



Yorkshire Dales Millennium Trust Hay Time Project

Results Based Agri-environment Payment Scheme (RBAPS)

Our first year of surveys is complete!

We can't believe that we have just finished the first full year since the pilot Agreements started. After all the hard work getting the pilot off the ground and working with the farmers to set up their Agreements we are thrilled to get to this point.

Throughout late spring, summer and early autumn the farmers and project team were out surveying; providing valuable information on the quality of the habitats. In addition to this our farmers have shared their views and feelings on the pilot. The whole point of the pilot is to test the effectiveness of this approach and the participating farmers' thoughts are vital to our understanding of this.

The project team has attended various events and had the pleasure of being invited to Ireland to visit their results-based pilot scheme in County Leitrim – see the report on Page 2. Interest in the pilot continues apace with articles appearing in various publications, a feature on Radio 4's "On Your Farm" and our website having a consistent number of 'hits'.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/results-based-agri-environment-payment-scheme-rbaps-pilot-study-in-england>

We are now looking forward to our second season of assessments which promises to provide further evidence on how we could take this approach forward in the future.

The Project Team

<https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/natural-england>
<http://www.yorkshiredales.org.uk/>

Live Agreements

34 agreements in the two pilot areas covering 230ha.



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Reminder.....

Norfolk/Suffolk Arable Farmers:

If any of you are planning on moving your winter bird food plots to a new location this year please let Vicky know.



YORKSHIRE DALES
National Park Authority



What have we learnt in the first year?

We are currently analysing the first year's results, but our initial findings are already proving interesting. Assessing environmental performance after only one year is not necessarily going to provide statistical conclusions, but combined with the attitudinal survey and our experiences on the ground we have learnt a lot.

Being able to apply this approach on farms is one of the most important aspects of this pilot in terms of testing 'for real' how practical it is. This has produced some unexpected findings:

It's not easy trying to get into dense plot of ten foot tall winter bird food and count seed heads whilst carrying a clipboard, quadrat and camera and taking a photo of the quadrat....



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Arable plots have been deliberately sown by the road so they can be easily critiqued by other farmers and seen by the public.

There's an element of competitive pride between neighbours on the number of wading birds found whilst surveying.

Performance wise we have seen an upward trend in the winter bird food plots compared to the baseline and control plots we surveyed. This

wasn't so marked in the pollen and nectar. Breeding wader habitats were challenged by the dry spring with performance more varied than in the previous, baseline year; whilst some of the hay meadows increased a tier which was very encouraging.

Our initial assumptions on the best time of year to survey some habitats have been challenged. The repeatability of the survey methodology is something we need another year of results on before we can draw any firm conclusions, but it has highlighted how quickly the habitats change throughout the year. So we have plenty of food for thought.

To Ireland.....

Based at the Institute of Technology in Sligo we had the pleasure of being hosted by the Irish RBAPS team for a two day meeting that brought together representatives from all three of the EU funded pilots as well as our EU co-ordinator and a range of interested stakeholders.

A real highlight was visiting two of the farmers on the first day to hear their views and experience the wonderful Irish hospitality. The second day gave us a chance to discuss our learning to date and hear from other projects such as The Burren Life Programme.



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- [Ireland and Spain](#)
- [Romania](#)



Arable Update



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After the dry start to the year the winter bird food plots got going with some excellent results.

Feedback from the farmers has told us they manage their RBAPS plots differently to the plots in their conventional schemes. We will be doing more in depth analysis on how this different attitude and approach is linked to the environmental performance of RBAPS plots compared with areas managed following set prescriptions and with fixed payments.

Interestingly, some of the farmers have also expressed concerns that the incentive to achieve maximum results for the winter bird food could push them towards using more chemical inputs than they perhaps feel comfortable with in an environmental scheme. Especially where pesticides are used to control pests in a winter bird food plot and it is adjacent to a pollen and nectar mix whose aim is to encourage pollinators.

The pollen and nectar plots also performed well and seemed to thrive with the spring weather that was experienced. This resulted in the survey window having to be moved forward. We originally thought early autumn would be the best time to look at the plots, but quickly realised that some could be surveyed in early summer. This spread the survey season out for both the arable team and the farmers and enabled them to complete their survey before harvest. This experience has meant we have also changed the length of the survey season for the second year of the pilot.



Copyright: David Whiting, Natural England. Crimson Clover in a Pollen and Nectar plot



Copyright: Vicky Robinson, Natural England

Members of the CLA Land Use team visited the arable pilot with Jon Daniels kindly hosting us.

Lots of discussion around the kitchen table was followed by a look at Jon's plots. This provided further talk about the availability of plant protection products to control weeds in a seed mix that includes cereals and brassicas.

Following the visit an article was written in the CLA magazine and Jon and Vicky have been invited to speak to their Land Use Committee.

Contact: Vicky Robinson at vicky.robinson@naturalengland.org.uk

Grassland Update

After a bit of a dry spring last year which tested the breeding wader assessment criteria, the grassland farmers' focus turned to their hay meadows and the impending species survey. From feedback received there was a certain amount of concern about identifying the plant species. However, there was little variation in scoring between farmer and advisor, which is fantastic given that this was probably the most challenging assessment in the project. Farmers worked very hard to make sure they identified species correctly with many emailing through photos if they were unsure. Out of 19 meadows, 5 had a significant increase in score to trigger a change in payment band, 14 stayed within the same payment band but with a slight variation in score and none dropped a payment band.

The assessment scores that had the most difference were for the wader habitats. This seems to be attributable to the perception of rush cover. Assessing percentages of habitat is always very difficult even for professional surveyors and especially where there are large areas of habitat to be scored. When looking across 10 hectares of a rushy pasture it is very difficult to say whether rush covers 29% or 31% but this means a difference of 5 points on the score sheet which can in turn make a difference to the payment band and the amount of money the farmer receives. In future schemes an alternative method of assessment may be necessary. Out of the 22 wader sites, 12 sites retained the same score as the baseline (5 retaining max score), 3 increased their score significantly to move up a payment band; 2 sites suffered a reduction in habitat quality, reflecting a drop in score and payment band and 7 sites had slight differences in score (4 sites negatively) but not enough to change payment band.

For both options, farmers have been determined to improve their habitat score by altering management, adding wildflower seed, cutting rushes and creating wet scrapes. With all this hard work, it is anticipated that the habitat condition will have improved.

The project continues to attract attention from other organisations like Defra, the NFU, EA and agricultural colleges and we have hosted a number of events to showcase the project in its best light. We would like to thank the farmers involved in the site visits who have given up their time to be the proud spokespeople for the project; Tom Fawcett, Hannah Fawcett, Andrew Kearton, William and Kevin Utley and Paul Hunter. David Metcalfe was a great advert for the project when he was interviewed for the Radio 4 program 'On Your Farm' which gave us a full 30 minutes of air time.

It's now time to start thinking about the 2nd year of wader habitat surveys. We have listened to farmers concerns and have decided to extend the wader habitat survey window to include the months of March and April as the birds start to return. The other reason is that due to the very dry weather conditions at survey time last year we were unable to get accurate results for the wetness features. At least in March and April that should definitely not be a problem! Farmers who have wader sites will be contacted and offered the extended window. Obviously lambing is about to start but maybe this will be an opportunity to record the habitat conditions if farmers are on the sites anyway.



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Overall we feel we have had a fantastic response to the pilot from the farmers. It is very encouraging to see such enthusiasm and commitment. We will be running training courses again plus we are updating our training guides taking into account feedback from the farmers. We hope you have enjoyed the process too and are looking forward to this year!

Contact: Helen Keep at Helen.Keep@yorkshiredales.org.uk

The Team

The Arable Team



Vicky Robinson (Project Manager, Natural England) has an arable farming background and 16 years of experience working on agri-environment schemes within Natural England and its predecessors.



David Ward (Project Adviser, Natural England) has worked on agri-environment schemes for Natural England and its predecessors for 15 years. Previous to that he worked as an agronomist for ADAS for 15 years.



Clare Bains (Project Adviser, Natural England) has worked for Natural England and its predecessors for 18 years, in various advisory capacities, especially agri-environment schemes. Working across Norfolk and Suffolk with a range of arable, mixed and livestock farms.



David Whiting (Project Adviser, Natural England) has 17 years of experience working on agri-environment schemes within Natural England and its predecessors. Areas of expertise include agronomy and land management.

The Grassland Team



Annabelle LePage (Project Manager, Natural England) has spent more time than she cares to remember working on the design and roll-out of new agri-environment schemes. Prior to that she's worked in environmental consultancy and visited hundreds of farms collecting agronomic data.



Helen Keep (Senior Project Adviser, YDNPA). Sister to a dairy farmer and originally from Bristol, this offcumbden has made the Yorkshire Dales home for nearly 21 years working on the delivery of agri-environment schemes and providing support to hill farmers during this time.



Adrian Shepherd (Contract Manager, YDNPA), brought up on the family potato, sheep & beef farm in the mosses of North Lancashire. Adrian has worked in the agri-environment sector for almost 30 years including time at FWAG, the Peak Park Joint Planning Board and now in his current role.



Jane Le Cocq (Project Adviser, YDNPA). has a livestock farming background and co-manages the family farm in her spare time! Born and bred in North Yorkshire, Jane has worked for the YDNPA for nearly 12 years on agri-environment scheme delivery and support to hill farmers, prior to that she was a veterinary nurse.