

UK Biodiversity Indicators 2019

This document supports
B1a. Area of land in agri-environment schemes

Fiche

For further information B1a. Area of land in agri-environment schemes visit jncc.gov.uk/ukbi-B1a

For further information on the UK Biodiversity Indicators visit jncc.gov.uk/ukbi

B1. Agricultural and forest area under environmental management schemes

B1a. Area of land in agri-environment schemes

Type: Response Indicator

Summary

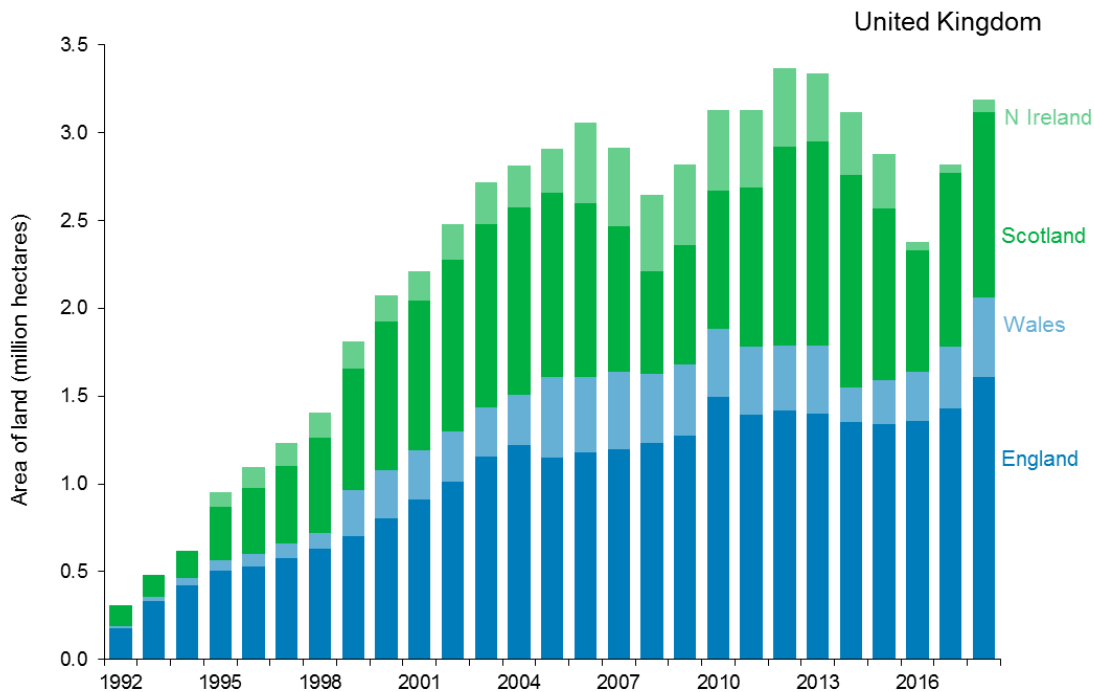
In 2018, the total area of land in higher-level or targeted agri-environment agreements in the UK was 3.2 million hectares: 1.6 million hectares in England; 0.5 million hectares in Wales; 1.1 million hectares in Scotland; and 0.1 million hectares in Northern Ireland.

Fluctuations in areas of land under agri-environment agreements over time can occur as a result of the introduction of new schemes and the ending of previous scheme agreements. Existing agreements will continue until they expire.

Indicator Description

Agri-environment schemes require land managers, including farmers, to implement environmentally beneficial management and to demonstrate good environmental practice on their land. The higher-level or targeted schemes promote environmental management aimed to: conserve wildlife; maintain and enhance landscape quality and character; protect the historic environment and natural resources; and promote public access and understanding of the countryside. The entry-level type schemes aim to encourage large numbers of land managers, to implement simple and effective environmental management on their land.

Figure B1ai. Area of land covered by higher-level or targeted agri-environment schemes, 1992 to 2018



Notes:

- The following schemes have been included as higher-level or targeted agri-environment schemes:

England: Environmentally Sensitive Areas (ESA), Countryside Stewardship (CS), Higher Level Stewardship (HLS) which includes Entry Level Stewardship (ELS) linked to HLS, and from 2016 new Countryside Stewardship (Higher-Tier and Mid-Tier). England Mid-

B1a. Area of land in agri-environment schemes

Tier and Higher-Tier schemes of the new Countryside Stewardship both contribute to B1ai.



Scotland: ESA, Countryside Premium, and Rural Stewardship, Rural Priorities, and from 2016 Agri-Environment Climate Scheme.

Wales: ESA, Tir Cymen, Tir Gofal, Glastir Advanced and Decoupled Advanced (from 2016).

N Ireland: ESA, Countryside Management, and Environmental Farming Scheme (from 2017).

- Higher level schemes have stricter criteria for qualification than other agri-environment schemes.

Source: Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs, Northern Ireland, Defra, Natural England, Scottish Government, Welsh Government.

Assessment of change in area of land covered by agri-environment schemes			
	Long term	Short term	Latest year
Higher-level or targeted schemes	 1992–2018	 2013–2018	Increased (2018)

Note: Long and short-term assessments are based on a 3% rule of thumb. Where possible, the base years for these assessments use a 3-year average. See [Assessing Indicators](#).

Indicator description

There are 2 main types of agri-environment scheme in the UK:

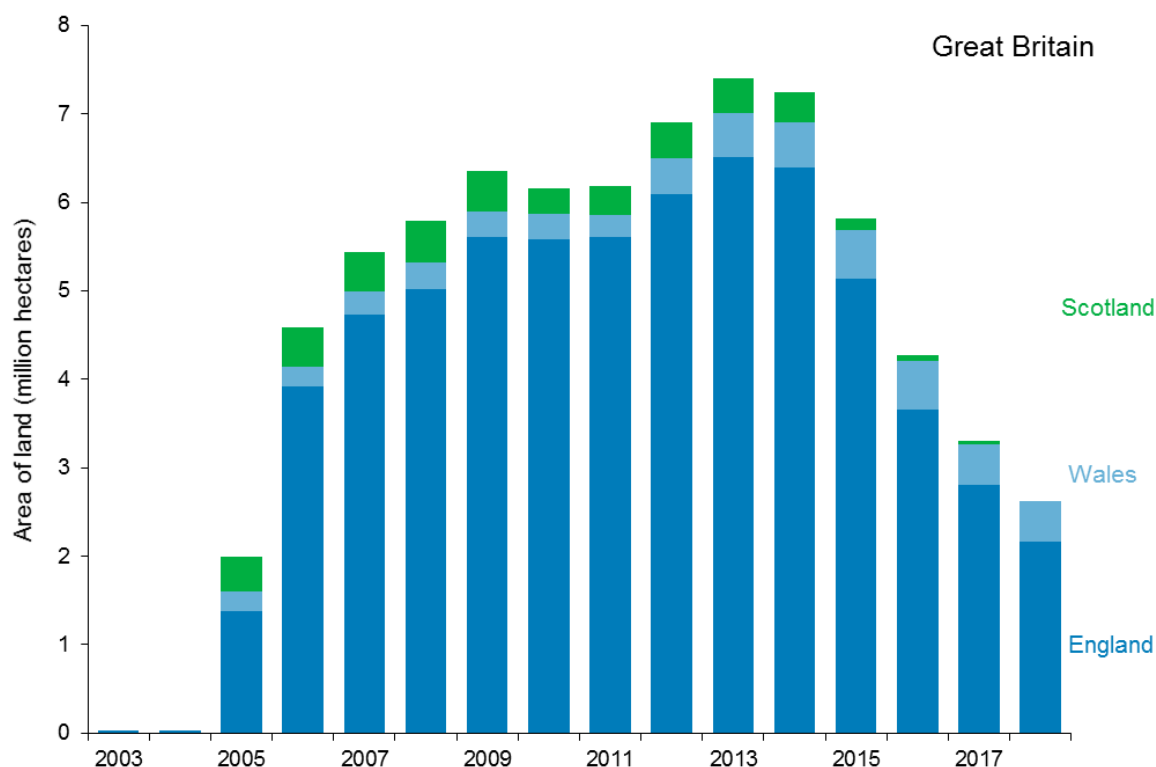
- Entry-level type, have a simple set of prescriptions providing basic environmental protection and enhancement, where the whole farm area may contribute to the indicator.
- Higher-level or targeted schemes that protect or restore land, focusing on parts of the farm or land-holding that are of high environmental/biodiversity value or potential.

It is possible for land to be in both an entry-level type and a higher-level scheme. Since the mid-1990s there has been a steady increase in UK land under agri-environment scheme management. Assessment is based on a 3-year average from the baseline, using the 3 earliest consecutive years available.

In 1992, there were 0.3 million hectares of land in the UK in higher-level agreements or targeted schemes, and by 2018 this had risen to just under 3.2 million hectares. The higher level scheme measure is assessed as increasing in the long term, since 1992. During this period some of the original schemes closed to new applicants. The area of land covered by higher-level schemes fluctuates between years as a result of changes to schemes: expiry of agreements and uptake of new ones; and amendments to existing agreements or land transferring from one farmer to another. In the shorter term, schemes that started under the previous Rural Development Programmes closed to new applicants in 2013/2014. New schemes have subsequently been implemented but at different times in the different countries. This has influenced uptake, e.g. Northern Ireland's most recent agri-environment scheme did not start until July 2017. The short-term assessment shows no change. However, since 2016 areas being managed under agri-environment schemes in the UK have increased.

In 2018 farms with higher-level or targeted agri-environment agreements accounted for: 18% of area on agricultural holdings in England; 26% in Wales; 19% in Scotland; and 7% in Northern Ireland.

Figure B1a.ii. Area of land covered by entry-level type, whole-farm agri-environment schemes, 2005 to 2018



Notes:

- The following have been included here as entry-level type schemes:
 - England: Entry Level Stewardship Scheme (including Upland Entry Level Scheme since 2010). ELS closed to new applicants in December 2014.
 - Scotland: Land Management Contracts (previously Menu Scheme), Land Managers Options Schemes, Habitat Scheme. All of these schemes had closed to new applicants by 2014 or earlier with the last agreements recorded in 2017.
 - Wales: Tir Cynnal, Glastir Entry. Tir Cynnal agreements were last recorded in 2013.
- Entry-type schemes have less strict criteria for qualification than the higher-level schemes shown in the previous chart.
- The area of land covered by entry-type schemes is shown to decrease mainly as a result of ELS only agreements in England beginning to expire following the closure of this scheme in December 2014.

Source: Defra, Natural England, Scottish Government, Welsh Government.

Entry-level schemes were introduced as a pilot in England in 2003, with 0.03 million hectares under agreement, and then rolled out in 2005. Similar entry-type schemes were also introduced in 2005 in Scotland, and in Wales (as Tir Cynnal), and the area in these whole-farm agreements rose rapidly to 7.4 million hectares in 2013, however decreased to 2.6 million hectares in 2018. The measure of entry-level schemes has been moved to the background in the 2019 publication as Environmental Stewardship in England closed to new agreements in 2014 and ELS only agreements have started to expire (existing agreements will continue to be honoured until their expiry date).

B1a. Area of land in agri-environment schemes

In 2018, the total area of land in entry-level type schemes in England and Wales was just 2.6 million hectares: 2.2 million hectares in England and 0.5 million hectares in Wales.

In 2018, farms with entry-level agri-environment agreements accounted for 24% of area on agricultural holdings in England and 26% in Wales.

Higher level agreements may be underpinned by an entry level scheme; therefore the areas of land in higher-level and entry-level schemes cannot be added to provide a grand total.

Relevance

Agriculture is a major land use in the UK (Utilised Agricultural Area covered 71% of land in the UK in 2018) and rapid changes to agricultural practice in the past have been linked to declines in wildlife, such as farmland birds. Since 1987 a number of voluntary agri-environment schemes have been introduced that provide payments to farmers to protect and enhance biodiversity, landscapes and historic features, and to promote public access.

Background

The United Kingdom was one of the first countries in the European Union to introduce agri-environment schemes: Environmentally Sensitive Areas (ESA) in the UK; Countryside Stewardship Scheme (CSS) in England; Tir Cymen (which became Tir Gofal) in Wales; Countryside Premium Scheme in Scotland (CPS) (becoming the Rural Stewardship Scheme (RSS) in 2001); and the Countryside Management Scheme in Northern Ireland.

In England, Environmental Stewardship closed to new applicants in December 2014 and was replaced by a new agri-environment scheme, Countryside Stewardship, for which agreements started in January 2016. Existing Higher Level and Entry Level agreements will continue until they expire. HLS agreements will continue, with the majority of agreements expiring by 2024. The new Countryside Stewardship scheme brings together many schemes including catchment sensitive farming and woodland grant schemes. Both Mid-Tier and Higher-Tier CS schemes are more targeted; the applicant is expected to ensure the options they take address the priorities for their land. There is a notable difference to the measurement of area included in the indicator, as ES is measured as “area of the farm” whereas CS, is measured as total area of options taken, i.e. the actively environmentally managed area. Differences in scheme reporting need to be borne in mind when interpreting the transition years, for example, where ELS and HLS have stopped and CS schemes are starting, there may be a dip in the figure B1ai.

In Wales, the Welsh Government introduced an entry-level agri-environment scheme known as Tir Cynnal in 2005. Tir Cynnal supplemented Tir Gofal, a higher-level agri-environment scheme which had been available throughout Wales since April 1999. Tir Gofal aimed to encourage agricultural practices which protect and enhance the landscapes of Wales, their cultural features and associated wildlife, and replaced the previous Environmentally Sensitive Areas and Tir Cymen schemes. A new sustainable land management scheme, Glastir, was introduced in 2012 which replaces 5 existing agri-environment schemes; Tir Cynnal, Tir Gofal, Tir Mynydd, the Organic Farming Scheme/Organic Farming Conversion Scheme, and Better Woodland for Wales. The scheme has an entry-level component – Glastir Entry (previously the All Wales Element) – and a higher-level component – Glastir Advanced (previously the Targeted Element). The first agreements for the entry-level components commenced on 1 January 2012; the first higher-level scheme agreements began on 1 January 2013. In addition there is a component specifically for common land, Glastir Commons. However, this is not included in this indicator; in 2018 Glastir Commons covered 120,000 hectares, no change from 2017.

In Scotland, schemes are designed to encourage farmers, crofters and common grazing committees to adopt environmentally friendly practices and to maintain and enhance particular habitats and landscape features. The Land Management Contract Menu Scheme

was introduced as an entry-level scheme under which land managers chose from a menu of options to put together a package for their farm. With the introduction of the Scotland Rural Development Programme (2007 to 2013), this became Rural Development Contracts (RDC) – Land Managers Options, sitting alongside RDC – Rural Priorities. They provide contracts between land managers and the government to implement measures designed to deliver environmental, social and economic benefits from farming and crofting. Since 2009, Figure B1ai includes the area under RDC – Rural Priorities Options. Rural Priorities and Land Managers Options closed to new applicants in 2013 and 2014, respectively. In 2015 a new Agri-environment Climate Scheme was launched with the first agreements going live in 2016.

In Northern Ireland, the Countryside Management Scheme closed to new applicants in 2013 although a small number of agreements commenced on 1 January 2013, resulting from applications made prior to 2013. All agreements in the Environmentally Sensitive Areas Scheme expired in 2016. As a result, the area under agri-environment schemes has declined since 2013 due to agreements ending. A new Environmental Farming Scheme was launched in 2017; existing agreements in closed schemes continue to be honoured until they expire.

Goals and targets

Aichi Targets for which this is a primary indicator

Strategic Goal A. Address the underlying causes of biodiversity loss by mainstreaming biodiversity across government and society.



Target 3: By 2020, at the latest, incentives, including subsidies, harmful to biodiversity are eliminated, phased out or reformed in order to minimize or avoid negative impacts, and positive incentives for the conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity are developed and applied, consistent and in harmony with the Convention and other relevant international obligations, taking into account national socio economic conditions.

Strategic Goal B. Reduce the direct pressures on biodiversity and promote sustainable use.



Target 7: By 2020, areas under agriculture, aquaculture and forestry are managed sustainably, ensuring conservation of biodiversity.

Aichi Targets for which this is a relevant indicator

Strategic Goal A. Address the underlying causes of biodiversity loss by mainstreaming biodiversity across government and society.



Target 1: By 2020, at the latest, people are aware of the values of biodiversity and the steps they can take to conserve and use it sustainably.



Target 2: By 2020, at the latest, biodiversity values have been integrated into national and local development and poverty reduction strategies and planning processes and are being incorporated into national accounting, as appropriate, and reporting systems.



Target 4: By 2020, at the latest, Governments, business and stakeholders at all levels have taken steps to achieve or have implemented plans for sustainable production and consumption and have kept the impacts of use of natural resources well within safe ecological limits.

Strategic Goal B. Reduce the direct pressures on biodiversity and promote sustainable use.



Target 5: By 2020, the rate of loss of all natural habitats, including forests, is at least halved and where feasible brought close to zero, and degradation and fragmentation is significantly reduced.

Web links for further information

Reference	Title	Website
Natural England	Environmental Stewardship	https://www.gov.uk/environmental-stewardship
Welsh Government	Farming and Scheme information	http://wales.gov.uk/topics/environmentcountryside/farmingandcountryside/?lang=en
Scottish Government	Agri-environment Schemes	http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Topics/farmingrural/SRDP
Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs, Northern Ireland	Agri-environment Schemes	https://www.daera-ni.gov.uk/articles/agri-environment-schemes
Defra Statistics	Agriculture in the UK	https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/agriculture-in-the-united-kingdom-2018

Full details of this indicator, including a datasheet are available at: ncc.gov.uk/ukbi-B1a

Last updated: September 2019

Latest data available: 2018