



CASE STUDIES - ESPC Target 6

At least 30% of production lands managed consistent with the conservation of plant diversity

Important Arable Plant Areas (IAPAs)

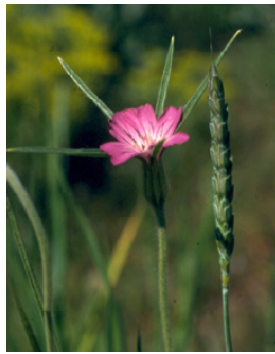
GSPC Target 6 (ESPC target 2.9)

Relevant species or habitats

Project coordinators	Plantlife International
Partner organisations	Farming and Wildlife Advisory Group (FWAG) and Worcestershire Wildlife Trust
Funding mechanisms	Esmee Fairbairn Foundation, Natural England



Corncockle at Ranscombe Farm
© Bob Gibbons/ Plantlife



Corncockle flower
(*Agrostemma githago*)



Arable plants training day
Species identification

Description

Arable plant species are the most threatened group of plants in the United Kingdom. Although almost 30% of the country (7 million hectares) is under cultivation, arable plant species suffer continuing and often terminal decline, out of a total of c.150, 7 species are extinct and 54 are currently threatened. Reasons for the decline include: widespread use of herbicides; improved seed cleaning techniques, increased use of nitrogen fertilisers; changes in crop rotation; loss of crops such as rye and flax; loss of over-winter stubble and summer fallow; effective drainage; removal of boundaries and loss of field margins. Recent measures have recognised this threat and the UK Biodiversity Action Plan contains 12 vascular arable plants, 5 arable bryophytes and the arable field margin itself as a priority habitat.

The UK Important Arable Plant Area was developed to identify sites of European, national and county level importance for arable plants. The methodology is outlined in Byfield and Wilson (2005).

The first list identified 133 sites as being of county or national importance, and 6 of these were identified as important at the European level, although this is expected to increase.

(Continued on page 2)



CASE STUDIES - ESPC Target 6

Important Arable Plants Areas (IAPAs)

Description (II)

The next stage of the process was to secure the conservation of key IAPA sites (focused in 5 counties) using sustainable management under the agri-environment schemes available, particularly the new Environmental Stewardship Scheme launched in England in 2005. During this implementation the project identified a number of problems within this new scheme for delivering arable plant conservation and a corresponding list of recommendations for improvement:

- 1. Review of Stewardship Scheme:** uncropped cultivated margins are the most effective management option for rare arable plants, however farmers are currently free to choose a range of management options under the new Entry Level Scheme and the financial incentive to carry out these techniques is insufficient compared with the careful management that is required.
- 2. Targeting hotspots:** key arable plant areas need to be targeted for conservation action
- 3. Natural regeneration over sown mixtures:** the schemes have favoured sown mixes, often non-native, for field margins, which benefit birds but not the local arable plants which could regenerate from the seed bank
- 4. More best practice advice and flexible management is required**
- 5. Research gaps within arable plant conservation need to be addressed**

* * * * *

Date of case study

Citations and Publications

Still, K. & Byfield A., *New Priorities for Arable Plant Conservation*, Plantlife

Walker et al, 2006, DEFRA field margin evaluation: Phase 3: Evaluation of agri-environment cultivation options in England; Effectiveness of new agri-environment schemes in conserving arable plants in intensively farmed landscapes, ADAS, CEH & DEFRA

Byfield A.J. & Wilson P.J. (2005) Important Arable Plant Areas: Identifying priority sites for arable plant conservation in the UK, Plantlife International (Salisbury)

Contacts

Kate Still (kate.still@plantlife.org.uk)

Website

www.plantlife.org.uk and www.arableplants.org.uk

