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English Woodland Grant Scheme

Woodland Improvement Grant 80

March 2010

Reversing Woodland Bird Decline

North West Region

Purpose This leaflet provides guidance on how to apply for this regionally focussed grant. It supplements the generic guidance on Woodland Improvement Grant (WIG), which is available from the [EWGS web site](#).

Introduction Wild birds are considered a good indicator of the general state of health of our wildlife and the countryside and they have been chosen as one of the Government's 15 headline indicators of progress towards sustainable development.

This grant is targeted at woodlands where work to improve woodland structure and species composition, encourage early successional scrub or old growth and dead wood will have a beneficial effect on identified woodland bird populations.

The 'Quality of Life' indicator shows woodland bird populations falling by 20 per cent among 33 species in the last 25 years. Some of these such as the Lesser Spotted Woodpecker, Spotted Flycatcher and Willow Tit have declined by more than 50 per cent since the late 1960s.

The Forestry Commission North West Region is offering financial support to landowners and managers to improve the habitat for 16 vulnerable species. Key target areas for the North West have been selected using RSPB distribution maps as indicated on the Regional map at Appendix 1. (Detailed boundaries are held on FC GIS, please contact your local Woodland Officer for specific sites). Details of the bird species, potential issues driving decline and the potential management solutions are contained in Appendix 2.

Individual species and Target Group Distribution maps can be found on the RSPB web site:

http://www.rspb.org.uk/ourwork/conservation/projects/targeting/targeting_map_s.asp (use www.rspb.org.uk/targeting for function on hard copy)

Recent research has indicated that a lot of the decline can be attributed to changes in woodland management regimes through either low levels of activity or changes in woodland composition.

Eligibility In order to be eligible for this grant applicants must meet the following:

- The general criteria and conditions for Woodland Improvement Grant (WIG) apply – refer to the WIG guidance for further details
- The application must specify through a brief description which bird species the work will benefit
- The woodland will normally fall within one of the key target areas shown in appendix 1, or be of significant value to woodland birds as shown by previous records / expert evidence to be eligible.
- The work must benefit the chosen species and be in accordance with the criteria outlined in appendix 2
- In order to assess the effectiveness of this grant and to compare with similar initiatives, applicants must agree to periodic appropriate monitoring of the woodland.

Each application will be visited by a FC officer to ensure the work is appropriate and will benefit the chosen species. Grant will be paid at 80% of Standard Costs for the agreed items in the proposed work schedule. The operations and standard costs are listed in *Operations Note 9 – Standard Costs*, available from the [EWGS document library](#) .

This WIG fund is limited to payments in the financial years 1 April 2009 to 28 February 2014 (Restocking payments are restricted to 1 April 2009 to 28 February 2012). Claims must be received before the end of the financial year in which the payment is due. Funds are limited and will be awarded on a first come first served basis.

How to Apply Both EWGS 1 *General Details* form and WIG *cost calculator* (which is a Microsoft Excel file) or EWGS 5 *Woodland Improvement Grant* form must be completed and submitted with an OS Master Map ® showing the areas for which grant is sought. Where tree felling is proposed then form EWGS 4 – *Felling Permission and Woodland Regeneration Grant* should also be completed.

Further Advice and Information Further information can be obtained from your local FC Officer through the following link:
[http://www.forestry.gov.uk/pdf/nwefdpwoodlandofficers.pdf/\\$FILE/nwefdpwoodlandofficers.pdf](http://www.forestry.gov.uk/pdf/nwefdpwoodlandofficers.pdf/$FILE/nwefdpwoodlandofficers.pdf)

Other Advice The EWGS website www.forestry.gov.uk/ewgs contains all the information needed to apply for grant support. If you do not have access to the internet, you can request any of the information from your local Forestry Commission office. We recommend getting professional advice on woodland management and grants. A list of national and regional professional organisations is available at www.forestry.gov.uk/england-advice or from your local FC office.

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Species Guidance

Habitat requirements & Woodland structure

Although not all of the causes of declines in woodland birds are fully understood, it is clear that many species are declining because the habitat conditions they require are missing or have declined. A well-developed woodland structure that includes a ground layer, shrub layer and canopy can offer a wide range of species the opportunity to have a diverse and abundant bird community.

Also, the edges of woodlands are an important interface for various species, which need a variety of farmland and woodland conditions. The points below are considered important when planning any bird management that could also fit with other wider objectives like timber or other wildlife benefits for different groups.

1. A field layer of herbaceous plants, ferns, grasses and bryophytes
2. A shrub layer of low growing scrub species (up to 5m high)
3. An understorey of immature and low growing trees
4. The canopy layer of mature trees and old hulks
5. Deadwood in each canopy layer including lying on the ground
6. Mature trees with dead snags, hollows or other small-scale features that develop with age
7. Browsing control (deer/ livestock)
8. Woodland boundaries

Woodland Activity that helps in reversing Woodland Bird Decline under this WIG grant

- **Thinning:** assumes selection to favour native broadleaf trees with beneficial features, e.g. in-tree deadwood etc.
- **Coppice:** assumes appropriate rotations and block sizes are established.
- **Woodland edge:** ideally graduating: grass margin > scrub thicket > woodland.
- **Rides and glades:** sufficiently open to enable thicket edge and open centre and managed.
- **Hydrological management:** applies not only to wet woodland. Evidence of significant drying of woodland which appears to be implicated in some species declines.
- **Dead and decaying wood:** important feature across woodland types. Ensure all types are conserved: lying, standing and snags. Enhance wherever it doesn't conflict with other objectives.
- **Nest boxes:** not necessarily a solution - may cause issues with competitor species – though evidence is mixed. Always assess need. Note maintenance requirement. Important to get other habitat right for species before nest boxes are used.
- **Woodland Roads & Tracks:** Where access in woodland is difficult and prevents management taking place, it will be at the discretion of the Woodland Officer to include appropriate road and track infrastructure costs that aid delivery of woodland improvement birds.

Appendix 1 – North West Woodland Bird Indicative Priority Areas:



The Forestry Commission accepts no responsibility for the accuracy of the information on this map, or liability arising from its use. Any errors or omissions should be referred to the relevant authority. This map must not be reproduced or copied without the express permission of the Ordnance Survey. This map must not be scanned, digitised, copied or stored in any electronic form.

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Appendix 2

Reversing Woodland Bird Decline

<i>BIRD SPECIES</i>	<i>KEY AREAS IN THE NORTH WEST</i>	<i>POTENTIAL ISSUES DRIVING DECLINE</i>	<i>POTENTIAL SOLUTIONS</i>	<i>WIG 80 FUNDABLE (indicative examples)</i>
Garden warbler	Throughout key woodland bird priority areas (see appendix 1).	Maturation of young successional woodland; decline in coppice extent.	Restore neglected coppice; ride enhancement; develop scrubby woodland edge; conserve soil moisture; new woodland creation.	Fencing; deer/grazing management; coppicing; ride management; scrub establishment in buffer zone; drainage management to achieve wetter ground.
Hawfinch	S. Lakes / Morecambe Bay & Central /South Lancs.	Woodland isolation; degradation in parkland habitats; decline in mature woodland quality.	Restructure under-managed mature woodland; restore old parklands; establish grazing management; maintain / enhance in-wood wet features; new woodland creation.	Fencing; deer/grazing management; thinning.
Lesser Redpoll	Throughout key woodland bird priority areas (see appendix 1).	Succession of preferred scrub and young woodland habitats into more mature woodland.	Restructure immature closed canopy woodland to provide immature elements; ride enhancement & glade creation/improvement with scrub edges; create new scrub woodland; favour birch.	Coppicing; ride management; thinning; scrub establishment in buffer zone; restocking with native species.
Lesser Spotted Woodpecker	Throughout key woodland bird priority areas (see appendix 1).	Tree crowding leading to a lack of open crowned mature trees; lack of standing and in-tree deadwood.	Restructure closed canopy woodland for crown development: Thin mature under-managed woodland; ride enhancement; increase deadwood; conserve soil moisture.	Thinning; ride management; standing deadwood creation; drainage management to achieve wetter ground; coppicing.

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Marsh Tit	North Cumbria. S. Lakes / Morecambe Bay, parts of Central /South Lancs & S. Cheshire.	Deer/sheep browsing leading to poor shrub layer; heavy shade.	Establish ability to control grazing; coppice neglected stands; thin crowded canopy to encourage shrub layer.	Fencing; deer/sheep management; thinning; coppicing; scrub establishment in buffer zone; restocking with native species.
Pied Flycatcher	North Cumbria Central / S. Lakes, , N. Lancs especially Bowland and its fringe, W. Pennines & Peak Park Cheshire. Sandstone Ridge	Insufficient grazing to maintain open shrub layer; potentially excessive grazing preventing regeneration; overcrowded stands lacking in growth and canopy development; lack of nest holes may be an issue.	Establish ability to manage grazing; selective thinning to encourage tree growth; retain deadwood; extend woodland in appropriate locations; provide nest boxes only where needed (based on objective assessment).	Fencing; thinning; standing deadwood creation; restocking with native species; nest boxes.
Redstart	Throughout Cumbria, N. Lancs especially Bowland and its fringe,, W. Pennines & Peak Park Cheshire	Loss of older trees especially on glade/woodland edge; lack of grazing to maintain open ground structure; shortage of natural nest holes.	Establish ability to control grazing; selective thinning to encourage tree growth; glade creation/ enhancement; retain deadwood; extend woodland in appropriate locations; provide nest boxes only where needed (based on objective assessment).	Fencing; thinning; glade creation; standing deadwood creation; nest boxes.
Spotted Flycatcher	Throughout key woodland bird priority areas (see appendix 1).	Decrease in in-stand structural diversity; decrease in glades and open rides; lack of grazing; lack of natural nest sites.	Restructure immature closed canopy woodland; thinning that encourages structural diversity; ride enhancement; glade creation/improvement; retain deadwood; new woodland creation.	Coppicing; thinning; creation of standing deadwood; ride management; restocking with native species.

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Tree Pipit	North Cumbria, Central / S. Lakes, N. Lancs especially Bowland and its fringe, W. Pennines & Peak Park Cheshire Manchester Mosses.	Loss of open-structure woodland through ageing and canopy closure; loss of individual trees in clear fell areas; excessive deer/sheep browsing removing nest cover.	Restructure immature closed canopy woodland; coppice; ride enhancement; glade creation/improvement with scatter of retained trees; establish ability to control grazing; create open scrubby woodland edge; new woodland creation.	Fencing; deer/sheep management; coppicing; ride management; thinning; scrub establishment in buffer zone; restocking with native species.
Wood Warbler	N, W & S. Lakes, W. Pennines & Peak Park Cheshire Bowland and its fringe.	Insufficient grazing to maintain open shrub layer; may be instances where excessive grazing is causing loss of nesting habitat and preventing regeneration; maturation of stands without replacement.	Establish ability to control grazing; retain deadwood; small group felling or coppicing to regenerate stands; extend woodland in appropriate locations.	Fencing; group felling; tree establishment to extend woodland; restocking with native species.
Woodcock	Isolated sites throughout key woodland birds priority areas (see appendix 1).	Deer/sheep browsing leading to loss of shrub layer; drying out of wet woodland; recreational disturbance.	Restructure immature closed canopy woodland; ride enhancement; glade creation/improvement; establish ability to manage grazing; maintain/enhance naturally high water levels; buffer woodland edge; new woodland creation.	Thinning; fencing; grazing management; ride management; scrub establishment in surrounding buffer; drainage management to achieve wetter ground conditions; restocking with native species.
Willow warbler	Throughout key woodland birds priority areas (see appendix 1).	Decline in young successional woodland; decline in coppice.	Restore neglected coppice; ride management; develop scrubby woodland edge; conserve soil moisture; new woodland creation.	Deer sheep management; coppicing; ride management; scrub establishment in surrounding buffer; restocking with native species.

Woodland Species with Restricted Range in the North West

<i>BIRD SPECIES</i>	<i>KEY AREAS IN THE NORTH WEST</i>	<i>POTENTIAL ISSUES DRIVING DECLINE</i>	<i>POTENTIAL SOLUTIONS</i>	<i>WIG 80 FUNDABLE (indicative examples)</i>
Woodlark	S W Manchester / Cheshire area.	Continuity of suitable clear-fell and permanent open ground habitat; conversion to continuous cover forestry; recreational disturbance.	Plan felling and restocking operations to ensure continuity of large coupes; maintain areas of short turf and bare ground.	Vegetation management/control; partial removal of lop and top from clearfells; ride management; access management.
Nightjar	Manchester Mosslands and isolated areas of S & N Cumbria	Decline in continuity of suitable clear-fell and permanent open ground habitat; conversion to continuous cover forestry; recreational disturbance.	Plan felling and restocking operations to ensure continuity of open areas; large coupes and or very open structure woodland. Visitor access management.	Vegetation management/control; coppicing; ride creation and management; access management.
Firecrest	Peak Park – Cheshire & West Wirral	Sudden restoration of PAWS to native broadleaved woodland where breeding populations are present.	Gradual PAWS conversion retaining conifer broadleaf mix in identified areas.	Thinning.
Willow Tit	North Cumbria. S. Lancs / Manchester Mosslands South Cheshire	Loss of soil moisture; maturing young woodland; increased shade/canopy closure; loss of shrub layer; loss of scrub; lack of nest sites (can be addressed during operations).	Restructure maturing closed canopy woodland; retain deadwood; establish ability to control grazing. Soil moisture conservation; new woodland and scrub creation; specialised nest boxes.	Fencing; deer/sheep management; coppicing; thinning; scrub establishment in buffer zone; nest-site provision including standing deadwood creation; drainage management to achieve wetter ground; nest boxes; restocking with native species.

Woodland Species with Restricted Range in the North West

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Long eared Owl	South & central Lancs, parts of Merseyside.	The relatively low population is vulnerable to small-scale changes in local conditions. Long eared Owls avoid well-developed woodland, so nest site availability may be limiting.	Experiments placing wicker nest baskets close to the trunks of suitable trees increased breeding densities. Provision of buffer strips with tussocky grass habitat.	Provision of artificial nest sites; Additional assessment, implementation and supervision of beneficial land management techniques by professionally qualified Forestry Agent.
Black Grouse	East Cumbria and North Pennines	Increased levels of sheep grazing resulting in reductions in dwarf shrub cover and vegetation height. Maturation of afforested areas of moorland causing the loss of field-layer resources when canopy closure occurs.	Control grazing pressure. Thin moorland fringe conifer woodland in bands to produce a feathered edge providing easy access to birds disturbed on moorland by potential predators: - outer 0–25 m band at 10% tree density - inner 25–75 m band at 25 50% tree density.	Fencing; sheep management, coppicing, thinning, restocking with native species. Additional assessment, implementation and supervision of beneficial land management techniques by professionally qualified Forestry Agent.