

6.3. Farmland

Main Objectives & Key Actions:

- 1) Maintain/increase the numbers and range of key farmland wildlife.**
 - Increase the area of farmland under environmental stewardship schemes by 20% by 2010. This area will include:
 - an increase in the area of land under low input arable management by 10% by 2012.
 - an increase in the area of rough/semi-improved grassland by 10% by 2012.
 - Maintain and expand existing populations of Gull buntings and Greater horseshoe bats.
- 2) Maintain the network of existing ancient boundary hedgerows.**
 - Identify the current resource of species-rich and ancient hedgerows in Torbay by 2009 and achieve 25% favourable condition by 2012.
 - Halt net loss of species-rich and all loss of ancient hedgerows by 2009.
- 3) Maintain/recreate the area of traditional orchards.**
 - Identify the current resource by 2009 and increase by 10% by 2012.
- 4) Work with smallholders to improve the farmed environment for biodiversity.**
 - Encourage 20% of Torbay's smallholders to improve the farmed environment for biodiversity by 2012.
- 5) Survey farmland wildlife and habitats to develop a stronger understanding of changes**
 - Continue with RSPB/Natural England survey programme.
 - Undertake Phase 1 surveys of key farmland habitats every 5 years.

6.3.1 Background & Current Status

The term farmland includes all habitats especially arable management, hedgerows and hedgerow trees, traditional orchards, flower-rich meadows and permanent pasture including in-field trees.

Figures from DEFRA (2004) gave total farmed area in Torbay as 1805 hectares, which represents 28% of Torbay's total land area. There has been a 10% decrease in hectares of farmland in Torbay from 1995, which reflects a decrease nationwide. Farmland is under pressure from development, recreation and changes in farming practices and this poses a great threat to wildlife that depends on the farmland habitat.

The Environmental Stewardship Scheme launched in 2005 replaces Defra's two flagship schemes – Countryside Stewardship and Environmentally Sensitive Areas. One of its primary aims is to conserve biodiversity by providing compensation to farmers that show good land management such as good hedgerow management. It is split into three elements: Entry Level Stewardship

(ELS), Organic Entry Level Stewardship (OELS) and Higher Level Stewardship (HLS). For more information refer to the DEFRA Environmental Stewardship 'Look after your land and be rewarded' 2005. Torbay's current 14 Countryside Stewardship Agreements, are shown in Figure 4 below.

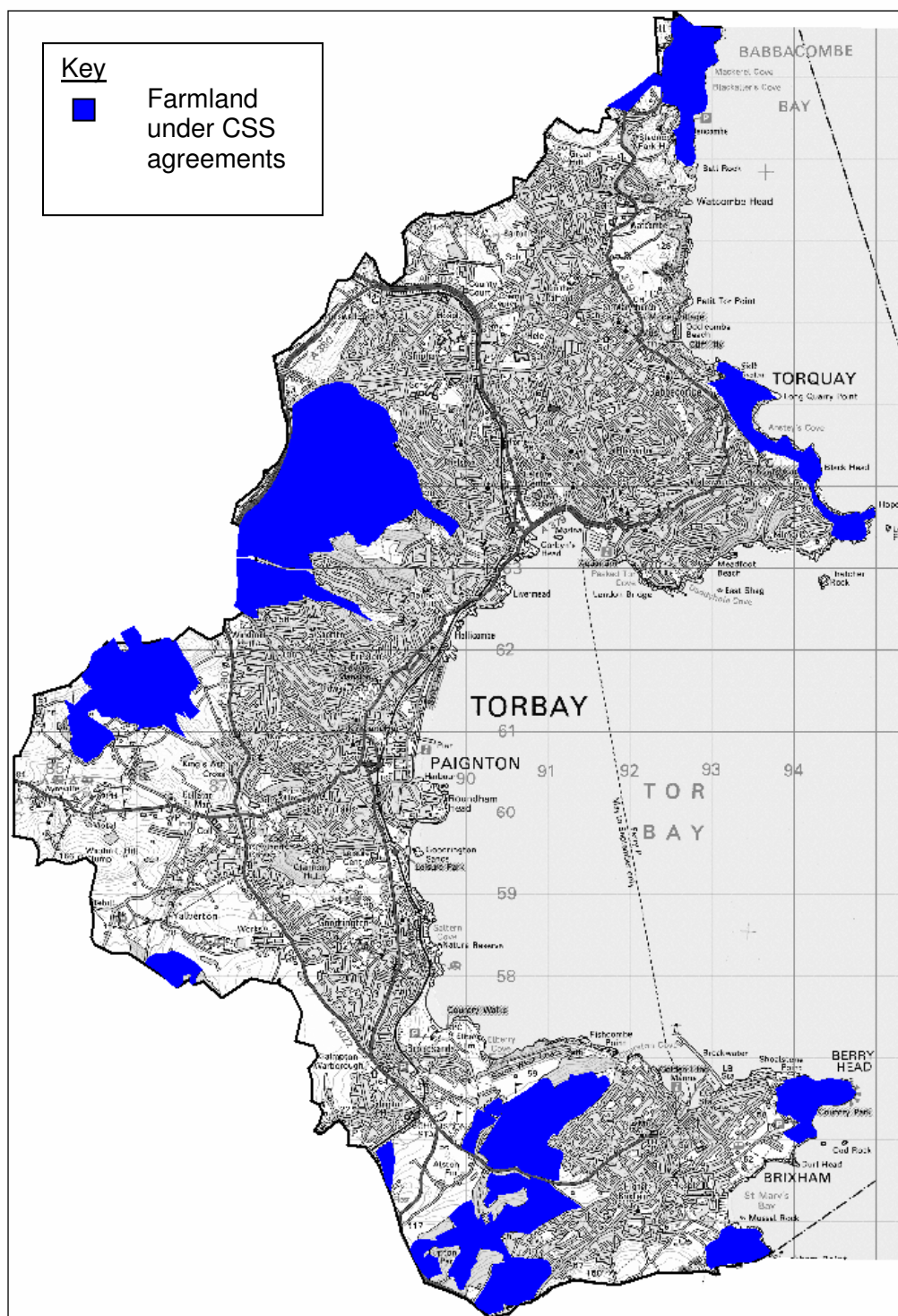
In Torbay relatively large amounts of farmland (100ha or greater) are managed by few holdings, with 54% of Torbay's agricultural holdings being less than 5ha. This means a greater commitment for schemes such as the Environmental Stewardship will be needed if positive changes are to be made for Torbay's farmland biodiversity.

Some of Torbay's farmland is designated in the Local Plan as Area of Great Landscape Value. Several areas of farmland are designated as County Wildlife Sites. In addition, part of Occombe Farm, near Paignton, was classed as SSSI in 1992 and consists of 12 ha of unimproved meadows and an area of ancient semi-natural woodland. Occombe's herb-rich grassland is neutral and characterised by NVC Grassland as *Cynosurus cristatus* – *Centaurea nigra* grassland. This plant community is recognised in the UK BAP Lowland Meadows Habitat Action Plan.

Table 5: Farmland landuse in Torbay (Defra Agricultural Census, 2004, 1995)

Farmland Type	Area (hectares) and % of total area	
	2004	1995
Crops & Fallow	377 - 20%	395 – 20%
Temporary grass	219 – 12%	217 – 11%
Permanent grass	1087 – 60%	1,266 – 63%
Rough grazing	7 – 0.4%	62 – 3%
Woodland	23 - 1.2%	17 – 0.8%
Set-aside	69 – 3.8%	39 – 1.9%
All other	29 – 1.6%	24 – 1.2%

Farmland habitat and its management are vital for many species that are declining throughout the UK. Changes in farming practices over the last sixty years have had wide ranging effects on the British countryside, one of the most dramatic being the removal of hedgerows and intensification of the land for increased production. Traditional mixed farming methods have declined and in Devon there has been a reduction in arable farming. This reduction in the planting of crops leads to a reduction in seed available for farmland birds. Threatened bird species such as circl bunting, linnet and yellowhammer greatly benefit from over-wintered stubble fields, which have been described by the British Trust for Ornithology as 'giant bird-tables'. A variety of boundary types provide a diverse habitat for insects, birds and mammals. Wildflower strips at field edges will attract butterflies and bees, provide food for birds and increase arable rare plants. Farmland ancient and mature trees are disappearing at a fast rate, yet they are vital for lichens, fungi, insects, bats and birds.



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Figure 4: Map to show Countryside Stewardship Agreements (CSS) (2006) in Torbay. Information was kindly provided by the Rural Development Service.

This action plan must reach a balance between the economic needs of the farmer and biodiversity. It is crucial that this action plan informs not only conservationists but farmers, landowners and members of the public.

Species that will be highlighted in this plan are:

Barn owl
Skylark
Linnet
Cirl bunting
Yellowhammer
Bullfinch
Swallow
Brown hairstreak
Pipistrelle bat
Greater horseshoe bat
Lesser horseshoe bat
Arable rare plants

6.3.2 The Current Problems/Threats to this Habitat:

- Improvement of grassland resulting in a species poor sward with low wildlife value.
- Bad hedgerow management - lack of nesting habitats and shelter, break in potential wildlife corridor, lack of old hedgerow trees.
- Cost of managing marginal land.
- Use of unsuitable worming treatments – leading to a loss or reduction in dung fauna.
- Changes in crop type and land use – loss of arable land linked to reduction in seed source, reduction in mixed farming practices.
- Stock management – high densities of livestock (damaging effects on trees, sward and lead to erosion and run-off) stock type.
- Changes in support systems.
- Development pressures.
- Recreational Pressures

Table 5: Farmland Action Plan. Actions shaded in grey indicate further funding is required.
High priority actions are proposed for completion within the next 3 years (to end of 2009).
Medium priority actions are proposed for completion within the next 6 years (to end of 2012).
Low priority actions are proposed for completion within the next 10 years (to end 2016)

Actions for Farmland Priority Action Plan	Priority (High, Medium and Low)	Meets Main Objective	Partners	Ongoing Action
Policy & Legislation				
F1 - Ensure there is an effective system of planning mitigation to reduce the impact of development on the farmed environment (including species-rich hedgerows) and its biodiversity e.g. section 106 agreement.	H	1	TC, NE, TCCT, Developers	✓
Site Management				
F2 - Link areas under agri-environment schemes to provide areas of continuous beneficial habitat for biodiversity.	M	1,2	TCCT, TC	
F3 - Encourage all farmers to enter into agri-environment schemes and look to add value to existing agreements.	H	1	TCCT, TC, Tenants, RDS, RSPB, FWAG, DWT	✓
F4 - Replacement of unsuitable worming treatments with more environmentally friendly treatments.	M	1, 4	Farmers, Horseowners	
F5 - Encourage planting of new species-rich hedges using locally native species.	H	2	TC, TCCT	✓
F6 - Encourage the use of set aside to achieve the arable and rough grassland aims.	M	1,3,4	TCCT, TC, NE, DEFRA, FWAG	✓
Communication & Publicity				
F7 - Where suitable encourage the use of traditional local breeds	L	4	TCCT	✓
F8 - Use TCCT holdings (Maidencombe/Occombe) to	H	1,2	TCCT	✓

promote good hedgerow management.				
F9 - Use other 'actively' farmed holdings to promote wildlife management to other farmers.	M	1,2,3,4	TCCT, FWAG	
F10 - Promote the use of non toxic worming treatments.	H	1	TCCT, TC, Farmers	✓
F11 - Use Maidencombe and Ocombe to educate people about farmland issues, from biodiversity to reducing recreational pressures.	M	1,2,3,4	TCCT	✓
F12 - Develop partnerships with Equestrian groups to promote positive management for biodiversity	H	4	TCCT, Horse Owners	
F13 - Promote the use of local produce and traditional local breeds through sites such as Ocombe and Farmers Markets.	M	1	TCCT	✓
Advisory				
F14 - Look at existing agreements and promote Environmental Stewardship especially Higher Level to land managers across Torbay.	H	1,2,3,4	DEFRA, FWAG, DWT	
F15 - Promote training in good hedge management for contractors and suppliers of hedge cutting machinery.	H	2	TC, TCCT, contractors, land managers, farmers	
F16 - Work with the local unitary authority to promote the use of local produce in catering contracts etc.	M		TC, DRN, Catering companies	
Research & Monitoring				
F17 - Identify and map all the key farmland habitats (Arable, species-rich grassland, semi-improved, rough grassland, ancient species rich hedgerows and orchards).	H	1,2,3,5	TCCT, NE	
F18 - Establish baseline data on the quantity and quality of hedges through sample surveys. Monitor change at 5 year intervals.	H	2, 5	TCCT	✓ (5 yearly intervals)

F19 - Ensure target species are monitored on a regular basis. Most birds except Swallow and Bullfinch, will be monitored in 2009 by RSPB Cirl bunting survey providing a comparison with the baseline data collected in 2003. Collate distribution maps of missing species.	H	1,5	RSPB	✓ (5 yearly intervals)
F20 - Continue monitoring of bat roosts and develop a system of monitoring elsewhere. Map distribution of known roost sites.	H	1,5	NE, TCCT	✓ (monitoring)
F21 - Set up and conduct standard surveys of arable rare plants and record. Set up inventory of sites where arable plants are present.	M	1,5	TCCT	
F22 - Prepare a distribution map of all known Brown Hairstreak sites and develop a system for regular monitoring at key sites.	M	1,5	BC, TCCT	

Abbreviations: Torbay Coast & Countryside (TCCT), Torbay Council (TC), Natural England (NE), Butterfly Conservation (BC), Devon Rural Network (DRN) Devon Wildlife Trust (DWT), Rural Development Service (RDS), Farming Wildlife Advisory Group (FWAG).

Please refer to the Parkland and Veteran Tree HAP.