Plantlife

Scotland Farmland Report

And on that farm he had...

...declining

Alpine milk vetch

Splendid waxcap

Corn marigold

Field gentian

Wild pansy

Contents

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Small white orchid

Marsh fritillary

Curlew

Great yellow bumblebee

Peewit

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Authors
Davie Black and Dr. Deborah Long.
With thanks to Richard Lockett, Alan Boulton, Luke Gaskell, Eric Meek and John Crossley

Editor
Joanna Bromley

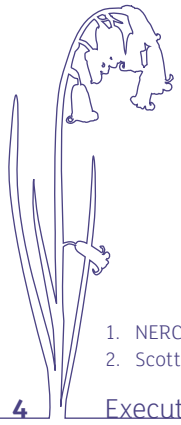
Executive summary

Wee, modest, crimson-tippèd flow'r,
Thou's met me in an evil hour;
For I maun crush amang the stoure
Thy slender stem:
To spare thee now is past my pow'r,
Thou bonnie gem.

In 1786, Robert Burns wrote about the fate of a single farmland flower as it succumbed to the plough at the farm of Mossgeil. One can only wonder what he might have thought about the most recent Countryside Survey,[1] which highlights the ongoing loss of plant diversity across Scotland. Today we are not only losing wild flowers in the wider countryside but also in special habitats identified for their botanical richness.

Scotland's countryside is still home to the braiding of field margins with poppies, cornflowers and chamomile, to hay meadows of buttercup, cranesbill and rare northern bedstraw and to hedgerows vibrant with hawthorn, black-thorn, dog rose and honeysuckle. The diversity of habitats that can be found in the corners of our farmland supports a huge range of species. But agricultural intensification and specialisation are in danger of simplifying this farmed landscape and making it the domain of fewer species where once there was abundant diversity.

Our wild flowers and plants support an extraordinary diversity of pollinators, birds and mammals. Flowers, including bird's foot trefoil (which supports 132 invertebrates, such as burnet moths and small blue butterfly) and knapweed (which supports 67 invertebrates), are part of our productive landscapes. As well as supporting pollinators, our native flora also contribute to flood control and clean soil and water.



Without wild plants, our productive lands could not be productive.

Scotland's farmers, however, are not in a position to farm for free and the wildlife benefits we want to see need to be paid for. Agri-environment schemes are the only mechanism to do this. Whilst agri-environment budgets remain under severe strain, it is vital that payments are targeted towards securing the greatest public good. Currently, biodiversity-rich areas, such as small crofts, often receive the lowest levels of Rural Development support.

Worryingly, agri-environment schemes in Scotland cannot, even at present rates, deliver the environmental priorities we, in Scotland, have set. To date, only 18% of the Rural Development programme funding is spent on agri-environment. The rest goes to rural infrastructure and Less Favoured Area Support payments. And of agri-environment scheme funding in 2011–2012, just under 15% was approved for options that could benefit plants and fungi in enclosed production lands.[2] The actual benefit of this spend for plants and fungi has never been measured.

Burns writes that to spare his farmland flower was 'past my pow'r'. We still have it in our grasp to change the future for Scotland's remaining 'bonnie gems'.

This report:

- **describes the importance of Scotland's farmed landscapes for native plants and fungi**
- **assesses the role of agri-environment schemes in creating space for nature**
- **sets out a recovery plan for Scotland's farmland biodiversity.**

1. NERC (2008) Countryside Survey 2007 www.countrysidesurvey.org.uk
2. Scottish Government Agriculture Facts and Figures 2012

Lapwing numbers have halved in the last 40 years but wild cornflowers have declined by

99%

Weeds and wild flowers

Scotland's wild flowers inspire a wide range of responses. A walker might enjoy the bright poppies and harebells that grow in field margins and along grassy banks; a farmer sees a weed that reduces the cereal yield. The increases in agricultural production, from which we have all benefitted, have been won by farmers controlling our native flora with help from herbicide companies, agronomists and agricultural policy.

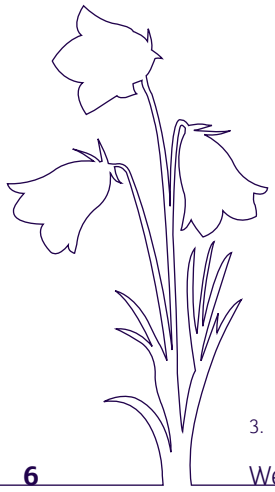
A third of Scotland's land[3] is farmed, that is managed as agricultural land and for pasture. From the intensively managed east coast to the extensively managed machair on the west, it is land that is generally enclosed or under a degree of control to maximise agricultural outputs. How this land is managed inevitably has a considerable impact on our native flora.

Here we look at three key habitats, where the severe decline in floral diversity has turned many wild plants into species of conservation concern.

1. Upland and lowland pasture

2. Arable and cropping

3. Crofting and High Nature Value Farming



3. Scottish Government Agriculture Facts and Figures 2012

Pasture

Pasture in Scotland ranges from enclosed, reseeded and fertilised lowland pastures with low levels of wild plant diversity, through unimproved pastures with lower soil nutrient levels and increasing plant diversity, to unenclosed rough grazing in the uplands with a semi-natural cover of grasses, wild flowers and dwarf shrubs like heather and blaeberry.

Wild flowers such as harebell, knapweed, devil's bit scabious and tormentil find their home in upland pastures, while meadow cranesbill, yarrow and yellow rattle thrive in lowland pasture. **Yet between 1998 and 2007 the area of enclosed, improved grassland in Scotland increased by 9% while its plant species richness declined by 8%.**

In the more extensive rough grazings, the extent of acid grassland increased by 8% but overall species richness declined in both acid and neutral grasslands with competitive species like nettle and soft rush increasing at the expense of species of open ground like field wood-rush and meadow vetchling.[4]

The intensity and timing of grazing and the levels of nutrient input are key factors that determine the quality of pasture land for wild plants and fungi and their associated invertebrates. The choice of stock can also influence the diversity of wild plants, as can the impact of wild herbivores such as voles, rabbits and deer.

4. NERC (2008) Countryside Survey 2007 www.countrysidesurvey.org.uk

Arable and cropping

Arable flowers are the fastest declining group of plants in Britain.

Compared to England, Scotland has a relatively poor diversity of arable plants, yet is still home to highly endangered species such as corn marigold, red hemp nettle and caraway.

The seeds of arable plants are often long-lived and disturbance from ploughing allows them to germinate. The amounts of fertilisers and pesticides used in fields have a strong influence on which wild flowers survive.

Enclosed farmland, including arable cropping and improved pasture, covers 20% of the land area of Scotland, and occurs mainly in the lowlands of central and eastern Scotland where the soil is more fertile and a more favourable climate exists for crops. These areas are primarily managed for food production and fields are often monocultures of a particular type of crop.

Crop edges and managed field margins are essential refuges for wild plants, with higher plant species richness than the main cropping area. This in turn allows for invertebrates, birds and mammals to forage, breed and move through the countryside.

Plant species richness in arable areas is low in comparison to semi-natural habitats, and has remained relatively unchanged since 1998. However, the ending of the compulsory set-aside option from the agri-environment programme raises the question as to whether this trend will continue, as plant species richness in set-aside is comparable to field margins and is more diverse than the area of the main crop.[5]

Without paying farmers to make space for nature, the area of farmland given over to field margins and headlands will decline, with a parallel decline in plant diversity across the field as a whole.

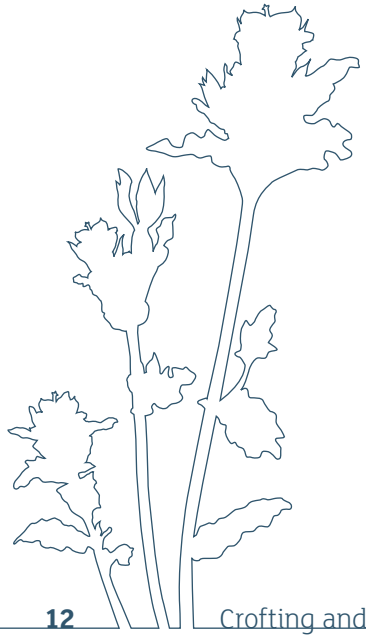
5. NERC (2008) Countryside Survey 2007 www.countrysidesurvey.org.uk

Crofting

Machair, a uniquely beautiful coastal landscape rich in flowers and wildlife, is restricted to the north and west of Scotland and is maintained almost solely by the traditional practices of crofting.

Typically a crofter is a tenant farmer, with about four acres of land. These small plots can rarely support a family so most crofters have other jobs and may be fishermen, postmen, road workers or ferry workers for example. The diversity of the machair – a typical 1m square has 45 different species of plants – is maintained by low-intensity agriculture with both arable and pastural components, including rotational livestock grazing, rotational cropping with fallow and growing of both cereals and hay using natural fertiliser, seaweed and farmyard manure. The rotational nature of crofting allows plant communities to flower and set seed while stock is removed from pasture in the summer. Stocking levels are low enough to prevent overgrazing. The cereal crops are generally small oat, rye and bere barley, sown in mixtures to maximise crop yields under rigorous, west coast summer conditions. While the total cereal crop yield is low, it is vital as winter feed for cattle.

The future of crofting depends heavily on receiving reward for the public goods it provides. There is a need for a higher active occupancy of crofts combined with greater flexibility to accommodate work off the croft. Croft landuse needs to retain the flexibility to operate at a small scale in terms of livestock numbers and arable cropping. As a key component of High Nature Value Farming, crofting should be valued for the environmental benefits it bestows as well as the economic support it provides to some of Scotland's remotest communities.



High Nature Value Farming (HNV)

Agriculturally marginal land and other landscapes with traditional farming practices, such as croft land, upland hay meadows and wet acidic meadows, survive with wild flowers intact and are referred to as High Nature Value Farming. In Scotland, the area of land classed as being HNV Farming is estimated as 29.6% of the total land area.[6]

The biodiversity value of High Nature Value Farming systems is a result of the management of a mosaic of habitats in the landscape, with different areas being farmed in different ways at different times of the year.[7] This type of low-intensity farming allows space for wild flora and fungi and their associated wildlife. The presence of habitat mosaics allows species to move around the landscape, enabling them to adjust to land management practices and a changing climate. These robust natural systems are capable of maintaining a high diversity of species and habitats. In times of change, these ecosystems will continue to deliver the services we depend on, including pollination and a healthy soil. Prioritising HNV areas for resources is crucial in our fight against climate and environmental change.

6. Scottish Government (2011) Developing High Nature Value Farming and Forestry Indicators for the Scotland Rural Development Programme Summary Report of the Technical Working Group on High Nature Value Farming and Forestry Indicators. http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Resource/Doc/355629/0120133.pdf
7. McCracken 2011 Farmland biodiversity and the Common Agricultural Policy. Rural Policy Centre briefing paper April 2011 (RPC PB 2011/04) http://www.sruc.ac.uk/downloads/file/48/farmland_biodiversity_and_the_common_agricultural_policy_cap_policy_briefing Accessed 13 March 2013.

The importance of the wild in *wild*flower

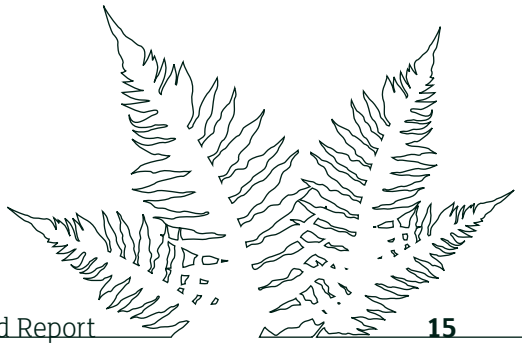
The loss of our farmland flora is, of course, having a detrimental effect on farmland wildlife. In response, nectar strips and grassland creation to help bumblebees, and wild bird seed crops to boost the seed supply for farmland birds and small mammals are increasingly used. But instead of turning to seed packets in the first instance, Plantlife advocates managing farmland better. Restore grassland naturally by using local green hay or seed and allowing pioneer plants in arable communities to germinate, flower and set seed. This will support all our farmland wildlife providing a food resource that supports every species.[8,9] The mutual relationships between pollinators and plants cannot be separated and the encouragement of one group of plants to the detriment of others may ultimately harm farmland wildlife.[10]

This sustainable, long-term approach also helps safeguard the distinctiveness of our local flora.

This is part of the magic of wild flowers; a wildflower meadow in Argyll with whorled caraway and lesser butterfly-orchids will be different in character to a grazed pasture in Orkney, with Scottish primrose and lots of eyebrights. This is what makes both of them special.

Commercial wildflower material only includes a small proportion of the genetic and phenological diversity available in wild plants and is a poor substitute for the real thing. Some mixes include species not even native to the UK. As an example, many of the cornfield flowers sold in some brands of seed packets of annual mixes contain an eastern European form of corn chamomile rather than our native species.

Wild flowers are resilient and opportunistic but we need to give them a chance to grow in their natural environment.



8. Carreck, N.L. and Williams, I.H. (2002) Food for insect pollinators on farmland: insect visits to flowers of annual seed mixtures. Journal of Insect Conservation, 6; 13-23.
9. Carvell, C., Westrich, P., Meek, W.R., Pywell, R.F., and Nowakowski, M. (2006) Assessing the value of annual and perennial forage mixtures for bumblebees by direct observation and pollen analysis. Apidologie, 37; 326–340.
10. Gibson, R.H., Nelson, I.L., Hopkins, G.W., Hamlett, B.J. and Memmott, J. (2006) Pollinator webs, plant communities and the conservation of rare plants: arable weeds as a case study. Journal of Applied Biology, 43; 246-257.

Where are we now?

A closer look at rural development schemes and their effectiveness for wild plants

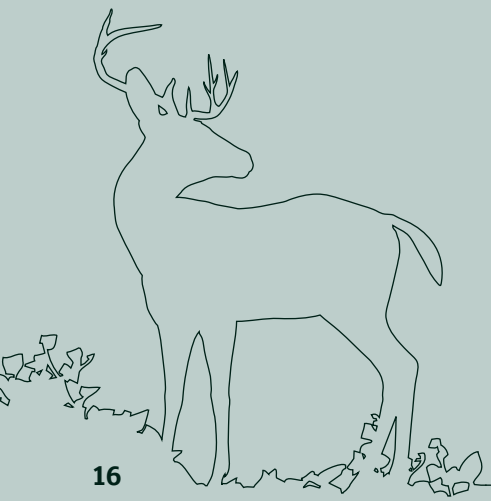
Agri-environment schemes have existed in Scotland since 1987. Designed to encourage farmers and crofters to manage their land for the benefit of Scotland's wildlife while carrying out normal farming operations, the schemes were also intended to improve rural businesses, improve water quality, address climate change, and to assist rural communities to thrive.

The current Scotland Rural Development Programme is a six-year funding programme running from 2007–13, with a value of £1.5 billion, which implements the policies of the Common Agricultural Policy, through a complicated piece of bureaucratic machinery, with Pillars, Axes, Measures, Options, and Programmes.

The processes that lie behind the SRDP are not the focus of this report. What is of interest is what SRDP funding achieves for Scotland's wild plants and fungi and how effective it is: are the options available to land managers easy to understand and implement and do they provide a measurable benefit for wild plants and biodiversity throughout Scotland?

Quantity...

In 2012, JNCC reported that 13% of agricultural land was included in agri-environment schemes under Rural Priorities (RP) with a further 10% under Land Managers Options (LMO): a total of 23% of Scotland's agricultural land was in receipt of some agri-environment funding.[11]



not quality

However, when assessing the effectiveness of the agri-environment component of the current SRDP, the most recent figures come from the Mid-term Evaluation,[12] which was completed two years into the programme. As a mid-term review, it can do no more than demonstrate the direction of travel but in terms of the actual benefits that agri-environment scheme funding has delivered for Scotland's wild plants and biodiversity, the direction of travel is unclear...

While the Review enables us to determine how many landholdings entered into contracts, how much funding was committed to which measure and the general geographical distribution of the funds, analysis of the impact of the funding on the habitats and species targeted is unavailable. Despite this the review concluded that the agri-environment component was *"...having a positive impact on the environment, in particular on habitats and species... although evidence from the survey is subjective"*.[13] We would dispute this: evidence from the Countryside Survey[14] points to continuing declines in the diversity and abundance of wild plants in the countryside during periods when agri-environment schemes have been in operation.

11. JNCC (2012) UK Biodiversity Indicators http://jncc.defra.gov.uk/page-4242
12. Scottish Government (2010) Mid Term Evaluation of Scotland Rural Development Programme http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2011/03/21113609/0
13. Scottish Government (2010) Mid Term Evaluation of Scotland Rural Development Programme http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2011/03/21113609/0
14. NERC (2008) Countryside Survey 2007 www.countrysidesurvey.org.uk

Under review

Agri-environment schemes in Scotland deliver the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP). This is under review in 2013 with proposals including 'greening' the CAP to ensure it delivers the environmental benefits needed. The potential for greening is substantial and could slow the decline in farmland biodiversity in intensively farmed areas. Extensively farmed areas would also benefit.[15]

However, it is far from clear what these 'greening' measures might aim to achieve. The success of any proposed greening will depend on how the measures are implemented. For example:

- it is possible to 'maintain' permanent pasture without it necessarily having any biodiversity or climate change benefits – it is the way it is 'maintained' that counts;
- increasing the diversity of crops grown at any one time has the potential to reduce landscape simplification (one of the major drivers of farmland biodiversity decline) but this depends on how 'different crops' are defined – wheat, barley and oats are all different crops, but growing these three would still result in a largely homogenous cereal landscape;
- maintaining an ecological focus on up to 7% of each farm also has the potential to increase landscape heterogeneity, but currently the areas under consideration appear to be largely, if not exclusively, farmland edge habitats. Including some elements that occur within fields would reduce landscape simplification even more, but until the 'biotopes' that are mentioned in the draft CAP reform text are defined in more detail then it is difficult to judge how useful this measure will be in practice.[16]

Despite the efforts to date to reverse declines and maintain biodiversity, it is clear that agri-environment options, although making some gains in freshwater systems, have failed to halt decline in wild plant species in Scotland. There needs to be a real and significant change in how agri-environment schemes are accessed and used by farmers and land managers before there will be any change.

1. Schemes need to be accessible and appropriate: "overall, the SRDP is felt by crofting interests to be inaccessible."[17]
2. The impact of schemes needs to be monitored so we can see if we are getting value for money: the lack of monitoring and reporting for schemes to date, such as the Less Favoured Area Support Scheme, means environmental benefits from the scheme cannot be identified.[18]
3. Schemes need to be available for the right thing in the right place: Scotland's use of the "historic" model for calculating the Single Farm Payment (SFP) means low-intensity livestock producers receive extremely low direct support and in many cases, common land and small crofts receive no payments. This means that biodiversity rich areas, providing the highest public value, often receive the lowest levels of Rural Development support.[19]

15. D McCraken (2011) CAP reform post-2013: an opportunity to support High Nature Value Farming systems in Scotland? Rural Policy Centre Policy briefing RPC PB 2011/09
16. http://www.sruc.ac.uk/info/120159/hot_topics/30/greening_of_the_cap_beneficial_for_biodiversity
17. Scottish Government (2010) Mid Term Evaluation of Scotland Rural Development Programme http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2011/03/21113609/0
18. Scottish Government (2010) Mid Term Evaluation of Scotland Rural Development Programme http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2011/03/21113609/0
19. RSPB (2011) High Nature Value Farming: how diversity in Europe's farm systems delivers for biodiversity

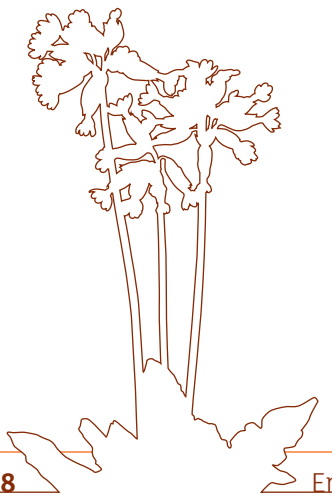
Environmental stewardship in practice

Treshnish Farm, Isle of Mull

Acquired in 1994, Treshnish is a 750ha farm, with hill ground, coastal heath and small areas of woodland on the west coast of Mull. The land was over-grazed, so sheep numbers were reduced and grazing diversified by starting a small herd of cattle and using insect-friendly vetinarary treatments. With agri-environment scheme support through Rural Priorities, the farm now manages for scrub, tall herb communities, species-rich grassland, wetland and open grazed grassland.

Management of the in-bye works on a four-year rotation of three years' grazing and 1 year silage. The grazing regime carefully balances grazing pressure and timing of grazing: sheep are excluded at particular times, with low grazing density on the hill ground. The silage is late cut after flower seed has set, and tight grazing in winter cleans up pastures to avoid the build up of rank vegetation. Bracken needs constant management and encroachment into the species-rich grassland can be challenging because timing of cutting has the potential to damage the range of wild flowers under it.

An abundance of wild flowers thrive on at Treshnish, providing nectar for 17 species of butterfly and 255 macro-moths. Field gentian (Red Data List Status: vulnerable) and wood bitter-vetch (Red Data List Status: near threatened) grow in the silage fields and 15 species of orchid have been found on the farm, including the nationally scarce bog orchid, sword-leaved helleborine (Red Data List Status: vulnerable), frog orchid and small white orchid.



Loft and Hill of White Hamars, Orkney

The farming regime adopted at Loft and Hill of White Hamars demonstrates that grazing can benefit wild plants, specifically Scottish primrose, and can be successfully incorporated into a low-intensity, commercial sheep farm.

On this 126ha holding, a quarter of the land was former improved pasture with the rest a mosaic of coastal heaths and grasslands of varying types, in which Scottish primrose grew in small colonies. Sheep were used to create a short, open sward to allow seeds to germinate, then excluded to allow the plants to flower and set seed.

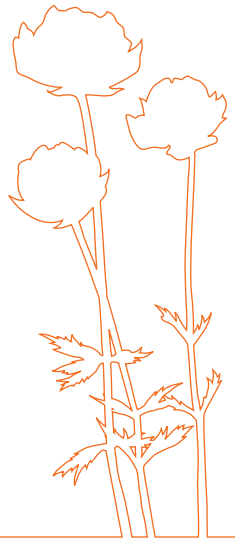
Scottish primrose is endemic to Britain, growing wild only in Orkney, Caithness and Sutherland. In Orkney, the number of sites where it was found had halved during the 20th century, with some colonies made up of small numbers of plants.

Results over a 10-year period showed an increase in Scottish primrose from 659 to 3316, with 40 other plant species showing similar impressive increases under the same grazing regime. 200-240 lambs produced annually showed that conservation grazing is commercially viable.[20]

20. R Harris & M Jones (1998) The nature of grazing: farming with flowers at Loft and the Hill of White Hamars. Scottish Wildlife Trust.

Kittyfield Farm, Melrose

Kittyfield Farm in the Scottish Borders is a family-run 430acre mixed farm near Melrose, with sheep and cattle, fed on predominantly home grown rations, and some arable crops. The family appreciate the wild flora of the arable fields, including some uncommon flowers such as treacle-mustard, dense-flowered fumitory and field-woundwort. The diversity of wild plants on the farm supports a wide range of wildlife and is considered a benefit rather than a cost. Their presence certainly does not damage farm profitability. For example, 5-7 year direct sown ryegrass / clover leys are managed to produce a high take of clover, through no spraying in the first year and with annual weeds controlled by topping and grazing. Typically there are 40+ wild flowers present across the field but they have minimal economic impact. Conservation headlands and unharvested crop options are also used to conserve wild arable plants. While the philosophy at Kittyfield Farm is that wild flowers have always been part of farming and that whilst they need to be controlled, it is not always necessary to try and eliminate them. In appropriate numbers they support wildlife, and removing them can often cost more than is gained in yield.



Crofting and resilient flower communities

Lesser butterfly orchid's stronghold is in north-west Scotland often, although not always, on crofting land. Found in a wide range of habitats, this species has suffered a considerable decline. In the lowlands it has been lost through drainage, woodland disturbance and agricultural intensification, while upland populations have been lost to increased grazing.

In 2008, Plantlife commissioned an assessment of 18 sites where lesser butterfly orchid grew. Of five sites with conservation management agreements in place involving grazing, only one was having any success in maintaining high populations of this orchid. All the others were experiencing a build up of vegetation which was outcompeting this orchid in particular and was resulting in a general decline in botanical diversity. Maintaining and increasing numbers of lesser butterfly orchid requires flexibility in the scheme that enables farmers to move animals from one site to another when local conditions dictate rather than when certain dates are reached. This is particularly true for small sites and crofts. Although crofts have the habitats to support healthy lesser butterfly orchid populations, inflexibile agri-environment schemes means that the best sites for plants like lesser butterfly orchid, are more likely to be managed as part of larger, extensive holdings and not on small scale crofts.

Restrictions on supplementary feeding in management agreements and agri-environment schemes also compound these issues with grazing. Low nutrient, flower-rich pastures cannot maintain animal condition without supplementary feeding, which makes achieving appropriate levels of grazing even more difficult.

A recovery plan...

We need to see better value for wild plants and biodiversity coming from the investment we are making through agri-environment schemes. Scotland's farmland deserves better than the current trajectory of declining diversity and increasing homogenisation of habitats. So much more could be achieved through better deployment of existing resources.

Successive governments have neglected plant conservation on farmland and the resulting mixture of policy mechanisms deployed is not effective. This means we need:

Higher levels of subsidy available: Scotland has the lowest level of Rural Development support per hectare of farmed land in the EU.[21] Direct funds are the fourth lowest. Biodiversity-rich nations, like Scotland, must invest in maintaining and restoring that biodiversity through agri-environment schemes and other appropriate funding mechanisms.

An outcome-based delivery focused on buying environmental goods: SRDP needs to continue to move towards an outcome-based delivery that focuses on biodiversity results. Some measures need to be less prescriptive and more flexible and this is especially important for High Nature Value Farming. The successor to the Lesser Favoured Area Support scheme, the Areas of Natural Constraint scheme, should be delivering more public benefits.

Improved targeting of measures: this means making tough choices and identifying what agri-environment schemes should support and what they should not. Schemes should be targeted by geographical location, so that measures can be put in place to manage for the species and habitats that occur in that geographical area. It is time to see an end to measures for specific species or habitats being available in areas where that species or habitat does not occur.

Specific, targeted and appropriate advice to individual farms: the availability of professional advice for farmers wanting to access agri-environment scheme funding in Scotland has dwindled with the closure of FWAG Scotland, Scottish Native Woodlands and the decline in capacity at SRUC, Scotland's Rural College. However, in order to achieve environmental benefits and value for money, it is imperative that management advice is available, whether it is a designated site or a lowland arable farm. An advisory service with the option to call in specialist support is vital, to provide generic advice on maximising benefits for biodiversity, plus a level of detail appropriate to the site and its environmental importance. On occasion this may mean using a top down approach to target measures in the most appropriate area: local priorities should focus on delivering national priorities in a local context to provide best value for money.

An accessible process that enables farmers to access support: the current bureaucracy puts many land managers off applying for support. The problem is particularly acute in High Nature Value areas, including crofting land, where SRDP is generally felt to be out of the means of crofters. This excludes 0.75 million hectares of land managed by around 30% of households on the mainland and 65% of households on the islands.

Effective monitoring: current monitoring only measures whether the funding was spent. It does not focus on whether the funding spent achieved any positive environmental outcome. Taxpayers need to know if the support provided resulted in more orchids, not whether the farmer actually spent the funding or not.

Access to support on a longer-term basis and on a wider landscape scale: five-year agreements are too short for effective land management and it is counter-productive for good schemes, or groups of schemes, to disappear after five years. For effective *and* cost effective management, ten-year agreements need to be available, paralleling current woodland management schemes, or advisors need to be in place to help land managers re-apply. Working on a landscape scale is difficult, but with the right facilitation can be made to work.[22]

Immediate priorities

Agreeing the CAP and delivering it in Scotland over the next 3 years:

The European Union is currently discussing the Common Agricultural policy and its future. The Scottish Government, as part of the UK government delegation, needs to ensure that the needs of Scotland's farmland, especially our High Nature Value areas, are taken into account. In order the get the best from CAP for Scotland's farmland plants and fungi, we need to see the following:

1. Resources effectively targeted to achieve measurable outcomes for plants and fungi
2. Measures that support the maintenance of HNV Farming systems
3. Advisory services that facilitate the delivery of measures
4. An improved system of spatial recording and monitoring of the biodiversity outcomes

Longer term priorities

Even at its best, SRDP does not provide long-term security for threatened plants and fungi. As a voluntary scheme, it is possible for farms to leave schemes after many years of public investment when ownership changes or when economic incentives to remove important plant assemblages become overwhelming. In those cases, the public has rented benefits for plant conservation that have eventually been lost.

Plantlife is concerned that voluntary agri-environment schemes do not give long-term protection to farmland plant hotspots. In order to do this, we would need to:

1. Identify individual land holdings within HNV
2. Support collaborative applications to deliver an ecosystem approach to land management that benefits plants in all priority habitats
3. Provide mechanisms to access long-term (30+ years) funded agreements for farming systems with individual land owners, paralleling forestry management agreements
4. Explore the opportunities offered by requirements of the Scottish Land Use Strategy and CAP reform to create more plant-friendly agricultural systems
5. Spread awareness of the plight and natural beauty of wild farmland plants to the farming community and the general public

21. Scottish Environment LINK File Note 2: The Draft Scottish Government Budget, SRDP Funding 2011-2012. http://www.scotlink.org/files/policy/PositionPapers/LINKatfFileNote2SRDP.pdf
22. Boulton, Lockett and Seymour (2012) A review and evaluation of collaborative landscape-scale management initiatives. Scottish Natural Heriatge commissioned report.

Conclusion

Banking our gold

Home to the poppy, symbol of peace, and spear thistle, emblem of Scotland, Scotland's farmland, although a small percentage of our landscape, retains an importance beyond its size. The diversity of these habitats and the diversity of ecosystem services they support are at risk if we do not invest in maintaining habitat and species diversity and ensuring that the countryside retains the capacity to provide the thoroughfare for species to move from place to place.

Unless we ensure that agri-environment schemes are funded sufficiently to provide support to farmers in areas where the richest biodiversity is found, we run the risk of losing all those benefits that Scotland's farmland can provide. What use are large fields of raspberries without the pollinators to produce fruit?

The custodians of Scotland's farmland need to continue to provide homes for its wildlife. And we need society as a whole to celebrate the value of our farmland: corn marigolds are gold in more than one sense of the word.

"While NFUS continuously pushes for better environmental regulation and a good deal from the next CAP, we're more likely to secure a better deal for Scottish farming if we can harness the power of the environmental lobby. They won't give their support for free, and there are likely to be areas where disagreement persists, sometimes with no common ground within sight, but we have many common goals and therefore it's in all our interests to secure a strong CAP. Without it everyone loses."

Andrew Bauer, NFUS

Plantlife

We are Plantlife

Plantlife is the organisation that is speaking up for our wild flowers, plants and fungi. From the open spaces of our nature reserves to the corridors of government, we're here to raise their profile, to celebrate their beauty, and to protect their future.

Wild flowers and plants play a fundamental role for wildlife, and their colour and character light up our landscapes. But without our help, this priceless natural heritage is in danger of being lost.

Join us in enjoying the very best that nature has to offer.

Patron: HRH The Prince of Wales

Plantlife Scotland, Balallan House
24 Allan Park, Stirling, FK8 2QG
T +44 (0)1786 478509
scotland@plantlife.org.uk

www.plantlife.org.uk

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