



# Beetle banks



Above: Beetle banks can be used to provide more tussocky grassland within large-scale arable farmland, which is important for farm wildlife.

Beetle banks are grass mounds, about two metres wide, that run through the middle of large arable fields. They can lie within a field headland not connecting with the field edge so that a field can still be farmed as one unit. Beetle banks are generally appropriate for fields larger than 16 hectares and wider than 400m. Fields larger than 30ha may warrant more than one beetle bank.

## BENEFITS FOR WILDLIFE

### Beetle banks boost numbers of farming-friendly insects and spiders on arable farmland

A tussocky grass strip through the middle of a field, known as a beetle bank, provides essential over-wintering habitat for many insects and spiders. As some of

these insects will move into the crop in spring and eat crop pests, such as aphids, beetle banks may also reduce the need for insecticides. These species only travel up to 250 metres from grass field margins during spring, so they do not reach the centre of large fields. Beetle banks enable these predatory insects to cover more, or even all, of such fields.

### Beetle banks provide habitat for ground-nesting birds and small mammals

A beetle bank provides good habitat for small mammals and for birds, such as corn buntings and skylarks, that prefer to nest in open farmland, away from field boundaries.

## HOW CAN I CREATE AND MANAGE A BEETLE BANK?

### Creating a beetle bank

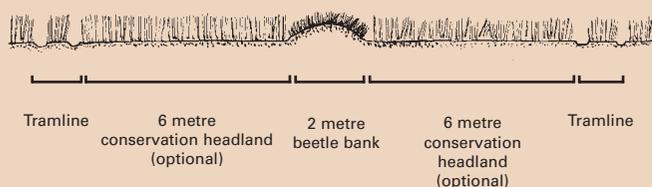
- September is the best month to establish the grass sward that forms a beetle bank.
- You will need to plough furrows that point towards each other from either side during cultivation of the field to create a raised bank of about 0.4 metres along the plough line. The headland at each end of the beetle bank can remain cropped.
- The grass mix should include up to 60% of tussock-forming species such as cocksfoot or Scots timothy grass. For the rest of the mix choose native species and include fescues and bents.
- The easiest method of establishing the strip is to broadcast the seed soon after creating the bank at a rate of about 30 kg per hectare.
- Up to three cuts may be needed in the first summer (when the sward reaches 10 cm in height) to encourage the grasses to tiller and to help control invasive annual weeds. Avoid cutting from May to August to minimise destruction of nests, particularly where there are corn buntings.
- Once established, you should only cut the grass strips when there is a need to get the dead tussocks to regenerate (typically no more than once every three years).

### Protection from sprays

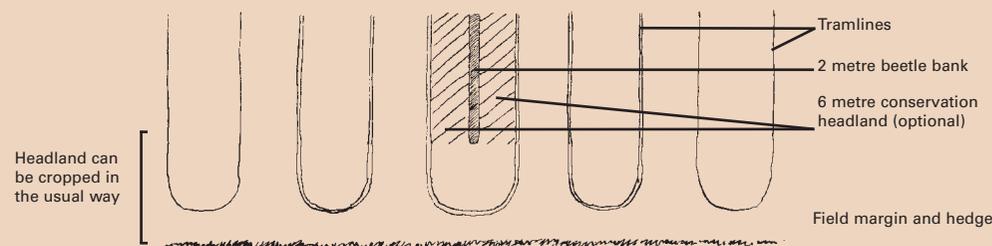
- Beetle banks are particularly vulnerable to the effects of pesticide drift because these narrow strips of grass are sprayed on either side.
- On light soils with a low weed burden, conservation headlands on either side of a beetle bank will enhance its value for insects and birds. Conservation headlands are selectively sprayed margins (see the separate sheet in this series entitled 'Conservation headlands').

- Avoid applying insecticides within at least six metres of the beetle bank whenever possible, as these will be particularly harmful.

### Diagram of a beetle bank



### Plan view of a beetle bank



## KEY POINTS

- Beetle banks can boost predatory insect numbers and help with pest control.
- The field headland can remain intact so that the whole field can still be farmed as one unit.
- Beetle banks can be created in Rural Development Contracts.

### See also the RSPB Scotland advisory sheets on:

- Corn buntings
- Skylark
- Conservation headlands

For answers to all of your farm wildlife enquiries, visit [www.farmwildlife.info](http://www.farmwildlife.info)

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You can get further information on this and other ways of managing your farm for wildlife from:



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