



LINKING ENVIRONMENT AND FARMING

State of Nature Report 2016

Response from LEAF (Linking Environment And Farming)

The State of Nature report presents data from the last 40 years outlining the state of the UK's biodiversity. The report highlights the population increases and decreases in various farmland species. Whilst this data is compelling, we do not feel it represents the whole picture.

Farming is intrinsically linked with the environment and as such, farmers are fundamentally committed to conserving and enhancing the biodiversity on their farms.

Agri-Environment schemes have had huge success over the past couple of decades with great take up from a wide range of enthusiastic farmers. The level to which such schemes have been embraced by farmers is reflected in the conservation areas that have been set aside, the conservation skills that have been gained and the species that have benefited. Agri-Environment schemes need to continue to develop to allow for more targeted and site specific conservation work. This will allow farmers to focus on species relevant to their land and maximise their efforts. Where there is positive management, we do see improvements.

These conservation efforts are further backed up by organisations such as ourselves and many others, both in terms of providing guidance and technical support, as well as rewarding farmers who are doing a fantastic job through the [LEAF Marque](#) environmental assurance system. As a result of this, LEAF farmers, through [Integrated Farm Management](#), provide nesting habitat and summer and winter food for farmland birds, 74% leave a minimum of 5% of their land uncropped so that it is available as habitat, 72% have conservation headlands, 73% adjust field operations to avoid destroying the nests of birds and bumblebees. These actions are known to benefit nature – unsown land benefits stone-curlews, skylarks, brown hares, arable plants, butterflies and bumblebees while conservation headlands benefit rare arable plants. A single hedgerow can support 750 species of fly and 85% of LEAF farmers retain all their hedgerows and boundaries.

The [LEAF Marque](#) rewards farmers for good environmental practice, but this needs to be further backed up by agri-environment payments as the marketplace is not yet ready to foot the entire biodiversity bill.

Efforts around biodiversity conservation have been further backed up by improved soil management, with 75% of LEAF farmers working to increase their soil organic matter as part of a wider soil management plan.

Conserving farmland biodiversity is an issue very high on the agenda for many farmers but there are often different factors at play. Climate change, as we know, is and will continue to have a large impact on crop and farm yields. It also has implications for the biodiversity living alongside it. In addition, predators play an important part in the complex food webs integrated within farming. It is therefore

imperative that farmers are given the support and expertise to manage and enhance these complex ecosystems in which they farm, to deliver healthy productive crops alongside a thriving biodiversity.

So much has changed since the 1970s, where the priorities for farmers were very different. They were focussed around maximum production and this inevitably led to a lessening space for wildlife. The story since then has been very different. We have seen the launch and great success of a number of Agri-Environment schemes, which have been taken up by 70% of farmers. In addition, we ourselves (LEAF, Linking Environment And Farming) launched in 1991 as a response to farmers' growing interest in protecting and enhancing the land in which they farm. Since then, many farmers have been fundamentally committed to not only working with, but looking after nature.

And we continue to see this being delivered across the UK through [Integrated Farm Management](#) with great and positive results. For more information on LEAF and Integrated Farm Management visit www.leafuk.org