critical role in determining the biodiversity of much of our countryside. For instance, the retention of a patchwork of habitats and features such as ponds, woods and hedges, along with a variety of different agricultural land-uses, maintains both habitat and species diversity across farms. Edinburgh is fortunate in having a countryside which is made up of a mosaic of both arable and pasture land in which fields, open ground and arable stubble are interspersed with hedgerows, dykes, field boundary trees, tracks, woodlands, wetlands, ditches and ponds.

This diversity of habitats and features supports many species, ranging from farmland specialists such as the cereal "weed" cornflower to species with broader habitat requirements. Field margins are used extensively by animals such as grey partridge, and a wide variety of invertebrates, including the common blue butterfly. Woodland plants and animals can be found in hedgerows and small farm woodlands, while farm ponds provide important habitats for wetland species such as the freshwater fern pillwort. Farm buildings, such as barns and steadings, provide nesting and roosting sites for bats and birds such as the barn owl. Many species travel through farmland, or are affected by farming activities. For example, waders and gulls roost on fields close to the coast when sandbanks and mudflats are covered at high tide.



Distribution of Farmland in Edinburgh

The following Edinburgh Biodiversity Action Plan species are particularly associated with farmland:

Animals: badger, brown hare, harvest mouse, weasel, pipistrelle bat, skylark, linnet, yellowhammer, tree sparrow, bullfinch, grey partridge, barn owl, lapwing, common blue butterfly, six spot burnet moth, *Euheptaulacus sus* (a dung beetle), henbane flea beetle, **Plants:** cornflower, common centaury, ragged robin, maiden pink, autumn gentian, meadow cranesbill, quaking grass, and pillwort.

“Since man first began to clear the ancient wildwood over 5,000 years ago, farming has shaped our countryside, and the wildlife that depends on it”

Nicholas Milton

FACTORS CAUSING LOSS OR DECLINE

Impacts

The increasing intensification, standardisation and specialisation of farm management has had a significant effect upon the diversity of farmland habitats. National and European agricultural policy has played an important role in influencing changes to farm management practice. Particularly significant have been the moves from grassland to arable and from spring-sown to autumn-sown crops. Agricultural improvement has resulted in the loss of wildlife rich wetlands and unimproved grasslands, while direct loss of farmland has arisen through urban expansion and afforestation. An increase in farm sizes and a decrease in farm labour have led to more uniform and mechanised management, often leading to the loss of features like hedgerows, woodlands and ponds.



Threats

The main threat to farmland habitats remains the continued loss of features of wildlife value arising from changes in farm management practice and from the loss of farmland to other uses, notably urban expansion and afforestation. The increased uncertainty and pressure on the viability of farming, particularly on smaller farms, is leading to a lack of investment in activities, such as habitat management, that do not directly help the profitability of the farm business. The lack of awareness of many farmers and landowners of the impacts of farming practices on wildlife and habitats, coupled with the limited financial incentives available for conservation management, are also constraints.

The gradual deterioration of hedgerows, steadings and boundary trees through lack of management is a continuing threat. Overuse and misuse of pesticides and fertilisers, and poor waste management may cause localised pollution problems and habitat damage.

CURRENT ACTION

A number of Edinburgh's farmers and landowners are actively working to protect and improve the wildlife habitats on their farms, taking measures to reduce the impact of pesticides, fertilisers and intensive cropping on farmland habitats and species. Actions include planting and restoring hedgerows, creating grass field margins and conservation headlands, restoring dykes, planting field boundary trees and actively managing ponds, wetlands and grasslands.

The Edinburgh Green Belt Trust is providing logistical and financial support for a wide range of projects in the area. A number of farms, assisted by the Farming & Wildlife Advisory Group and the Scottish Agricultural College are entering the government's Countryside Premium Scheme, which provides financial support for a range of habitat management activities. Advice on managing for biodiversity is currently provided by all these organisations, as well as the Pentland Hills Regional Park staff and the Scottish Wildlife Trust. Fifteen Edinburgh farms have had whole farm reports or plans prepared by the Farming & Wildlife Advisory Group.

ACTION PLAN OBJECTIVES & TARGETS

Objective

To protect and improve the quality, diversity and extent of farmland habitats and wildlife in Edinburgh.

Targets

To have completed Whole Farm Environment Reports with individual farm Biodiversity Action Plans for at least fifty percent of Edinburgh's farms. To restore and plant 8 km of hedges, and establish 20 km of extended field margins, buffer strips and conservation headlands. To create or restore 5 farm ponds.



Actions

1
Work with farmers and landowners to prepare farm Biodiversity Action Plans for at least 50% of farms by Autumn 2004.

(Actioned by: Farming & Wildlife Advisory Group, Edinburgh Green Belt Trust & Scottish Agricultural College)

2
Inform all farmers of relevant grants and sources of local expertise, by direct mail, by Winter 2001.

(Actioned by: Farming & Wildlife Advisory Group, Edinburgh Green Belt Trust & Scottish Agricultural College)

3
Restore and plant 8 km of hedgerow on Edinburgh farms by Autumn 2004.

(Actioned by: Farmers, Farming & Wildlife Advisory Group, Scottish Agricultural College & Edinburgh Greenbelt Trust)

4
Establish 20 km of extended field margins, buffer strips and conservation headlands on Edinburgh farms by Autumn 2004.

(Actioned by: Farmers, Farming & Wildlife Advisory Group & Edinburgh Green Belt Trust)

5
Create or restore five farm ponds by Autumn 2004.

(Actioned by: Farmers, Farming & Wildlife Advisory Group & Edinburgh Green Belt Trust)

Key Contacts

Farming & Wildlife Advisory Group
Edinburgh Green Belt Trust
Scottish Agricultural College

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CHAMPIONS

