
HEDGEROWS — MANAGEMENT POLICY



Crataegus laevigata Midland hawthorn flowering in a well-managed hedge (berries inset)

Native hedgerows are one of the defining features of the British lowlands. They can be centuries old and mark ancient boundaries, often in combination with a ditch and lynchet, or they can be recently planted with a mix of native woody species. All are valuable wildlife habitats, nesting/roosting/sheltering places and corridors along which species can move and connect with other habitats. They can be thought of as linear woodland, especially when they contain trees, as many do. A mature hedge with trees connecting two tracts of woodland is an especially important feature that isolates wildlife if broken by a new road or other intrusion.

Part of the hedgerow habitat is its ground flora. Beneath a hedge, we find shade-loving vegetation and spaces where the old favourites of our walks and paths so often grow, their common names reflecting their botanical place: Jack-by-the-hedge, hedge woundwort, hedgerow crane’s-bill, *etc.*



Anemone nemoralis wood anemone is a common flower at the base of hedges.

Research¹ shows that hedgerow management has a significant influence on the value of hedges for wildlife in terms of ecological connectivity (“wildlife corridors”), faunal food resources (especially flowers, fruit, and foliage), and in how it changes ecological factors such as predation and parasitism. Hedgerow management regimens affect different wild species in different ways, so heterogeneity of management is considered the preferred option over a large site, but the best “standard” regime is to cut in late winter rather than autumn and to promote taller, wider hedges using an “incremental cutting intensity” that allows smaller hedges to grow by, say, 10cm in breadth and width each year.

OUR MANAGEMENT

To maximise their biodiversity value, we follow a particular regime for managing hedges on our land:

-  We limit hedge cutting to the period September–February to avoid active birds’ nests with a preference for late winter cutting for general biodiversity benefits.
-  We protect the rhizosphere (root zone) of hedges and their trees by keeping ground disturbance operations and new buildings away from them.
-  Where hedges are gappy, we infill with new native plantings.
-  When we cut hedges, we avoid any trees and aim to maintain the hedge with thick bushy growth, trimming annually (see below) but allowing species such as hawthorn that flower and fruit on the previous year’s growth to remain uncut in parts, such as along one side of the hedge. We instruct grounds staff and contractors to avoid using flails in general hedge trimming and to use bespoke hedge-cutting tools that trim tidily if they can. Flails can leave an untidy “slashed” finish and can be inimical to some species when they smash up the branch ends and thus crush those invertebrates that live there, such as the twig-tip pupae of the hawthorn sawfly, which otherwise would mostly fall to the ground with the cut twigs rather than be crushed.
-  For Favourable Conservation Status (FCS) we need wide, tall hedges so we aim for no less than 2m broad and 3m tall, usually in an “**A**” shape, trimming smaller hedges incrementally to increase width and height by about 10cm per annum.
-  We maintain the ecological resources of dead wood, knot holes, fungi, hollows, sap runs and epiphytes (ivy, lichens, bryophytes, *etc.*).
-  We maintain the umbricolous hedge-bottom flora at FCS, which means no or only occasional winter strimming, maintaining a meadow strip of a metre or so along each side of the hedge and avoiding short mowing there; and we

¹ E.g. that collected in *The Ecology of Hedgerows and Field Margins* edited by J. W. Dover (Routledge, 2019).

enrich the ground flora where necessary with native herbaceous and other species.

-  Where possible, we manage grassland that runs up to hedges as a species-rich pollinator-positive, typical type (such as the mesotrophic National Vegetation Classification MG5 where there are circumneutral soils). (See our grassland policy in this series.)

DESIRABLE NATIVE WOODY HEDGEROW SPECIES

Thin, gappy, shorn, species-poor hedges are proscribed, as are monospecific barriers of exotics such as cypress, garden privet and laurel. We promote thick, tall species-rich hedgerows. Here are some species we like to see:

<i>Acer campestre</i> field maple	<i>Prunus spinosa</i> blackthorn
<i>Alnus glutinosa</i> alder	<i>Pyrus pyraster</i> wild pear
<i>Betula pendula</i> silver birch	<i>Quercus robur</i> pedunculate oak
<i>Betula pubescens</i> downy birch	<i>Rhamnus cathartica</i> buckthorn
<i>Carpinus betulus</i> hornbeam	<i>Rosa canina</i> agg. Dog rose
<i>Cornus sanguinea</i> dogwood	<i>Salix caprea</i> goat willow
<i>Corylus avellana</i> hazel	<i>Salix cinerea</i> agg. grey willow
<i>Crataegus laevigata</i> Midland hawthorn	<i>Salix fragilis</i> crack willow
<i>Crataegus monogyna</i> hawthorn	<i>Salix viminalis</i> osier
<i>Cytisus scoparius</i> broom	<i>Sambucus nigra</i> elder
<i>Euonymus europaeus</i> spindle	<i>Sorbus aria</i> common whitebeam
<i>Fagus sylvatica</i> beech	<i>Sorbus aucuparia</i> rowan
<i>Frangula alnus</i> alder buckthorn	<i>Sorbus torminalis</i> wild service-tree
<i>Fraxinus excelsior</i> ash	<i>Taxus baccata</i> yew
<i>Hedera helix</i> ivy	<i>Tilia cordata</i> small-leaved lime
<i>Ilex aquifolium</i> holly	<i>Tilia x europaea</i> lime
<i>Lonicera periclymenum</i> honeysuckle	<i>Ulex europaeus</i> gorse
<i>Malus sylvestris</i> crab apple	<i>Ulmus glabra</i> wych elm
<i>Populus nigra</i> black poplar	<i>Ulmus procera</i> English elm
<i>Populus tremula</i> aspen	<i>Viburnum lantana</i> wayfaring tree
<i>Prunus avium</i> wild cherry	<i>Viburnum opulus</i> guelder-rose
<i>Prunus domestica</i> wild plum	

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