

Skylark Plots



How Skylark Plots Help

The UK skylark population has declined by 52% over the last 30 years; although present on many farms at low levels the national population is still declining by at least 1% per annum. This is largely due to the move from spring to winter cereals and the intensification of grassland management. Skylarks occupy open fields to avoid predators. They nest on the ground between April and August in open vegetation of no more than about 50 cm high. Historically, they would make two to three nesting attempts each year, but currently this is down to only one or two attempts. Skylarks are most successful on farmland with a combination of stubbles for food over winter and short, sparse vegetation for nesting and feeding chicks. The planting of winter crops often means vegetation is too dense for a second or third brood to be produced. One low cost solution to this problem is to leave small (typically 4m by 4m in size), undrilled patches within wheat crops to enhance access for nesting and foraging.

Skylark Plots (SP), also known as 'Undrilled Patches or Scrapes', have been shown in the SAFFIE project to increase the breeding success of skylarks by 49%. Skylarks benefit from the undrilled areas because of they can spot and capture insect food for their young more easily. If Skylark Plots were adopted on 20% of the winter cereal area, the UK decline in Skylarks may be reversed. Skylark Plots are included as an option in Defra's Entry Level Stewardship (ELS) Scheme launched in 2005. They are worth 5 points per plot equivalent to 10 points per hectare. Management details are provided in the ELS Scheme Guidance Booklet.



How to Establish Skylark Plots*

- Each year select a field that is to be sown with a winter cereal, more than 5 ha in area and with an open aspect. Avoid fields bounded by tree lines or adjacent to woods unless the size is greater than 10 ha. A good guide is if skylarks have been heard singing over the field in previous years.
- In any field Skylark Plots should be put in at a rate of up to **2 per hectare** as evenly distributed as is manageable. The layout of the plots in the field is not critical, they can be randomly or neatly spaced.
- Do **not** create the plots on tramlines, and make sure they are well away from telegraph poles and field boundaries.
- Where possible the patches where practical, plots should be placed at least 50m (preferably 75m) from the edge of the field to reduce risk of predator damage to nests. For example, up to 40 plots can be put in a 20 ha field, but should be concentrated towards the centre of the field.
- To create a Skylark Plot:

Either

Turn off/lift up the drill during sowing to leave an unsown area. This area should be no less than 3 m in width and no more than 12 m in length. The adjacent table indicates plot length and drill width options to give a plot of the ideal area (16-24m²). There is no need to worry about the tailing-off effect caused by lifting the drill out, this is to be expected.

Or

Spray out the plot with a non-selective non-residual weed killer (e.g. glyphosate) by the end of December.

*Check First

Always check the requirements for Skylark Plots in the ELS Handbook. This best practice guide is based on the latest scientific research and practical experience from the SAFFIE Project. If this advice differs from the ELS handbook you should seek clarification from the local RDS office.

Example drill width x plot length combinations

Aim for each plot to be 16-24m² in area

Drill width (m)	Plot length (m)
3	5.3 to 8
4	4 to 6
6	3 to 4
8	2 to 3

Plot Management

- After drilling, manage the plots as if they are a cropped part of the field (i.e. they can be over sprayed and receive fertiliser applications etc.)
- If there are concerns about difficult to control weeds, such as black grass or wild oats, then these can be controlled using a knapsack sprayer.

For more information on the SAFFIE project please visit the website: www.saffie.info



www.cropprotection.org.uk

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Always read the label. Use pesticides safely.



www.voluntaryinitiative.org.uk