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## AB4: Skylark plots

Find out about eligibility and requirements for the skylark plots option.

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From:

[Rural Payments Agency \(/government/organisations/rural-payments-agency\)](/government/organisations/rural-payments-agency) and [Natural England \(/government/organisations/natural-england\)](/government/organisations/natural-england)

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Grant type: [Option \(/countryside-stewardship-grants?grant\\_type%5B%5D=option\)](/countryside-stewardship-grants?grant_type%5B%5D=option)

Land use: [Arable land \(/countryside-stewardship-grants?land\\_use%5B%5D=arable-land\)](/countryside-stewardship-grants?land_use%5B%5D=arable-land), [Biodiversity \(/countryside-stewardship-grants?land\\_use%5B%5D=biodiversity\)](/countryside-stewardship-grants?land_use%5B%5D=biodiversity), [Uplands \(/countryside-stewardship-grants?land\\_use%5B%5D=uplands\)](/countryside-stewardship-grants?land_use%5B%5D=uplands), [Pollinators and wildlife \(/countryside-stewardship-grants?land\\_use%5B%5D=wildlife-package\)](/countryside-stewardship-grants?land_use%5B%5D=wildlife-package)

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Funding (per unit per year): [Up to £100 \(/countryside-stewardship-grants?funding\\_amount%5B%5D=up-to-100\)](/countryside-stewardship-grants?funding_amount%5B%5D=up-to-100)

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## How much will be paid

£11.00 (minimum 2 plots per hectare (ha)).

## Where to use this option

- Available for Countryside Stewardship Mid Tier and Higher Tier
- Rotational
- Only:
  - on arable land
  - on temporary grassland
  - in winter cereal fields with an open aspect of more than 5ha

## Where this option cannot be used

- In parcels bounded by tree lines or adjacent to woods, unless the parcel is larger than 10ha

## Related Mid Tier options

The following options and supplements can be located on the same area as this option:

- [HS3 – Reduced-depth, non-inversion cultivation on historic and archaeological features \(https://www.gov.uk/countryside-stewardship-grants/reduced-depth-non-inversion-features\)](https://www.gov.uk/countryside-stewardship-grants/reduced-depth-non-inversion-features)

[cultivation-on-historic-and-archaeological-features-hs3\)](#)

- [HS9 – Restricted depth crop establishment to protect archaeology under an arable rotation \(https://www.gov.uk/countryside-stewardship-grants/restricted-depth-crop-establishment-to-protect-archaeology-under-an-arable-rotation-hs9\)](https://www.gov.uk/countryside-stewardship-grants/restricted-depth-crop-establishment-to-protect-archaeology-under-an-arable-rotation-hs9)
- [OR3 – Organic conversion – rotational land \(https://www.gov.uk/countryside-stewardship-grants/organic-conversion-rotational-land-or3\)](https://www.gov.uk/countryside-stewardship-grants/organic-conversion-rotational-land-or3)
- [OT3 – Organic land management – rotational land \(https://www.gov.uk/countryside-stewardship-grants/organic-land-management-rotational-land-ot3\)](https://www.gov.uk/countryside-stewardship-grants/organic-land-management-rotational-land-ot3)

## How this option will benefit the environment

It provides skylarks with suitable access to nesting habitats in winter cereal crops throughout their breeding season.

If successful there will be:

- plots providing access into the growing cereal during the spring and summer
- skylarks holding territory and singing over the fields of winter cereals where the plots are located and, ideally, landing in the plots themselves
- increased numbers of singing skylarks across the farm

## Aims

If you're selected for a site visit, we will check that delivery of the aims is being met and the prohibited activities have not been carried out. This will ensure the environmental benefits are being delivered.

During the autumn/winter fallow plots will be created within the winter cereal crop. There will be a minimum of 2 plots per ha and each plot will be at least 3 metres (m) wide and will have a minimum area of 16 square metres. These plots will be retained until the crop is harvested.

## Prohibited Activities

To achieve the aims and deliver the environmental benefits, **do not** carry out any of the following activities:

- locate plots in tramlines, boundaries and margins (as this increases nest predation)

On your annual claim you will be asked to declare that you **have not** carried out any prohibited activities.

## Recommended management

To assist you in achieving the aims and deliver the environmental benefits for this option, we recommend that you use best practice.

We recommend that you:

- create fallow plots at least 3m wide and with a minimum area of 16 square metres in winter cereal fields
- space plots across the field at a minimum density of 2 plots per ha

## Keeping records

Where there's uncertainty about whether the aims of the options have been delivered, we will take into account any records or evidence you may have kept demonstrating delivery of the aims of the option. This will include any steps you've taken to follow the recommended management set out above. It's your responsibility to keep such records if you want to rely on these to support your claim.

- Photographs of the plots

## Additional guidance and advice

The following advice is helpful, but they are not requirements for this item.

### Pick the right location

This option works best in large, open winter cereal fields, preferably where skylarks are present or have been in the past. Avoid fields that are bordered by trees or next to woods as this increases the risks of predator attack.

Minimise attacks on nests from predators by placing plots:

- away from tramlines (choosing a middle spot between two sets of tramlines works best)
- at least 50m from field boundaries and margins

### How to establish skylark plots

Create plots by **one** of the following.

- Turning off the drill during sowing to leave an unsown plot
- Sowing the crop as normal and spraying with herbicide to create the plot by 31 December

### Managing the plots

After drilling, the plots can be managed with the same treatments as the remainder of the field.

There is no need to keep the plots weed-free but spot-treating with herbicide in April will help skylarks to access their nesting sites.

Mechanical weeding of crops containing skylark plots will destroy any nests present and is not recommended.

## Biodiversity

This option has been identified as being beneficial for biodiversity. All Countryside Stewardship habitat creation, restoration and management options are of great significance for biodiversity recovery, as are the wide range of arable options in the scheme. Capital items and supplements can support this habitat work depending on the holding's situation and potential.

The connectivity of habitats is also very important and habitat options should be linked wherever possible. Better connectivity will allow wildlife to move/colonise freely to access water, food, shelter and breeding habitat, and will allow natural communities of both animals and plants to adapt in response to environmental and climate change.

## Further information

Read [Countryside Stewardship: get funding to protect and improve the land you manage](https://www.gov.uk/guidance/countryside-stewardship-get-funding-to-protect-and-improve-the-land-you-manage) (<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/countryside-stewardship-get-funding-to-protect-and-improve-the-land-you-manage>) to find out more information about Mid Tier and Higher Tier including how to apply.

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## Related content

[AB5: Nesting plots for lapwing \(and in Higher Tier, stone curlew\) \(/countryside-stewardship-grants/nesting-plots-for-lapwing-and-stone-curlew-ab5\)](#)

[AB9: Winter bird food \(/countryside-stewardship-grants/winter-bird-food-ab9\)](#)

[AB8: Flower-rich margins and plots \(/countryside-stewardship-grants/flower-rich-margins-and-plots-ab8\)](#)

[SW1: 4m to 6m buffer strip on cultivated land \(/countryside-stewardship-grants/4m-to-6m-buffer-strip-on-cultivated-land-sw1\)](#)

[AB6: Enhanced overwinter stubble \(/countryside-stewardship-grants/enhanced-overwinter-stubble-ab6\)](#)

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