

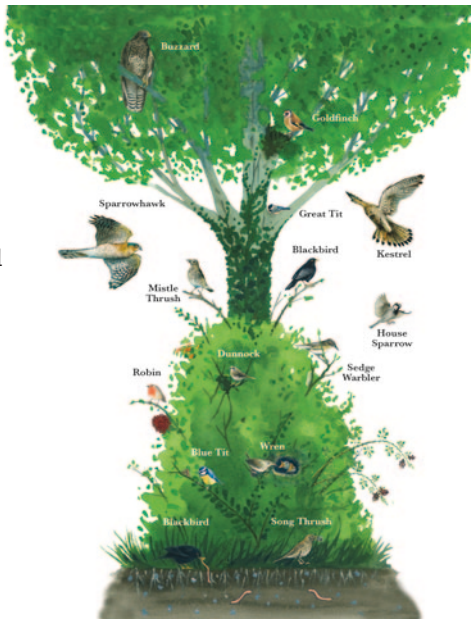
# ENVIRONMENT

April 2025

## Hedges' vital role

Our native Irish hedges are an example of how biodiversity, climate and water are connected. Both treeline hedges and topped hedges sequester and store carbon, regulate water in the landscape, and are a very important habitat – provided each type is managed appropriately, ensuring a good and healthy structure. Of 110

birds regularly recorded in the BirdWatch Ireland Countryside Bird Survey, 55 use hedges, with 35 nesting in them, each with different requirements and using a different niche.



*Native Irish hedges are good for biodiversity, carbon and water regulation.*

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**FROM MARCH  
TO AUGUST,**  
hedges must not be  
cut to avoid  
disturbance of  
nesting birds –

# 35

bird species nest in  
hedges, each using  
a separate niche.

# Biodiversity

## Allow space for nature in your field margins

Field margins comprise rough grassland on the edge of fields of intensively managed farmland. Their linear nature provides corridors of movement and networks for nature through the countryside, as well as being habitats of high biodiversity value. Their structural diversity, as well as the diversity of flora,



*Field margins are networks for nature.*

contributes to biodiversity. Good structure is as important as species. Lumpy and bumpy is good. Vegetation flowers and produces seed.

### Management of field margins

- Field margins need management in order to be maintained as grassy margins.
- In the absence of management, scrub will take over with a loss of grassy field margins.
- In order to maintain the biodiversity value of field margins, it is essential not to cause harm to them, deliberately or accidentally.

#### Do

- ✓ **Cut or graze** in autumn to maintain as grassy margins to prevent evolving into scrub.
- ✓ **Remove offtakes where possible** to deplete soil nutrients to favour more diverse flora.
- ✓ **Spot treat noxious weeds.** Treat manually or spot spray. Watch out for invasive alien species and seek professional advice.
- ✓ **Fence** in intensively managed grassland to allow vegetation to flower and seed. Fencing is not required in species-rich grassland.

#### Don't

- ✗ **Cultivate.** Cultivation disrupts soil biodiversity – it is better to allow natural vegetation to develop or sow grass to address problem weeds if necessary.
- ✗ **Spray** or allow spray drift, which kills vegetation and creates a vacuum for invasive alien species to colonise.
- ✗ **Add nutrients.** Lime, fertiliser and slurry alter soil conditions in favour of agriculturally favoured or aggressive species, eliminating indigenous vegetation.
- ✗ **Sow – let it grow.** Don't sow 'wild' flowers as they are unregulated and can alter the genetics of species of local provenance.

# Climate

## 10 supports available to farmers to reduce greenhouse gas emissions (GHG)

	Support	How it helps reduce GHG
1	TAMS grants	Multiple benefits, including: better slurry management leading to low chemical nitrogen (N) use; reduced reliance on fossil fuels (e.g., biomass boilers, solar panels); and, improved benchmarking of animal performance leading to better breeding decisions.
2	Forestry Programme	A change of land use may reduce emissions from livestock and increase carbon sequestration potential.
3	Processor incentivisation scheme	Adoption of the Teagasc 12 steps to reduce emissions, including better breeding, reducing chemical N use, and increased use of protected urea.
4	Eco Scheme	Planting native trees/hedgerows to increase carbon (C) sequestration; limiting chemical N usage; use of GPS for fertiliser spreaders or sprayers; soil sampling and applying lime; planting a break crop; and, using multispecies and legumes.
5	Organic Farming Scheme	Eliminating the use of chemical N and lowering stocking rates.
6	Straw incorporation measure	Potential to reduce emissions and increase capacity to sequester carbon.
7	Protein Aid Scheme	Less chemical N used, less imported proteins – reducing transport emissions and emissions associated with deforestation.
8	Signpost Advisory Programme	Supports farmers to adopt technologies in the Signpost 12 steps to reduce emissions.
9	Multi-species sward and red clover silage measure	Reduced emissions through reduced use of chemical N and reduced concentrate usage with quality red clover silage.
10	Other schemes	ACRES, soil sampling scheme, KT groups, and EIPs all support actions to reduce GHG emissions.

# Water

## Fence off cattle access points to improve your local river



*Fencing off watercourses helps to reduce direct pollution.*

Fencing off watercourses on farms protects water quality and can improve the ecological quality of a watercourse.

Unrestricted access of cattle to streams and rivers can lead to environmental degradation in your local area.

One of the primary benefits of fencing off watercourses is the reduction of direct pollution. When cattle are allowed to access streams, they can deposit faecal matter directly into the water, introducing pathogens and increasing nutrient levels. This can lead to the deterioration of water quality, posing risks to both human health and aquatic life. By preventing cattle from entering water bodies, fences act as a barrier that significantly reduces the input of harmful substances.

Fencing also helps to minimise sediment and phosphorus loss. Cattle trampling along riverbanks can destabilise the soil, leading to increased sedimentation and phosphorus loss to watercourses after

rainfall events due to runoff through overland flow. Fencing off these areas allows vegetation to recover, stabilising the soil and reducing erosion. Fenced riparian zones can also enhance biodiversity. By excluding cattle, these areas can develop into diverse habitats that support a wide range of plant and animal species.

If there is no access to mains or well water supply on the farm or out farm, alternative options are available such as a solar pump or pasture pump. A pasture pump is adequate for smaller numbers of cattle, up to 15 per pump. If you need to provide water to a larger number of animals, a solar pump is a better option. Both pumps are now grant aided. In conclusion, fencing off watercourses is a vital practice for protecting water quality and promoting sustainable agriculture. By preventing cattle access, it reduces pollution, minimises erosion, and enhances biodiversity, contributing to the overall health of aquatic ecosystems.