HOW CAN I MANAGE OVER-WINTERED STUBBLE?

Many of these guidelines may be funded by Tir Gofal, the Countryside Council for Wales or Plantlife. For further information contact your local Farming Connect Officer, Plantlife Wales Officer or Countryside Council for Wales Officer.

Precede an over-wintered stubble with a low-input spring cereal

An unsprayed spring cereal crop left as an over-wintered stubble will have a greater benefit for seed-eating birds and rare spring-germinating arable plants. Do not under sow or apply herbicides and seek project officer consent before applying selective treatments of herbicide or fungicide. The crop should not be harvested until the agreed harvest date (after 1 August).

Follow with an over-wintered stubble with a low-input spring cereal

An over-wintered stubble can be followed by a low-input spring cereal to benefit rare spring-germinating arable plants, seed-eating birds and nesting lapwings and Skylarks. The Tir Gofal ‘Unsprayed cereal, rape and linseed crops’ option can apply to whole fields or margins of at least 4 m width beyond the 1 m buffer zone. For details see above.

Management for nesting lapwings

Lapwings frequently use fields of maize and spring-sown cereal for nesting in Wales. Ideally cultivation should be completed by 20 March. If nesting lapwings are present, farming operations should ideally be avoided between 20 March and 30 June to prevent damage to eggs or young. If operations are necessary, try to avoid the nest site if its location is known or alternatively condense all operations into as short a time as possible, ideally within one week to allow opportunities for re-nesting.

Over-wintered stubble can be followed by a spring/summer fallow to benefit nesting lapwings

- Adopt this practice in fields that are used regularly by breeding lapwings. If previous breeding sites are not known, choose a large arable field adjacent to a permanent pasture field that will be grazed through the spring.
- This practice can be applied to whole fields or plots within fields, but to benefit nesting birds it will need to be at least two hectares in size.
- Avoid locating a plot close to a tall hedge or wood.
- Cultivate using times or discs between 1 March and 20 March, and avoid any further field operations between 20 March and 31 July.

Limit herbicide use in the preceding crop (such as the adoption of conservation headlands) will increase the value of the over-wintered stubble for wildlife.

Over-wintered stubble provides spilt grain and broadleaved weed seeds, which are important food sources for seed-eating birds.

Over-wintered stubbles and low-input spring cereals should be targeted to areas with tree sparrows, yellowhammers, corn buntings, grey partridges, turtle doves, lapwings and rare arable plants if these species are to obtain maximum benefit.

Limit herbicide use in the preceding crop (such as the adoption of conservation headlands) will increase the value of the over-wintered stubble for wildlife.

KEY POINTS

- Over-wintered stubble provides spilt grain and broadleaved weed seeds, which are important food sources for seed-eating birds.
- Over-wintered stubble and low-input spring cereals should be targeted to areas with tree sparrows, yellowhammers, corn buntings, grey partridges, turtle doves, lapwings and rare arable plants if these species are to obtain maximum benefit.
- Limited herbicide use in the preceding crop (such as the adoption of conservation headlands) will increase the value of the over-wintered stubble for wildlife.

BENEFITS FOR WILDLIFE

Over-wintered stubbles provide important seed food for birds

Split grain and the seeds of broadleaved plants are vital for seed-eating birds throughout the winter.

Spring crops following over-wintered stubble can provide nesting and feeding habitat

Spring crops following the over-wintered stubble can provide nesting habitat for lapwings (if established in February or March) and Skylarks, and is an important habitat for barn owls. Spring crops managed with limited herbicide and insecticide use are particularly beneficial feeding habitats for grey partridges, turtle doves, tree sparrows and yellowhammers and provide good conditions for rare arable plants.

SPILL GRAIN FOR WILDLIFE

Spilt grain and weed seeds in stubbles are vital food for seed-eating birds throughout the winter.

Many of these guidelines may be funded by Tir Gofal, the agri-environment scheme for Wales. Get further info from:

- Farming Connect, Y Lânà, Trechafen, Aberystwyth, Ceredigion SY23 1AS. Tel: 08456 000 813
- Farming and Wildlife Advisory Group Cymru, Forodd Arran, Dolgellau, Gwynedd LL40 1LW. Tel: 01341 421456
- Countryside Council for Wales, Maes y Ffynnon, Penrhosgarnedd, Bangor, Gwynedd LL57 2Q. Tel: 01248 385500
- Plantlife Wales Office, Maes y Ffynnon, Penrhosgarnedd, Bangor, Gwynedd LL57 2Q. Tel: 01248 385545
- The Game Conservancy Trust, Fordingbridge, Hampshire SP6 1EF. Tel: 01425 652281
- Plantlife Wales Officer c/o Countryside Council for Wales, Maes y Ffynnon, Ffordd Penrhos, Bangor, Gwynedd LL57 2LQ. Tel: 01248 385545

Over-wintered stubble can provide an important winter food source for seed-eating birds such as tree sparrows, yellowhammers, grey partridges and Skylarks. Winter seed sources, including spilt grain and hay and/or cereals fed to out-wintered stock, as well as stubble fields, are far rarer in the Welsh countryside today than in the past. Reduced seed food availability is limiting the winter-over survival of many seed-eating birds. Over-wintered stubbles are particularly beneficial to seed-eating birds as part of a low-input spring-sown cereal regime, and can provide good opportunities for nesting lapwings if left as a spring/summer fallow or followed by a maize crop. In Tir Gofal the ‘Winter stubbles’ option would be particularly beneficial following the ‘Unsprayed cereal crop’ option. Rotational set-aside also presents an opportunity for providing over-wintered cereal stubble.

Over-wintered stubble will have a greater benefit for seed-eating birds and rare spring-germinating arable plants. The Tir Gofal ‘Unsprayed cereal, rape and linseed crops’ option can provide this and can apply to whole fields or margins of at least 4 m width beyond the 1 m buffer zone. A spring cereal crop should be established by 20 April. Do not under sow or apply herbicides and seek project officer consent before applying selective treatments of herbicide or fungicide. The crop should not be harvested until the agreed harvest date (after 1 August).

A Hay (rspb-images.com)
It is preferable not to graze the regenerating seed-rich stubble fields. Birds will make use of the spill grain and weed seeds in stubbles.

**MANAGEMENT**

Birds will make use of the spill grain and broadleaved weed seeds within stubble that is left to regenerate naturally after harvest. The weed seeds available will largely be those produced by weeds that germinated with the preceding crop eg chickweed, mouse-ear and forget-me-not. Limited herbicide use or conservation headlands in the preceding crop, therefore, will greatly enhance the stubble’s benefit to seed-eating birds.

Under the Tir Gofal ‘Winter stubbles’ prescription, cereal stubble should be left between harvest and 1 March. Regenerating vegetation can be cut after 15 February and use of pesticides, other than for spot-treatment of vegetation can be cut after 15 February and use of pesticides, other than for spot-treatment of weeds that germinated with the preceding crop (such as chickweed, mouse-ear and forget-me-not), is left to regenerate naturally after harvest. The crop should not be harvested until the agreed harvest date (after 1 August).

**FOLLOW AN OVER-WINTERED STUBBLE WITH A LOW-INPUT SPRING CEREAL**

An over-wintered stubble can be followed by a low-input spring cereal to benefit rare spring-sprouting arable plants, seed-eating birds and nesting lapwings and skylarks. The Tir Gofal ‘Unsprayed cereal, rape and linseed crops’ option can apply to whole fields or margins of at least 4 m width beyond the 1 m buffer zone. For details see above.

**MANAGEMENT FOR NESTING LAPWINGS**

Lapwings frequently use fields of maize and spring-sown cereal fields for nesting in Wales. Ideally cultivation should be completed by 20 March. If nesting lapwings are present, farming operations should ideally be avoided between 20 March and 30 June to prevent damage to eggs or young. If operations are necessary, try to avoid the nest site if its location is known or alternatively condense all operations into as short a time as possible, ideally within one week to allow opportunities for re-nesting.

**ROTATIONAL SET-ASIDE**

Natural regeneration on rotational set-aside is a good way to provide stubble in the countryside and it provides more seed food over winter than non-rotational set-aside.

Delay the use of broad-spectrum herbicides for as long as possible. This will prolong the benefits into the breeding season.

**BENEFITS FOR WILDLIFE**

Over-wintered stubble can provide an important winter food source for seed-eating birds such as tree sparrows, yellowhammers, grey partridges and skylarks. Winter seeds sources, including spill grain and hay and/or cereals fed to out-wintered stock, as well as stubble fields, are far rarer in the Welsh countryside today than in the past. Reduced seed food opportunity is limiting the winter survival of many seed-eating birds. Over-wintered stubbles are particularly beneficial to seed-eating birds as part of a low-input spring-sown cereal regime, and can provide good opportunities for nesting lapwings if left as a spring/summer fallow or followed by a maize crop. In Tir Gofal the ‘Winter stubbles’ option would be particularly beneficial following the ‘Unsprayed cereal crop’ option. Rotational set-aside also presents an opportunity for providing over-wintered cereal stubble.

**SPRING CROSS CROPS FOLLOWING OVER-WINTERED STUBBLE**

Spring crops following the over-wintered stubble can provide nesting and feeding habitat.

Spring crops following the over-wintered stubble can provide nesting habitat for lapwings (if established in February or March) and skylarks, and is an important habitat for barn owls. Spring crops managed with limited herbicide and insecticide use are particularly beneficial feeding habitats for grey partridges, turtle doves, tree sparrows and yellowhammers and provide good conditions for rare arable plants.

Over-wintered stubble can be followed by a spring/summer fallow to benefit nesting lapwings:

- Adopt this practice in fields that are used regularly by breeding lapwings. If previous breeding sites are also not known, then choose a large arable field adjacent to a permanent pasture field that will be grazed through the spring.
- This practice can be applied to whole fields or plots within fields, but to benefit nesting birds it will need to be at least two hectares in size.
- Avoid locating a plot close to a tall hedge or wood.
- Cultivate using tines or discs between 1 March and 20 March, and avoid any further field operations between 20 March and 31 July.

**OVER-WINTERED STUBBLE WITH A LOW-INPUT SPRING CEREAL**

- Over-wintered stubble can be followed by a spring/summer fallow to benefit nesting lapwings.
- An over-wintered spring cereal crop left as an over-wintered stubble will have a greater benefit for seed-eating birds and rare spring-sprouting arable plants. The Tir Gofal ‘Unsprayed cereal, rape and linseed crops’ option can provide this and can apply to whole fields or margins of at least 4 m width beyond the 1 m buffer zone. A spring cereal crop should be established by 20 April. Do not undersow or apply insecticides, and select a plot site before applying selective treatments of herbicide or fungicide. The crop should not be harvested until the agreed harvest date (after 1 August).

**FALLOW WITH A SPRING/SUMMER FALLOW**

Over-wintered stubble can be followed by a spring/summer fallow to benefit rare spring-sprouting arable plants and farmland birds that may also use the seed produced by broadleaved plants on the plot. This option can be applied to whole fields or plots within fields, but to benefit nesting birds it will need to be at least two hectares in size.

- Cultivate using tines or discs between 1 March and 20 March and avoid any further field operations between 20 March and 31 July.

**WHERE TO SITE OVER-WINTERED STUBBLE**

Stubble fields should be located close to the breeding sites of these species. Preference for breeding sites of these species is to obtain maximum benefit.

- Limited herbicide use in the preceding crop (such as the adoption of conservation headlands) will increase the value of the over-wintered stubble for wildlife.