

Wild Bird Cover Strips

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 Strips 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 can only be selected on CP fields that have a scorecard submitted and is only available on the following scorecard types: Grassland and Rough Grazing
- This action is not appropriate for fields with a medium or high cover of positive indicators.
- This action is not suitable immediately adjacent to watercourses or drains. A minimum of 6m is required between the edge of the strip and any watercourse. 12m should be maintained between the edge of the wild bird cover strip and any watercourse/drain within a Freshwater Pearl Mussel catchment or within a high-status water objective catchment.
- Wild Bird cover strips cannot be drawn in parallel. Each strip must run along its own boundary.
- Wild Bird Cover Strips 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.

Note 16: Fencing-Barbed Wire, Fencing- Permanent Electric or Fencing-Sheep Wire NPIs cannot be used to fulfil the fencing requirement of this ACRES NPI.

Requirements

1. Establish a Wild Bird Cover Strip 9 meters in width by the 30th of June following approval.
2. If the NPI AWP is approved on or before the 15th of May, it is taken that this NPI will be delivered in the approval year, unless withdrawn before the 30th of June or before any notification of inspection. If approval is issued after the 15th of May, this NPI can only be delivered the following year.

3. There must be at least 2m uncultivated/unsown zone between the edge of the crop and the field boundary (i.e. a hedgerow, stone wall/bank). The cultivated area must be at least 6m from any surface water course.
4. To be eligible for this action, the minimum continuous length to be delivered is 50m. These strips can be applied for annually but there will be a maximum of 400m payable per NPI-AWP.
5. The location and length (metres) must be identified on the LPIS parcel(s) and marked on the map submitted.
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 1st of March 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 strip must be protected from livestock using a fence that is fit for purpose.

Additional Guidance

- The location should not be adjacent to houses, schools, or public buildings.
- 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, Gold of Pleasure, Phacelia and Vetch) is the recommended mix for this NPI. See Table 18 and 19 below of WBC mixtures.
- 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 one bag of Granulated lime per 100m strip is recommended. Nutrients can be applied in line with crop requirements and maximum fertiliser rates allowed for spring cereal as described in Statutory Instrument Number 113 of 2022.
- Livestock damage to the crop may result in the crop not being certified as delivered.
- The same site can be used for linear strips of Wild Bird cover for up to 3 years. Grasses should be allowed to re-establish naturally after use.
- Additional guidance and useful information and courses on Ireland's farmland bird species can be found at [Biodiversity Ireland](https://www.biodiversityireland.ie/).

Table 17: List of prescribed species for Wild Bird Cover

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

Note 17: 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 17** 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 18** below.

Table 18: Example of Wild Bird Cover Strip Mix (kg/ha). Source Hen Harrier Project

4 way mix	kg/ha
Spring Triticale	50
Linseed	14
Fodder Radish	4
Vetch	18

Picture 5: Example of Wild Bird Cover Strip



Photo Source: Hen Harrier Project