

26 May 2009

Dear Sir

Intensive Farming threatens all wildlife

Farmland birds are an indicator of the health of the wider countryside, so the figures indicating farmland bird declines in Monday's G2 article are worrying for all wildlife. The government is about to make a crucial decision which will affect our beleaguered farmland wildlife for years to come.

Historically our farmed countryside has been the canvas for a rich and vibrant collage of native wildlife – but recent declines in that wildlife could continue unless we find a way to replace the environmental benefits of the controversial EU set aside scheme.

Although not designed to do so, the now defunct set aside policy created habitats for wild flowers, insects, mammals and birds and helped to keep agricultural pollutants out of our waterways.

The government will shortly settle the thorny issue of how to ensure the environmental benefits of set aside continue, as the public consultation on the issue comes to an end.

The farming industry recently issued their plans to encourage farmers to replace the benefits of set aside through voluntary action. In our view, the published proposal from the farming industry will undoubtedly fail to achieve what is needed as it lacks urgency and specific targets.

We believe that the alternative scheme, which would require farmers to manage a small percentage of their land for the environment in return for their public subsidy, stands a much better chance of success than the one currently tabled by the farming unions.

Yours faithfully

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Matt Shardlow, Director – Buglife - The Invertebrate Conservation Trust
Shaun Spiers, Chief Executive - Campaign to Protect Rural England
Victoria Chester, Chief Executive - Plantlife International
Amy Coyte, Chief Executive - Bat Conservation Trust
Ruth Chambers, Acting Chief Executive - Campaign for National Parks
Mike Heyworth, Chief Executive - Council for British Archaeology (CBA)
Kathy Wormold, Chief Executive - Froglife
Lucy Cooper, Chief Executive - The Grasslands Trust
Tony Gent, Chief Executive - The Herpetological Conservation Trust
Callum Rankine, Chief Executive - The Mammal Society
Jeremy Biggs, Director - Pond Conservation
Mark Avery, Director of Conservation – Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB)
Stephanie Hillborne, Chief Executive - The Wildlife Trusts
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"Bringing voluntary organisations in the UK together to protect and enhance wildlife and landscape, and to further the quiet enjoyment and appreciation of the countryside"

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