

## Wild Bird Cover Plots

### Objective:

To support pollinator species during the summer months, to provide a source of insects for small birds to feed their chicks and to supply cover and feeding opportunities for birds and small rodents during the winter. In turn this provides hunting opportunities for Barn Owl, Hen Harrier and Kestrel.

### Background

The absence of tillage from upland areas and from most high nature value farmland reduces the feeding opportunities for many species at critical times of the year. Wild Bird Cover can compensate for this by introducing small areas of high value crops to otherwise largely grazing based agricultural systems.

### Site Suitability

- This action can only be selected on parcels with an Eligible hectare > 0.
- This action is available on both CP parcels declared as arable and on Non-CP parcels, therefore not available on any CP Parcel that has a scorecard assigned.
- In Non-CP parcels this action is not available on areas that are SAC/SPAs, NHAs, pNHAs or Annex 1 Grasslands.
- This action is not suitable immediately adjacent to watercourses or drains. If within a Freshwater Pearl Mussel catchment or within a high-status water objective catchment, use Wild Bird Cover Split Parcel (SP) to ensure a buffer of 12m is maintained between the edge of the wild bird cover plot and any watercourse/drain.
- The location should not be within 50m of houses, schools, or public buildings.
- Wild Bird Cover Plots should not be located within 30m of major roads, such as motorways and busy national or regional roads due to risk of collision of birds with traffic.
- This action is not suitable in areas where established scrub or rocky outcrops are present.

### Requirements

1. Establish a Wild Bird Cover Plot by the 30<sup>th</sup> of June following approval.
2. If the NPI AWP is approved on or before the 15<sup>th</sup> of May, it is taken that this NPI will be delivered in the approval year, unless withdrawn before the 30<sup>th</sup> of June or before any notification of inspection. If approval is issued after the 15<sup>th</sup> of May, this NPI can only be delivered the following year and the same rules of withdrawal apply.
3. To be eligible for this action, the minimum area to be delivered is 0.25ha. The participant can apply for more than one plot around the farm annually.
4. There must be at least a 2-metre uncultivated/unsown zone between the edge of the crop and the field boundary (i.e. a hedgerow, stone wall/bank, or stream/drain). This

- 2m zone **does not have to be additional** where a mandatory buffer **is in place** for applicable watercourses under S.I. No. 113 of 2022 (as amended) and GAEC 4.
5. The NPI Wild Bird Cover Plot can be delivered on a full or split LPIS parcel. Where the action is selected on a split parcel, choose NPI Wild Bird Cover Plot SP. To select on a whole parcel, Create WP and select NPI Wild Bird Cover Plot -WP.
  6. The Wild Bird Cover crop must contain:
    - a. At least one or more of these cereals: spring oats/ triticale/wheat/barley
    - b. At least two or more of the following: linseed, oil-seed rape, phacelia, fodder radish, mustard, spring vetch, lucerne, chicory, or birds-foot trefoil.
  7. Harvesting of the crop is not permitted and must remain in situ until the 1<sup>st</sup> of March of the following year.
  8. Only certified seed must be used and all receipts/labels for the crops sown must be retained by the participant for the duration of the ACRES contract and for twelve months after the date of submission of any claim for payment.
  9. No herbicides or pesticides can be applied post sowing. Only the spot treatment of noxious and invasive weeds with herbicides is allowed. Pre sowing weed control is permitted.
  10. Where necessary the Wild Bird Cover plot must be protected from livestock using a fence that is fit for purpose.

#### **Additional Guidance**

- Triticale is the preferred cereal due to its tolerance of low soil pH, relatively infertile soils and its resistance to lodging. Triticale along with Linseed and at least two other species (Mustard, Forage Radish, Phacelia and Vetch) is the recommended mix for this NPI.
- Preparation of the soil is key. Carry out pre sowing weed control to aid good establishment. Cultivate the soil by ploughing, light cultivation, power harrowing etc. to generate a fine seedbed. Roll the plot/strip after sowing.
- To ensure crop establishment lime and fertiliser is recommended. Fertiliser can be applied up to a maximum of half the fertiliser rate for Nitrogen and Phosphorus on spring oats as described in Statutory Instrument Number 113 of 2022.
- Livestock damage to the crop may result in the crop not being certified as delivered.
- Additional guidance and useful information and courses on Ireland's farmland bird species can be found at [Biodiversity Ireland](https://www.biodiversityireland.ie/).

**Table 14. List of prescribed species for Wild Bird Cover**

Species	Monoculture seed rate kg/ha
Spring oats	150kgs
Spring triticale	180kgs
Spring wheat	180kgs
Spring barley	160kgs
Linseed	50kgs
Spring Oil-seed rape	6kgs
Phacelia	8kg
Fodder Radish	10kgs
Mustard	15kgs
Spring Vetch	40kgs
Lucerne	25kgs
Chicory	10kgs
Bird's foot Trefoil	12kgs

**Note 15:** To ensure successful establishment of the Wild Bird Cover crop, the minimum seed rate should be at least one third of the monoculture rate (see **Table 14** above) for each of the chosen prescribed species for a three-way mix. For a four-way mix, the minimum seed rate should be at least one quarter of the monoculture rate for each of the chosen prescribed species. See examples in **Table 15 and 16** below.

**Table 15: Example 1 of Wild Bird Cover Plot Mix (kg/ha)**

Spring Triticale	50
Linseed	14
Mustard	3.75
Phacelia	2

**Table 16: Example 2 of Wild Bird Cover Plot Mix (kg/ha)**

Spring Triticale	50
Linseed	14
Forage Radish	4
Vetch	18