



OAKBANK

2026

MAGAZINE AND PRODUCT GUIDE

The Rise of Monitoring
Restoring the Nation's Parklands
Herbal Remedies
Right Tree, Right Place, Right Reason
Notes from a Farm Shoot

OAKBANKGC.CO.UK



BY APPOINTMENT TO
HIS MAJESTY THE KING
CONSERVATION SEED
SUPPLIER OAKBANK GAME
& CONSERVATION LTD
CAMBRIDGESHIRE

WELCOME

Twenty-one years on from Oakbank's beginnings, our purpose remains the same: to help farmers, gamekeepers and land managers create and manage resilient, wildlife-rich habitats alongside productive, profitable businesses.

Working with our amazing clients, that purpose has seen Oakbank evolve to encompass woodland management, regenerative agriculture, wider natural capital and carbon, while continuing to offer seed expertise across the UK.

Ian Gould's retirement from the business in December was a big moment for all of us. He leaves a considerable legacy and an approach to practical problem-solving that continues to shape how we work. Fortunately, we have some terrific talent stepping up right across the business, ensuring continuity and fresh energy in equal measure. We look forward to speaking to many of you in the forthcoming weeks and months.



REVIEW OF 2025

What a year of upheaval for farmers, landowners, wildlife managers and ancillary trades - one that truly highlighted how holistic planning and aligning habitat, cropping and business objectives provides resilience and flexibility, whatever the next policy announcement or market shift may bring.

Sudden government announcements - changes to inheritance tax, APR and BPR, removal of BPS, and the suspension of the Sustainable Farming Incentive with no notice - combined with one of the worst harvests this century for much of Central and Eastern England, created huge uncertainty. In Wales, the Sustainable Farming Scheme was finalised, with a 2026 start and revised habitat requirements, following lively debate in the Senedd. Scotland's Agriculture and Rural Communities Act and the launch of the Future Farming Investment Scheme set the direction for future agricultural support, though many details remain to be clarified.

Whilst the one-year extension to expiring Countryside Stewardship agreements in England was welcome, the sector's prevailing mood remained one of frustration at the lack of joined-up policy and the impact of knee-jerk decisions on rural communities and the environment.

Despite these challenges, there were some positive outcomes for wildlife habitat. Kinder weather,

reduced insecticide use and effective predator control led to a successful breeding year for lowland wild game on many farms and estates. Our own Ellington project saw seven out of eight grey partridge pairs successfully bring off a brood, leading to much excitement on our two shoot days ([page 34](#)) We were also encouraged by the early results from bioacoustic monitoring ([page 6](#)), helping us better understand and evidence changes in wildlife activity across managed habitats.

June's demonstration day at Pilsgate brought together nearly 100 customers to explore stewardship habitat management, soil health and sustainable nutrition. At Groundswell, we were able to offer a new biostimulant to the UK market from AEA in the USA.

Throughout late spring and summer, we attended many shows, offering practical advice and, we hope, a dose of optimism amid discussions of the woes of British farming.

In September, Defra extended the ban on burning heather and grass on deep peat, lowering the minimum depth to 30cm and expanding coverage to all Less Favoured Areas. This move, alongside the ongoing impact of heather beetle, made 2025 a challenging year for grouse moor managers.

A kind weather pattern in September and October meant that many autumn-sown crops went

into the winter looking terrific, and despite the earlier drought in many parts of the country, it was, on the whole, a great time for establishing winter cover crops. Hopefully that bodes well for harvest 2026!

Staffing changes at Oakbank included farewells to Ian and Jamie. Hopefully many of you will have seen the tribute to Ian and Jamie in the December newsletter, but suffice to say they will be greatly missed. As Ian hung up his Oakbank gilet and spade, leaving the worms and mycorrhizal fungi in the capable hands of Harry and Rory, Jamie's ecological expertise and on-farm environmental advice have been passed on to Archie, Rory and Ethan. We bid a warm welcome to Ana and Harold at the start of the year, and to Max Cowell, our new placement student taking over from Louise, in August.

As ever, our focus remains on supporting clients through change - combining practical advice, innovative tools and a strategic outlook to support both immediate needs and long-term ambitions - and we look forward to working with you all in 2026!

Ana Tim

MEET THE TEAM



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MONTHLY E-NEWS

For timely information about policies and grants, pest alerts, woodland management updates, open days, trial results and the occasional quip, sign up to our monthly newsletter.

We promise not to clog your inbox!

Email us or go to oakbankgc.co.uk/subscribe



OAKBANK SERVICES

Much of what we do starts with a seed, and while our seed expertise is second to none, covering everything from cover crops and forage to game cover and stewardship, we serve our customers in many other ways.



ENVIRONMENTAL AND CONSERVATION STRATEGY

We can undertake a complete review of your farm or estate to assess soils, habitats, water, woodland, heritage and biodiversity potential. We will create a clear, integrated plan that aligns your environmental, financial and social goals. Whether you are looking to improve sustainability, attract investment or future-proof your business, we can help you plan with confidence and deliver measurable results.

ECOLOGY AND NATURAL CAPITAL

With money from the private, rather than public, sector and measurable biodiversity outcomes becoming more important, our ecology team can help you understand and enhance the value of your holding. We offer ecological surveys, Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) baselining and habitat management and monitoring plans, supported by innovative tools such as bioacoustic monitoring.

COUNTRYSIDE STEWARDSHIP / SFI CONSULTATIONS AND APPLICATIONS

Whether you need some help and advice when completing your own, on-line application, or want to put together a first class, Higher-Tier CS application, we have the people to help you. We are experts in grant applications and will tailor applications to deliver what you want on your estate and, in most cases, deliver for the farm, the farm environment, the shoot and the bottom line.

SCHEME AUDITS AND COMPLIANCE CHECKS

Take away the worry of an RPA visit by asking Oakbank to audit your Stewardship or SFI scheme. We will carry out an audit and send you a report highlighting areas of concern so that you can remedy them before they become problems.

REGENERATIVE AGRICULTURE ADVICE

We see regenerative agriculture as a set of practical tools to improve soil health and business resilience. Our team has real-world experience across the UK, working closely with Velcourt and others to implement regenerative practices at scale. No two farms are the same - whether you need help with blends, equipment decisions, integrating livestock, soil analysis or bespoke cover crop mixes, we offer pragmatic, farm-specific advice that delivers measurable results.

GAME HABITAT ADVICE

Setting up a new shoot or want a fresh pair of eyes to look at game crops then we can help you. From siting of the game cover to crop choice and agronomy advice to help ensure you get the best out of the crop. For anyone wanting to start a wild game project we have a vast amount of experience and are happy to share that with you.

TREE RISK MANAGEMENT

If you have trees near buildings, roads or public rights of way then you have a duty of care to ensure they are safe. Our arboricultural specialists can help deliver estate-wide tree risk management policy as well as carrying out your tree hazard inspections.

WOODLAND MANAGEMENT

We deliver Woodland Management Plans of the highest standard whether grant aided or not. Plans can be tailored to meet shooting requirements, biomass delivery or simply to improve the overall woodland habitat. We ensure all the correct felling licences, consents and utilities are in place prior to work starting. We can engage contractors on your behalf, manage felling operations and prepare tenders for standing or roadside sales.

WOODLAND CREATION / PLANTING

English Woodland Creation Offer (EWCO) provides capital grants to cover planting costs as well as the opportunity to access additional funding depending on where the woodland is to be created and what additional benefits the woodland will provide. Oakbank can help you through the application process as well as select suitable species and plan the layout. For larger projects, we can also help you register with the Woodland Carbon Code and conduct a biodiversity baseline to add value to your planting.



For more detailed information about our Woodland Services please see [page 25](#).

BY
HAROLD MAKANT

Senior Farm Environment
& Stewardship Advisor



THE RISE OF MONITORING

The UK's Environmental Improvement Plan (EIP) is packed with ambitious goals, one of the biggest being to halt the decline in species abundance by 2030.

It's a bold target, and one that demands effective conservation action and a far more sophisticated understanding of how nature is responding to the existing interventions, carried out under the various agri-environment schemes. We need to know, with confidence, whether the steps we're taking are actually working. That's where monitoring becomes absolutely critical.

Among the indicators used to track environmental health, the Farmland Bird Index stands out as particularly important. Farmland birds act as ecological barometers. The grey partridge is one of the most identifiable indicator species. Once common, its decline has mirrored wider environmental pressures, making it a highly sensitive measure of habitat quality. The PARTRIDGE project showed how strongly the species responds to improved habitat and management, with population increases signalling

genuine ecological recovery. Their presence, or absence, reveals a great deal about the condition of the wider farmed landscape. If we want to understand how nature is really doing, listening to the birds, grey partridges included, is a good place to start.

But here's the problem: despite years of investment in stewardship schemes, habitat creation and species recovery projects, measuring their success has been far from straightforward. Traditional monitoring methods - visual surveys, transect counts, habitat assessments - have undoubtedly provided valuable insights, but they come with limitations. They rely heavily on skilled surveyors, are constrained by time and weather, and often produce data that is patchy or inconsistent. With so

many variables at play, it's easy to miss subtle changes or fail to detect species that are present but elusive. In many ways, we've been trying to steer a course for nature recovery while flying partially blind.

This is where bioacoustics enters the picture, offering a genuinely transformative shift in how we monitor and understand the natural world. Instead of depending solely on what we can directly observe during short survey windows, bioacoustics allows us to tune into what we can hear - continuously, objectively and at scale. Birds are naturally vocal creatures, and their songs and calls contain a wealth of information. Each species has its own acoustic signature, and by capturing these sounds, we can build a detailed picture of presence, abundance, behaviour and habitat use.





HOW DOES THIS TECHNOLOGY WORK IN PRACTICE?

At the core of our approach are Autonomous Recording Units (ARUs). These compact, inconspicuous, weatherproof devices are designed to sit in the landscape, often for days or weeks at a time, capturing the soundscape around them. They're surprisingly sophisticated: battery-powered, GPS-enabled and equipped with sensitive microphones capable of detecting even faint calls. They gather hours upon hours of audio data. It's remarkable to think how far we've come since the first known recording of a nightingale in 1900, captured on a wax cylinder. Today's technology is opening up new possibilities for large-scale ecological monitoring.

We process recordings using AI-driven software, converting audio into spectrograms - visual representations of sound - and comparing them against extensive reference libraries of known bird calls. While the technology is powerful, it's not infallible. Background noise, overlapping calls and unusual vocalisations can all introduce errors. That's why human verification remains essential.

Last year, we carried out a feasibility study on a Velcourt managed farm by deploying ARUs in two areas with contrasting habitats, capturing a rich tapestry of bird activity. The differences between the two sites were striking. One area was alive with a diverse chorus of species, while the other was noticeably quieter. These variations provided valuable insights into habitat quality, species distribution and the effectiveness of existing management practices. Instead of relying on assumptions or sporadic observations, we now had concrete, quantifiable evidence.

WHY DOES THIS MATTER?

This data can directly inform agri-environment schemes and land management decisions. If a particular field or woodland edge is unusually silent, it may indicate a lack of suitable habitat or food resources. That knowledge allows farmers and land managers to adjust their practices - perhaps by altering seed mixes, modifying cutting regimes or enhancing structural diversity. Conversely, areas with high levels of acoustic activity can help identify what's working well and where efforts should be replicated. Bioacoustics turns vague impressions into actionable intelligence.

There's growing interest in whether this type of data could support access to nature-based markets. While the frameworks for such markets are still evolving, robust, auditable evidence will be crucial for demonstrating environmental outcomes. Bioacoustic monitoring offers exactly that: objective, repeatable data that contributes to a credible baseline and can be tracked over time. It doesn't replace other forms of monitoring, but it strengthens the overall evidence package.

At a national scale, the implications become even more significant. Bioacoustic monitoring isn't just a clever piece of technology, it's a strategic tool that can help the UK meet its EIP targets. By feeding into the Farmland Bird Index, aggregated recordings from farms and estates across the country can reveal patterns and trends that would otherwise remain hidden. When combined, these soundscapes tell a powerful story about the state of nature.

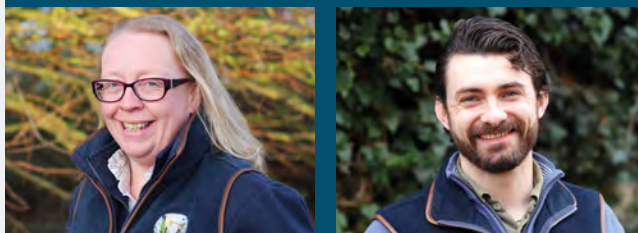
In a decade defined by environmental urgency, we need monitoring methods that are as ambitious as our goals. Bioacoustics offers a way to listen more closely, understand more deeply and act more effectively. If we want to halt the decline in species abundance by 2030, this kind of innovation is essential.

RESTORING THE NATION'S PARKLANDS

Combining strategic planning, practical conservation and tailored project management to deliver integrated environmental, heritage and business outcomes.

Historic parkland restoration is essential for preserving cultural heritage while enhancing biodiversity. Many estates contain veteran trees, pastures, lakes, and designed landscapes that have declined over time due to neglect, agricultural change, or natural ageing. Public funding, such as Countryside Stewardship Higher-Tier in England, provides crucial support for these projects, enabling landowners to implement parkland management plans that guide woodland

BY
ANN GIBSON
&
ETHAN POWELL
Senior Farm Environment & Stewardship Advisors



care, grassland management, tree succession, and habitat restoration. By combining strategic planning with practical conservation, these initiatives protect the historic character of parklands, improve ecological value, and ensure that these landscapes continue to be enjoyed by wildlife and people alike for generations to come.

In recent years, Oakbank has played a leading role in restoring historic parklands, with projects including:



With the right strategic approach, historic estates can be sensitively restored for the modern era, with heritage restoration and environmental enhancement working hand in hand.

RAYNHAM HALL

The restoration of the parkland and lake at Raynham Hall in Norfolk marked a significant moment in the estate's long history, reflecting both a renewed commitment to environmental stewardship and a deep respect for its historic landscape. Beginning in 2022 the restoration project was an ambitious programme of habitat renewal, landscape repair, and water management.

Central to this work was the revitalisation of the lake, originally created as a focal point within the estate. Silt build-up and invasive vegetation had diminished both its appearance and ecological function. Carefully planned dredging, combined with the re-establishment of marginal planting, has begun to restore the lake's clarity and biodiversity. These efforts aim not only to enhance the visual harmony of the landscape but also to create healthier conditions for local wildlife, from aquatic invertebrates to visiting bird species.

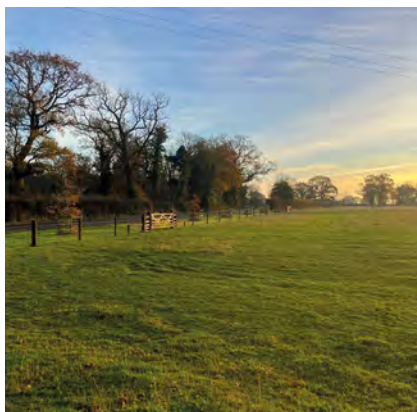
The surrounding parkland has also undergone an ambitious transformation. Historic tree lines



and avenues have been selectively replanted. New grazing regimes, designed to encourage species-rich grassland, have been introduced alongside measures to protect ancient trees and regenerate woodland edges. Together, these interventions are helping re-knit the estate's historic layout while strengthening its ecological resilience.

A project of this scale would have been difficult to achieve without external support. Countryside

Stewardship funding has played a crucial role, enabling the estate to undertake long-term land management aligned with national conservation priorities. Working in partnership with Historic England, Natural England and the Environment Agency has ensured that heritage restoration and environmental enhancement go hand in hand, demonstrating how traditional landscapes can adapt to contemporary ecological needs.



HEYDON HALL

Heydon Hall in Norfolk underwent a carefully managed restoration of its historic parkland, balancing heritage conservation with ecological enhancement. The estate lies within the village of Heydon, designated a conservation area in 1971. This status ensures that restoration work respects the historic character of the estate while allowing for sensitive ecological management.

A key feature of the estate is its combination of wood pasture and open parkland. Veteran trees are scattered across grassland areas creating a landscape rich in wildlife. The restoration programme focused on maintaining and enhancing this traditional structure. Veteran trees were surveyed and safeguarded, and new planting was undertaken to reinstate lost avenues and strengthen woodland edges, guided by both historical evidence and ecological advice in conjunction with both Historic England and Natural England.

A Parkland Management Plan provided the long-term framework for the restoration. It outlined strategies for woodland and grassland management, tree succession, and habitat improvement, ensuring that the parkland could thrive sustainably. By managing grazing regimes, maintaining meadows, and protecting veteran trees, the plan supports biodiversity while preserving the visual and historic qualities of the landscape.

Through careful planning and management, Heydon Hall's parkland was restored to reflect both its historic significance and its ecological potential. This demonstrated how a structured approach, combining a parkland management plan with sensitive interventions, could sustain wood pasture, open parkland, and historic vistas for future generations to enjoy.



BY
ANA REYNOLDS

Managing Director



NUTRIENT RELEASE FROM COVER CROPS

In our search for dependable nutrient strategies, we draw on farm experience and emerging research to explain what cover crops can realistically deliver.

The conversation is shifting from “do cover crops work?” to “how do I make them work (harder) for me?”. It’s a question we grapple with on our own farm, and one I explored closely during my time at AHDB. The truth is that cover crops can capture, fix and return meaningful nutrients, but doing so consistently and having confidence to adjust fertiliser plans requires a more strategic mindset than simply putting seed in the ground, and an evidence base suitable for UK climate and soils.

Well-grown winter covers typically supply around 20-30kg N/ha to the next crop, and 50kg N/ha+ is possible in exceptional situations. Species, timings and termination all influence how much of that N is actually available when the following crop needs it, which is the ultimate question. For example, succulent, multi-species covers

tend to mineralise rapidly after destruction (often within days!) and deliver a good amount of nutrients, while woody, high C:N covers can temporarily lock up N and delay crop growth if poorly managed, especially where heavy soils also stay wet under a bulky cover. The challenge is that these factors interact with highly variable (and increasingly extreme) weather and soil conditions, meaning nutrient release rarely follows a neat pattern - one field, one year, or even one species mix can behave very differently from the next. Getting this right is fundamental to turning nutrient capture into nutrient use and, ultimately, ensuring a financial return.

We are determined to move this conversation beyond rules of thumb by working with farmers to generate practical, field-scale data on nutrient release dynamics, enabling everyone to estimate fertiliser adjustments with greater certainty. Rigorous science, real-world testing and shared learning, across countries as well as among ourselves, is our direction of travel in 2026.



Scan the QR code to explore more and register your interest in joining our on-farm trials.



BY
MAX COWELL

Trainee Advisor



MY PLACEMENT YEAR AT OAKBANK

I joined Oakbank in August 2025 as part of my agricultural degree at Harper Adams University.

Oakbank offered me so many areas of interest, including woodland management, cover crops and habitat creation, to name a few. Since joining the Oakbank team, I have been undertaking tasks that are new to me and are often outside of my comfort zone, learning a huge amount about the business as well as discovering my own strengths and weaknesses.

Assisting with woodland management plans and surveys has been a significant part of my role through the winter, ranging from a tree risk survey along a very busy stretch of the A1 to a management plan in stunning ancient woodland,

parkland and gardens. Meeting clients, sharpening my tree identification skills and measuring timber volumes have also been valuable learning opportunities.

I have also learned a great deal about cover crops and how they can be used for different purposes, such as improving organic matter, helping to prevent nutrient leaching, or simply for grazing. Over recent months, I have seen many Oakbank mixes used for all of these purposes, from a wild grey partridge shoot in North Norfolk - where cover crops provide additional cover for the greys and protect the soil over winter - to grazing mixes in

Northamptonshire that are strip-grazed in a very considered way to benefit both the soil and the livestock.

Being part of the Oakbank team has allowed my passion for wildlife and habitat creation to grow, inspiring new ideas and plans for the farm at home, including installing owl and tree sparrow boxes, creating and restoring ponds, and laying hedges.

Being based in an office environment has also helped me develop a range of professional skills while working within a great fun and productive team full of experience and energy.



BY
HARRY MOFFAT

Senior Regenerative
Agriculture & Conservation
Advisor



HERBAL REMEDIES

Not all leys are equal – so why do we often neglect species and variety choice? And let us not forget the power of diversity in boosting soil health and livestock performance.

If you are considering introducing grass or herbal leys into your farm rotation, then doing some research into which species and varieties to include is time well spent. However, when it comes to forage, I feel like this is often a neglected thought process. I like to be quite matter-of-fact about things, so the purpose of this is to help you try to maximise your natural feed sources and subsequently import less to your farm, saving you money.

When it comes to planting new leys there are obvious things to consider. Consider longevity of the sward; whether it is for cutting, grazing or both; whether it is to help condition your soil; whether you want to reduce inputs; and whether you want to be more climate resilient.

All are important, so ensure you select the right seed mix for your requirements. I have spoken before about how monocultures are not the best thing from a soil and biodiversity point of view so be adventurous in your mixes. Start with the grasses and ensure you include a minimum of 5 species of grass. I would then suggest that including clover - red or white - is the minimum for a new sward, as long as your herbicide programme is compatible (consider stitching clover in after the grass has established, which can be a helpful trick). Clovers condition the soil, fix nitrogen and add another level of metabolisable energy and crude protein which will become available to your livestock.

Adding in other legumes and herbs, such as trefoils, chicory, plantain, parsley and burnet, can all increase the soil and livestock benefits as well as biodiversity and it has been shown that a well-managed herbal ley can reduce the number of days to slaughter by around two weeks, compared to a grass-only ley. In herbal leys, the herbs tend to die out over time through competitiveness of the grasses, but chicory and plantain tend to prevail. In my opinion, these are the most valuable herbs to have in terms of soil conditioning, animal health and nutrition. Both plants are also high in metabolisable energy, early and late in the season. Herbal leys may also reduce the need for anthelmintic treatments.



To ensure the productive longevity of a herbal ley does take careful management. Resting the sward at the appropriate time, as well as mob grazing, can have significant benefits. Yes, it is extra work in terms of temporary fencing, however by just rotationally grazing areas, the more vigorous and meaningful grasses will begin to thrive. Like you and I, animals tend to eat the nicest food first. When a sheep sees a lovely bit of palatable ryegrass or plantain it will eat it straight away, leaving the less nutritious grasses behind. If the stocking density is higher, the animals will more likely leave the area evenly grazed, enabling higher productivity overall.

This picture demonstrates selective grazing: creeping bent is of little nutritional value, so the sheep have pulled it out but not eaten it. You could do this mechanically and then overseed with more beneficial species. When overseeding, ideally bare soil will be showing, either created by hard grazing or aggressive raking or similar methods.



Permanent pasture is an area of the farm which sometimes seems to get little or no attention. When was it last overseeded or reviewed in terms of grazing management? Again, rest and managed mob grazing, as well as overseeding can make a huge difference to the productivity of the sward.

The SFI payment made herbal leys look reasonably attractive as a break crop in an arable rotation but in many cases there is a strong case for utilising herbal leys even without the SFI payment. Restoring and regenerating soils as well as helping reduce arable weed burdens in a holistic way could help reduce

inputs in the long term and, if the ley is utilised properly then it will also produce a high value product, whether that's forage to sell or home-grown beef or lamb. All wins in my book. I have recently been shown some data, detailing how multispecies herbal leys can increase the weight of lambs at weaning by around 2kg when compared to a singular species perennial ryegrass ley!

So what does this all mean? Take time to consider and manage your grass and herbal leys and employ slightly different management techniques, which should help you reduce the inputs and increase the output of your forage. While spending a little more on seed can be an additional cost that you don't want, consider it as an investment spread over the length of the ley. If you would like to discuss the management techniques in greater detail, or what is the right seed mix for you, then please get in touch.



PRODUCT GUIDE

We offer a comprehensive range of seed mixes designed to suit a wide variety of situations - from **Game Cover** and **Stewardship/SFI** options to mixes for **Soil Health, Forage** and **Amenity** purposes. Whatever your aim, we are confident you will find something to suit your needs!

If you are looking for something more specific, or need help solving a particular challenge, please give us a call. We are always happy to discuss individual requirements and will help you choose a suitable seed mix for your specific soil type, location and purpose. We can also put together bespoke mixes or advise as part of a wider environmental strategy to target resilience and new income opportunities.

All our seed is of the highest quality. Certified seed is used for species which have a certification standard, and where they don't, we carry out germination and purity tests, so we know exactly what we are supplying. Many of our mixes are designed to be multi-purpose, providing winter bird food, game cover and improvements in soil health. Please be aware that we reserve the right to change the composition of mixes during the season if prices or availability of certain species change dramatically.

FUNDRAISING: BARRINGER'S BLOOMS & THREE PEAKS

We continue to celebrate Henry's life through a special **wild flower mix** which can brighten up a part of your farm, woodland ride or garden corner. The mix is packed in 1kg packs and for every kilogram we sell we will donate £5 to each of two charities close to Henry's family's hearts - The Brain Tumour Research Charity and the Priscilla Bacon Hospice Charity.

On 30th May 2026, the team will be taking on the **Three Peaks Challenge** in his memory.



Follow our journey and fundraising

GAME COVER

In this section you will find crops that are typically used for game cover, whether as straight or in mixes. Some of them are suitable for Countryside Stewardship option AB9 and SFI option AHL2/CAHL2 (both called - 'winter bird food'). By definition, a game crop is any crop grown with the intention of feeding and/or holding game birds in the shooting season.

TOP TIPS FOR ESTABLISHMENT

As the lowland game shooting season starts in September and continues until the end of January there is no rush to get game covers drilled in the spring. Many species come from warmer climates so will only grow when the soil is warm enough. Please also remember that if game birds are to spend time in these crops, they need to be easily accessible and provide a good overhead canopy. That means they need to be relatively weed free and sown on wide enough rows (we recommend 50cm+) to allow the birds to move around under the canopy. Far too many crops are sown too thick so the birds can't access them until they have died back in December.

MAIZE

The best maize crops for holding game have good early vigour and stand through the shooting season.

Maize should be sown on wide rows and kept weed-free. Some people are looking for a very early variety that produces early cobs and can be flailed off as the season progresses to provide a good food source. Others want a very late maturing variety that doesn't produce any feed value so as not to attract the unwanted attention of corvids, rats, badgers and deer. And somewhere in the

middle sit the majority of our customers who are looking for a maize that gets away strongly, produces cobs that mature in October and stands through the season.

Seed Treatment – this year we managed to secure Mas 48L again as our Oakbank maize. Those of you who had Mas 48L two years ago will remember how well it stood! The Agrostart seed treatment, combined with the Redigo M + Korit helped with its exceptional early vigour and protection from avian predation. All other maize varieties in our portfolio are treated with Optiplus.



OAKBANK MAIZE (MAS 48L FAO 310)

- Proven variety with excellent standing power
- Agrostart seed treatment improves rooting and nutrient uptake
- Mid-maturity but will produce good cobs in most situations
- Seed treatment – Redigo M/Korit & Agrostart
- Bag size – 45,000 seeds
- Recommended seed rate 90-110,000 seeds/ha



GAME MAIZE (MAGNATO FAO 240)

- Slightly taller variety but still stands well
- Earlier to mature than Mas 48L
- Seed treatment – Optiplus
- Bag size – 50,000 seeds
- Recommended seed rate 100-120,000 seeds/ha



SUPER-EARLY MAIZE (MARCAMO FAO 170)

- Tall variety with average lodging score
- Guaranteed cobs on most sites
- Ideal for early season shooting and then food value
- Seed treatment – Optiplus
- Bag size – 50,000 seeds
- Recommended seed rate 100-120,000 seeds/ha



LATE (NO COB) MAIZE (AGROKING FAO 600)

- Very late maturing
- Good standing power
- Seed treatment – Optiplus
- Bag size – 50,000 seeds
- Recommended seed rate 100-120,000 seeds/ha

KALE

As ever, seedbed conditions at time of drilling make the difference between success and failure with kale. Sow into a warm, fine, moist seedbed and the kale will be up in rows in a week and shouldn't look back. Our main varieties are Gruner Angelita, Thousand Head,

Anglian Gold and Goldeneye. In addition, our Gold Fire Kale Blend proved very successful again last year - a combination of kale varieties treated with Take-Off seeming to deliver outstanding early vigour.



GRUNER ANGELITA/THOUSAND HEAD/ANGLIAN GOLD

- Good early vigour
- Strong stem
- Winter hardy
- Good second year crop
- Seed treatment – re-cleaned only
- Bag size – 1kg or 5kg



GOLDENEYE

- Good early vigour
- Some club root resistance
- Strong stem
- Winter hardy
- Good second year crop
- Seed treatment – re-cleaned only
- Bag size – 1kg or 5kg



GOLD FIRE KALE BLEND

- A mix of Goldeneye, Anglian Gold and Spitfire Kale Rape
- Anglian Gold treated with Take-Off ST
- Excellent early vigour and good winter hardiness
- Good second year crop
- Seed treatment – Take-Off ST
- Bag size – 5kg (hectare)

SORGHUM

Still a popular cover crop in the south of the UK, sorghum provides a warm and windproof cover crop. Often grown alongside maize as a wind break, sorghum has also come into its own as part of many wild bird

seed mixes as it stands so well and helps hold up some of the weaker, seed-bearing species. It must not be sown until the soil temperature reaches 14°C.



OAKBANK MILO

- Blend of US and French grain sorghum
- Fantastic standing power
- French sorghum will set seed
- Leaf structure similar to maize
- Seed treatment – recleaned only
- Bag size – 10kg



MID-HEIGHT SORGHUM

- Grain sorghum
- Slightly taller than Milo
- Good standing power
- Seed treatment – recleaned only
- Bag size – 10kg



GIANT SORGHUM

- Taller sorghum so provides excellent shelter belt
- Prone to brackling over in late winter
- Seed treatment – recleaned only
- Bag size – 10kg

MILLET

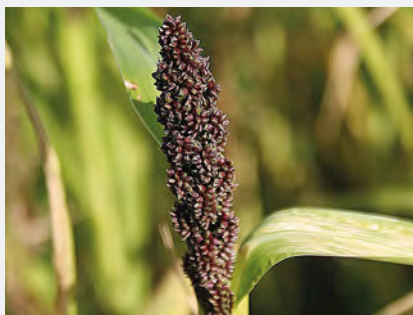
A very popular food crop in the warmer parts of the UK, millet forms the basis of many winter bird food mixes as well as being a useful early food source for game birds. Red and white millet are primarily 'food' producing

species whilst Japanese reed millet is an excellent winter cover crop in its own right and, in our experience, also delivers a large amount of food for game and farmland birds.



RED & WHITE MILLET

- Red millet matures slightly earlier than white
- Both produce large quantities of palatable seed
- Mix well with Oakbank Milo and tolerant of same herbicides
- Sold as individual species or as a mix in Oakbank Millet Mix
- Seed treatment – recleaned only
- Bag size – 10kg



JAPANESE REED MILLET

- Excellent 'structural' component in mixes
- Very good standing power through the winter
- Will grow in harsher climates than sorghum
- Seed treatment – recleaned only
- Bag size – 10kg



REED MILLET MIX

- The perfect blend of reed, red and white millet
- Delivers cover and food through the winter
- Seed treatment – recleaned only
- Bag size – 10kg

OAKBANK GAME MIXES

These mixes have been developed primarily for game birds, although they are also suitable as winter bird food (particularly under Countryside Stewardship and SFI). Other stewardship mixes, which would also be suitable for game but are more directed at farmland birds, can be found in the **Stewardship section** on [page 18](#).

2025 was a particularly bad year for weed infestation in winter bird food plots. Ensure you clean up your plots prior to drilling or move them if possible. Try and identify the main problem weeds and select a mix which is safe to spray for those weeds e.g. GM416 for fat hen or Grass Weed Buster for barnyard grass.



AB9 | AHL2 | CAHL2

GM109

- A traditional 'game cover' type mix
- Provides food and cover
- Tricky weed control due to diversity of species
- Contains buckwheat, camelina, fodder radish, mustard, phacelia, quinoa, reed millet, kale-rape, sunflowers
- Seed treatment – re-cleaned only
- Bag size – 8kg (half hectare)



AB9 | AHL2 | CAHL2

GM313

- A very good holding and driving cover for the South of the UK
- Sunflowers add colour and finch food
- Dwarf grain sorghum and reed millet deliver warm cover right through the winter
- Contains camelina, dwarf grain sorghum, fodder radish, mustard, sunflowers, red, white and reed millet
- Seed treatment – re-cleaned only
- Bag size – 10kg (half hectare)



AB9 | AHL2 | CAHL2

GM416

- Fantastic all-round game cover for areas that can grow sorghum
- Stands through the winter and provides large amounts of food for game and songbirds
- Most popular annual game mix
- Sprayable for broadleaf weeds
- Contains dwarf grain sorghum, linseed, spring barley, spring triticale, spring wheat, red, white and reed millet
- Seed treatment – re-cleaned only
- Bag size – 25kg (half hectare)



AB9 | AHL2 | CAHL2

FEED & FLUSH

- Truly winter hardy mix delivering warm, dry habitat and lots of food
- Provided the kale establishes well, it can be left for a second year
- Inclusion of millet and sorghum restrict it to less severe climates
- Contains camelina, dwarf grain sorghum, fodder radish, kale, quinoa, spring triticale, red, white and reed millet
- Seed treatment – re-cleaned only
- Bag size – 20kg (half hectare)



AB9 | AHL2 | CAHL2

ELEVATION MIX

- Feed and Flush for the north of the UK and more exposed sites
- Very warm and winter hardy mix that also provides natural food
- Good kale establishment means it can be left for a second year
- Contains camelina, fodder radish, Thousand Head & Anglian Gold Kale, Spitfire kale-rape, linseed, mustard, quinoa, spring triticale
- Seed treatment – re-cleaned only
- Bag size – 20kg (half hectare)



AB9 | AHL2 | CAHL2

GRASS WEED BUSTER

- Developed as a mix with which you can tackle grass weed problems such as couch, blackgrass, barnyard grass and foxtail millet
- Suitable for later sowing (early July) so stale seedbeds can be easily attained
- Can be sprayed, post-emergence, with most graminicides
- Provides good winter cover and food
- Can be mixed with kale and/or chicory to provide a two-year crop
- Contains buckwheat, camelina, fodder radish, kale-rape, mustard, quinoa
- Seed treatment – re-cleaned only
- Bag size – 15kg (hectare)

COUNTRYSIDE STEWARDSHIP & SFI MIXES

WINTER BIRD FOOD MIXES

Suitable for Mid-Tier option AB9 & SFI options AHL2/CAHL2, the following mixes are all compliant at the time of going to press. If you have a prescriptive mix in your CS agreement or would like a bespoke mix created

for your individual circumstance e.g. a mix targeted towards Corn Bunting or Tree Sparrow, then please call the office.



AB9 | AHL2 | CAHL2

OAKBANK FARMLAND BIRD MIX

- An easy-to-grow, annual wild bird seed mix
- Provides lots of winter food for a variety farmland birds
- Can be mixed with kale to produce a two-year crop
- Contains fodder radish, linseed, mustard, quinoa, red & white millet, spring barley, spring triticale
- Seed treatment – Recleaned only
- Bag size – 25kg (half hectare)



AB9 | AHL2 | CAHL2

AHL2 WINTER BIRD FOOD

- Annual mix, developed for those wanting something simple to tick the SFI box
- Contains linseed, mustard, red & white millet, spring triticale, spring wheat
- Seed treatment – Recleaned only
- Bag size – 20kg (half hectare)



AB9 | AHL2 | CAHL2

SOILS, BEES & SEEDS

- Multi-species and multi-purpose mix to benefit the soil as well as farmland birds and pollinators
- Contains alsike clover, buckwheat, camelina, crimson clover, fodder radish, kale-rape, linseed, lucerne, millet, mustard, phacelia, quinoa, red clover, sainfoin, sorghum, stubble turnip, sunflower, spring vetch
- Seed treatment – Recleaned only
- Bag size – 20kg (hectare)

SUPPLEMENTARY FEEDING

Suitable for Mid-Tier option AB12 & SFI action AHW2. Probably the most important farmland bird option as it delivers guaranteed food through the winter when the birds most need it. You can use your own wheat and oilseed rape but a percentage of small seeds such as millet, sunflower hearts and canary seed are essential to ensure you are feeding a range of species. We will have three standard mixes for winter 2026/7 - a **complete ration**, which will contain 70% cereals and 30% small seeds; a **small seed budget mix**, which will use a limited range of small seeds to add to your own cereal; and a **small seed premium mix** with a more diverse range of small seeds for customers who want to go the extra mile for their farmland birds. As always, we offer straights as well as bespoke mixes.



Discover the Oakbank guide for
Supplementary Winter Bird Feeding: AB12 & AHW2

GAME FEED MIXES

If you are not in stewardship then our supplier can also offer us game holding mixes including kibbled maize, split peas and black sunflowers. Please ask us for a quote.



AB16 | AHW1

OAKBANK BUMBLEBIRD MIX

- Establish in the spring or late summer/early autumn (AB16 - autumn only) for two-year crop
- Delivers good insect-rich brood rearing as well as winter cover and food
- Good option for wild bird shoots
- Contains alsike clover, camelina, crimson clover, fodder radish, kale, linseed, phacelia, red clover, sainfoin, triticale, vetch, wheat
- Seed treatment – Recleaned only
- Bag size – 25kg (half hectare)

GWCT PARTRIDGE PROJECT MIXES

These mixes have been developed in conjunction with the GWCT and European partners to help the grey partridge recover its range across Europe. Both mixes qualify as Winter Bird Food crops (Mid-Tier option AB9 and SFI action CAHL2) and the Advanced mix qualifies as a Bumblebird Mix (Mid-Tier AB16 and SFI AHW1). Please call us to discuss further. For every pack of the GWCT PARTRIDGE project mixes that you purchase, Oakbank will donate to the project. Last year that donation amounted to £10,000, so please keep buying these mixes and supporting the trust.



Game & Wildlife
CONSERVATION TRUST



AB9 | AHL2 | CAHL2



AB9 | CAHL2 | AB16 | AHW1

GWCT PARTRIDGE MIX

- Contains camelina, chicory, corn cockle, fodder radish, kale, lucerne, mustard, perennial rye (secale multicaule), sunflower, sweet fennel, teasel, triticale, vetch
- Seed treatment – Take-off ST (kale), Nitragin Gold inoculant (lucerne)
- Bag size – 20kg (hectare)

GWCT ADVANCED PARTRIDGE MIX

- Contains seed bearing species such as teasel, stubble turnips, triticale, kale, millet, sunflower and perennial rye; structural plants such as chicory and sweet fennel; and a host of flowering species, both annuals (cornflower, corn marigold, corn poppy) and perennials (sainfoin, red campion, yarrow, oxeye daisy, wild carrot, black knapweed, selfheal, lucerne, musk mallow, birdsfoot trefoil, st.john's wort, kidney vetch, vipers bugloss and greater mullein)
- Seed treatment – Nitragin Gold inoculant (lucerne)
- Bag size – 10kg (half hectare)



OAKBANK FLOWER MIXES

NECTAR FLOWER MIXES

Suitable for Mid-Tier option AB1 & SFI action AHL1/CAHL1, the following mixes are all compliant at the time of going to press.



AB1 | AHL1 | CAHL1

NECTAR-RICH BRONZE

- Standard nectar flower mix
- Contains alsike clover, black knapweed, crimson clover, lucerne, red clover, sainfoin, vetch, yarrow
- Seed treatment – Nitragin Gold inoculant (lucerne)
- Bag size – 15kg (hectare)



AB1 | AHL1 | CAHL1

CELTIC MIX

- The Oakbank slant on a nectar flower mix to provide a bit more winter cover with the inclusion of chicory and sweet fennel
- Mustard provides some summer cover in the year of sowing
- Contains chicory, crimson clover, hairy vetch, lucerne, mustard, oxeye daisy, sainfoin, sweet fennel, yarrow
- Seed treatment – Nitragin Gold inoculant (lucerne)
- Bag size – 12kg (hectare)



AB1 | AHL1 | CAHL1

OAKBANK HONEY BEE MIX

- Several bee-keepers have asked us for a Stewardship compliant mix containing species favoured by honey bees so here it is
- Contains alsike clover, black knapweed, sainfoin, phacelia, red clover, selfheal, yarrow, yellow blossom sweet clover
- Seed treatment – recleaned only
- Bag size – 6kg (half hectare)

FLOWER-RICH MARGINS AND PLOTS

Suitable for Mid-Tier option AB8 & SFI action IPM2/CIPM2, the following mixes are all compliant at the time of going to press. We use both agricultural and native cultivars of wild flowers. The natives are labelled 'N'.



AB8 | IPM2 | CIPM2

OAKBANK FLOWER-RICH GRASS MIX

- 85:15 grass:flower mix
- A reasonably robust mix designed to tick the boxes for CS & SFI
- Uses a majority of agricultural cultivars of flowers to keep the cost down and to deliver success on heavier and more fertile soils.
- Contains chewings fescue, meadow fescue, slender creeping red fescue, smooth stalked meadow grass, alsike clover, black medic, birdsfoot trefoil, crimson clover, oxeye daisy (N), red campion (N), sainfoin, sheeps burnet, spring vetch, yarrow
- Seed treatment – recleaned only
- Bag size – 20kg (hectare)



AB8 | IPM2 | CIPM2

OAKBANK PREMIUM FLOWER-RICH GRASS MIX

- A 90:10 grass:flower mix but using more species of grass and native wild flowers
- Contains chewings fescue, crested dogtail, meadow fescue, slender creeping red fescue, smooth stalked meadow grass, birdsfoot trefoil (N), black medic, black knapweed (N), kidney vetch (N), lady's bedstraw (N), meadow buttercup (N), oxeye daisy (N), red campion (N), sainfoin, selfheal (N), wild carrot (N), yarrow
- Seed treatment – recleaned only
- Bag size – 20kg (hectare)



BARRINGER'S BLOOMS

- A flower only mix, in memory of our friend and colleague Henry Barringer
- This is a grass-free mix so could be stitched into existing grass margins or a small quantity of fine grasses could be added to create more of a meadow
- Shade tolerant flowers make it ideal for a woodland glade
- Contains Bluebell, Agrimony, Ragged robin, Ribwort plantain, Ivy-leaved speedwell, Nettle leaved bellflower, Greater mullein, Egyptian clover, Red campion, Self heal
- Seed treatment – recleaned only
- Bag size – 1kg

For those of you with a real passion for wild flora, or a particular project in mind, we create bespoke grass and native wild flower mixes for specific soil types - from chalkland to marshland to woodland.

LEGUME FALLOW

Suitable for Mid-Tier option AB15 & SFI action NUM3/CNUM3, the following mixes are all compliant at the time of going to press.



AB15 | NUM3 | CNUM3

OAKBANK LEGUME FALLOW WITH GRASS

- Good option for blackgrass control providing establishment is done correctly
- Helps pollinators and delivers invertebrate chick food for farmland birds
- Contains intermediate perennial ryegrass, cocksfoot, alsike clover, crimson clover, red clover, sainfoin, winter vetch, lucerne
- Seed treatment - Nitragin Gold inoculant (lucerne)
- Bag size – 15kg (half hectare)



AB15 | NUM3 | CNUM3

OAKBANK LEGUME FALLOW

- For fields where blackgrass may not be an issue or where you don't want any grasses in the mix
- Diverse range of flowering plants good for soil fertility and for pollinators
- Autumn sowing best to meet the aims of CNUM3
- Contains crimson clover, winter vetch, linseed, lucerne, phacelia, red clover, sainfoin
- Seed treatment – Nitragin Gold inoculant (lucerne)
- Bag size – 15kg (hectare)



NUM3

NUM3 SPRING MIX

- For soils which can be sown in the early spring to ensure plants are flowering by late spring
- Fast growing and rapid flowering species included to reduce risk of non-compliance
- Diverse species mix for soil structure and fertility
- Contains berseem clover, buckwheat, camelina, crimson clover, phacelia, sainfoin, spring vetch
- Seed treatment – recleaned only
- Bag size – 15kg (hectare)

HERBAL LEYS

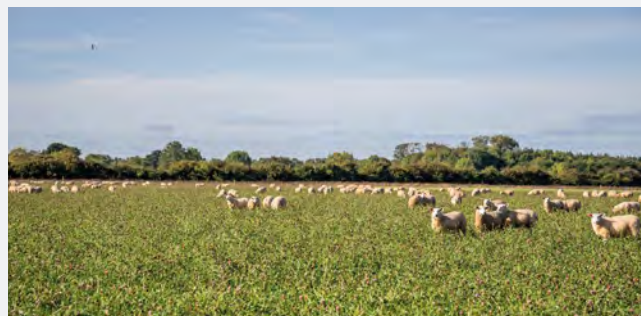
Suitable for Mid-Tier option GS4 & SFI action SAM3/CSAM3, the following mixes are all compliant at the time of going to press.



GS4 | SAM3 | CSAM3

OAKBANK HERBAL LEY

- For clients looking for a mix that delivers a highly palatable forage crop for grazing and/or conserving
- Inclusion of cocksfoot and festulolium adds resilience on drought prone soils
- Sainfoin and lucerne provide excellent quality silage or hay
- Additional benefits for soil structure and fertility
- Contains intermediate perennial ryegrass, cocksfoot, festulolium, meadow fescue, timothy, Boston plantain, crimson clover, lucerne, red clover, sainfoin, sheeps burnet, sheeps parsley, yarrow
- Seed treatment – Nitragin Gold inoculant (lucerne)
- Bag size – 20kg (sow at 30kg/ha)



GS4 | SAM3 | CSAM3

OAKBANK HERBAL GRAZE ONLY MIX

- For clients who graze their stock extensively and want a high quality, herb-rich sward
- Not really suitable for conserving due to chicory and sweet clover
- Cocksfoot and tall fescue add resilience on drought prone soils whilst creeping red fescue increases grazing tolerance
- Deep rooting sweet clover and chicory
- Additional benefits for soil structure and fertility
- Contains intermediate perennial ryegrass, cocksfoot, festulolium, strong creeping red fescue, meadow fescue, timothy, birdsfoot trefoil, chicory, lucerne, Boston plantain, red clover, sainfoin, sheeps burnet, sheeps parsley, white clover, yarrow, yellow blossom sweet clover
- Seed treatment – Nitragin Gold inoculant (lucerne)
- Bag size – 20kg (sow at 30kg/ha)

PERENNIAL GAME CROP OPTIONS

All wild bird shoots and any shoots reliant on game crops to produce drives should have a percentage of their crops as perennials.

However, please don't think that you can just plant a perennial crop and it will guarantee cover for many years. All perennials need to be established with care and need annual management if they are to deliver the habitat that game requires. Once established they are a terrific source of reassurance especially in difficult years. Perennials are excellent for providing reliable cover, but they don't produce much winter food. They can attract insects and be useful for brood rearing, plus they can offer considerable cost savings over their lifetime. Some are easy to establish (and to remove if required), others, artichokes for example, are rather more permanent. Please talk to us to discuss what you are looking to achieve, and we can advise you on the best solution.



GM206

- Our most popular and successful perennial mix
- Must be sown on wide rows otherwise game birds will not use it
- Reed millet delivers cover in year 1 whilst the perennials get established
- Once established, if managed correctly, will give 5-10 years cover
- Contains chicory, reed canary grass, reed millet, yellow blossom sweet clover
- Seed treatment – recleaned only
- Bag size – 5kg (half hectare)



HOME SWEET HOME

- Developed for estates with grey partridge interest
- Long-term mix delivering winter cover and spring chick food
- Sweet fennel a very winter hardy perennial that also delivers insects in the spring
- Reed millet and kale-rape give cover in year 1
- Contains chicory, lucerne, reed millet, kale rape, sweet fennel, yellow blossom sweet clover
- Seed treatment – Nitragin Gold inoculant (lucerne)
- Bag size – 12kg (hectare)



CANARY/REED CANARY

- Reed canary grass (*phalaris arundinacea*) is UK native unlike Canary grass (*p. aquatica*)
- Both must be sown in wide rows (75cm) and need ongoing management
- Better sown in mixes
- Seed treatment – recleaned only
- Bag size – 2.5kg



MISCANTHUS

- Fantastic holding and driving crop
- Takes two years to establish
- Once established, holds birds all day whatever the weather
- Best grown in strips alongside a food crop
- Can be oversown in year 1
- For establishment advice and costs please contact the office on 01480 890686 or info@oakbankgc.co.uk
- Minimum order size – 2,000 rhizomes (0.2ha)
- Bag size – 2,000 to 10,000 rhizomes
- Planter available to hire with orders of over 10,000 rhizomes

GAME CATCH CROPS

These are for late sown game cover crops, whether patching in failed areas of game cover or creating a drive after harvest, and not to be confused with Cover Crops for Soil Health (see opposite).



OAKBANK RESCUE MIX

- Contains fodder radish, forage rape, stubble turnip, mustard
- Seed treatment – recleaned only
- Bag size – 5kg



UTOPIA

- The best late sown brassica for game
- Canopy similar to kale
- Don't drill too early (mid-July earliest) or crop will bolt and flower
- Seed treatment – recleaned only
- Bag size – 2kg



OTHER CATCH CROPS

- Forage rape
- Fodder radish
- Mustard
- Stubble turnip
- Spitfire kale-rape

GAME COVER STRAIGHTS

- Buckwheat
- Linseed
- Sunflowers
- Triticale – winter & spring
- Camelina
- Quinoa
- Tic beans

COVER CROPS

Oakbank is actively involved with this increasingly important market, including substantial trials with our colleagues at Velcourt. We offer expert advice as well as a complete range of species for these uses including:

- Black oats
- Forage rye
- Legumes – Berseem clover, vetches, crimson clover
- SMART radish
- Daikon and oil radish
- Buckwheat
- Phacelia
- Linseed
- Mustard
- Sunflowers
- Stubble turnips

We offer straights and bespoke mixtures for your particular purpose. There is a minimum order size of 500kgs for bespoke cover crop orders.



SW6 | SAM2 | CSAM2 | SOH2 | SOH3

SMART GRAZE

- Aimed at the grazing cover crop grower, producing good forage with additional soil health benefits
- Contains crimson clover, fodder radish, forage rape, phacelia, Smart radish, stubble turnip, spring vetch
- Seed treatment – re-cleaned only
- Bag size – 25kg (two and a half hectares)



SW6 | SAM2 | CSAM2 | SOH2 | SOH3

SUMMER CATCH

- Our most popular catch crop mix for rapid growth and nutrient retention
- Contains buckwheat, linseed, oil radish, phacelia, spring vetch
- Seed treatment – re-cleaned only
- Bag size – 25kg (two hectares)



SW6 | SAM2 | CSAM2 | SOH2 | SOH3

SUMMER FALLOW

- An improved recipe for 2026 including the addition of millet and sorghum to maximise root exudation, boost soil structure and energise soil biology throughout the spring and summer months
- Contains berseem clover, buckwheat, crimson clover, linseed, phacelia, reed millet, Smart radish, spring vetch, sunflowers, white millet
- Seed treatment – re-cleaned only
- Bag size – 20kg (hectare)



SW6 | SAM2 | CSAM2 | SOH2 | SOH3

SMART COVER

- Our most popular cover crop mix
- Fast growing and deep rooting, with good winter hardiness. An excellent soil conditioner
- Contains buckwheat, crimson clover, hairy vetch, linseed, phacelia, Smart radish
- Seed treatment – re-cleaned only
- Bag size – 25kg (two hectares)



SW6 | SAM2 | CSAM2 | SOH2 | SOH3

CATCH CROP NO RADISH

- Fast growing, rapid development but brassica free
- Contains buckwheat, linseed, phacelia, spring vetch
- Seed treatment – re-cleaned only
- Bag size – 25kg (two hectares)



SW6 | SAM2 | CSAM2 | SOH2 | SOH3

SOILS & STOCK

- A dual purpose, winter cover crop, delivering great soil benefits as well as a decent grazing opportunity
- Contains black oats, crimson clover, forage rape, forage rye, spring vetch, stubble turnip, sunflower
- Seed treatment – re-cleaned only
- Bag size – 25kg (hectare)



SOH4

AFTER MAIZE MIX

- Suited for late drilling. Will establish in the colder, less favourable conditions, holding onto soil and nutrients
- Standard mix contains mustard and rye
- Seed treatment – re-cleaned only
- Bag size – 25kg (hectare)



BIOCOAT GOLD SEED TREATMENT

- We started offering this innovative product from AEA in 2025, with some very interesting results
- Dry-blended, biological seed treatment and inoculant, aims to support germination and early root growth

COMPANION CROPS

We pioneered the use of companion crops with oilseed rape, as well as the use of small leaved clovers as 'living mulches'. Together with Velcourt, we have also trialled companion crops with cereals and have some good data about herbicide safety in those situations.



IPM3 | CIPM3

OSR STANDARD MIX

- Helps crop establishment and combatting CSFB pressure
- Contains: Buckwheat, Berseem Clover, Fenugreek
- Bag size - 25kg (two and a half hectares)



STRAIGHT COMPANION CROPS

- Legumes – Berseem clover, vetches, crimson clover
- Buckwheat
- Phacelia
- Linseed
- Beans



LIVING MULCHES

- Small leaved white clover vr. Rivendell and AberAce

FORAGE AND AMENITY

Over 20 forage mixes to help produce high yields, drought tolerance, palatability and good metabolisable energy. Whether it's a one-year Westerwolds ley or permanent pasture, we will have something to suit your requirements. Clover inclusion and bespoke mixes available.

We also offer a vast range of amenity options, from wildflower meadows to hard-wearing sports field and landscaping grasses, lawn seed, and specialist horse paddock grass mixes.



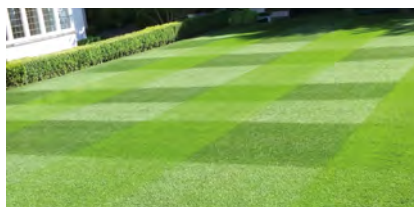
SPECIALIST SILAGE AND HAYLAGE LEYS

- Short- and long-term
- High-yielding
- Recommended list varieties
- Clover options
- Bag size - 20kg



GRASS LEYS AND PERMANENT PASTURES

- For grazing and / or cutting
- Options to include clover and for overseeding
- Option for ryegrass-free, traditional meadow mixes, including herbs and legumes
- Bag size - 20kg (10kg for horse paddock grass)



LAWNS, SPORTS PITCHES AND LANDSCAPING

- From garden lawns to playing fields, hard wearing landscaping grasses to specialist cricket wicket grasses.
- Hard wearing and long lasting
- Drought tolerant
- Bag size – 10kg or 20kg



WILDFLOWERS

- Options to suit woodland, marshland, wetland and more
- Native options and agricultural cultivars
- Options for flowers only and with grass
- Bag size - 1kg or 5kg

TREES/SHRUBS/HEDGING

Our bare root trees and shrubs are sourced from a fantastic, family-run nursery in Yorkshire whilst our cell grown material comes from Cheviot trees in the Borders and Rymer Trees in Suffolk. The provenance and quality of the plants is second-to-none. We are very competitively priced and can supply whatever your project requires, including:

- 20-90cm hedging whips plus spirals and canes
 - Multiples of 25 plants per species
- 20-60cm cell grown plants
 - Multiples of 10 plants per species
- 6-8ft Standard trees plus tubex guards and stakes
- 20-90cm shrubs plus shrub shelters and stakes
 - Multiples of 25 plants per species

OAKBANK WOODLAND DIVISION

Whether you are interested in afforestation, have existing woodland in need of management, or are concerned about the risk that your existing tree stock poses to people or property - get in touch, because we can help!



WOODLAND MANAGEMENT PLANNING

- Multifaceted and comprehensive woodland management plans
- Concise, operational woodland management plans
- Woodland Management and Improvement grant applications
- Ancient Woodland Restoration Plans
- Felling licence applications and assistance
- Bioacoustic monitoring of how woodland supports particular species, such as red-listed birds

We offer everything from detailed woodland management plans for sensitive Ancient- semi-natural woodland (ASNW) and SSSI's, through to more concise plans for simple woodland improvements and to enable felling licences. One-off visits are valuable to discuss and advise on your woodland management and to mark up your thinnings to maximise your crop potential for the future. We specialise in advising on how to improve your woodland ecologically, for game shooting and to maximise the potential economic return. Whatever your woodland needs, we can assist.

GRANT APPLICATIONS AND FUNDING GUIDANCE AND ASSISTANCE

- England Woodland Creation Offer (EWCO)
- CS Woodland Creation Planning Grant
- CS Woodland Management Plan Grant
- CS Woodland Tree Health Grant
- CWD2 Woodland Improvement Grant and associated additional options including WS1 & WS3 Deer & Squirrel Management Grants
- Woodland Carbon Code
- Ancient Woodland Restoration Plans

We deal with complex grants every day and can assist you in securing these important income streams for your woodland - whether it be for new woodland creation, management planning or restoring and improving woodland affected by disease.

NEW WOODLAND CREATION

Assisting woodland design and layout planning

- Supply of trees, shrubs and protection
- Access to appropriate grants

We have extensive experience in planning, administering and managing new woodland planting schemes for all requirements. We help advise on suitable locations, species selection, layout, grant applications and the most cost-effective and profitable approaches - taking care of the whole process.

WOODLAND OPERATIONAL MANAGEMENT

- Marking of trees for thinning and harvesting operations
- Woodland maintenance and invasive species management
- Contractor engagement and supervision
- Timber harvesting and marketing
- Management of site Health & Safety and Ecological Best Practice

We can help you plan, arrange and supervise all of your woodland operations, including timber harvesting, marketing and gaining best market value, coppice cutting and fencing requirements, new woodland planting or young woodland maintenance. We have a portfolio of trusted contractors and timber buyers that are ready to work for you.

TREE RISK STRATEGY

- Guidance on tree risk strategy to suite your needs and tree stock
- Production of Risk Management Policy
- Carry out tree hazard inspections and provision of written reports

Managing the risk posed by trees is an essential part of managing any land holding and we can advise you on the most cost effective and reasonable approach. Implementing a proactive and defensible system need not be particularly onerous in terms of time or cost, but would prove invaluable in the event of a tree related incident.

MANAGEMENT OF ANCIENT AND VETERAN TREES

- Guidance on sensitive management of these important structures and habitats
- Carry out inspections and provide reports and guidance for managing specific trees
- Parkland Tree Restoration and Future Management Planning for long-term retention and resilience

Ancient and veteran trees are beyond normal maturity for their species and are therefore relatively rare and incredibly important habitats. They require specific care, presenting a unique set of management challenges which differ from conventional arboriculture, including the management of land surrounding the trees themselves and management to prevent structural failure. We have a lot of experience in the management of these irreplaceable elements of our heritage.

BY
SAM JACKSON

Woodland & Arboricultural
Consultant



ANCIENT WOODLAND MANAGEMENT

Ancient woodland management blends science, heritage and sustainability, ensuring resilient habitats and landscapes for future generations across the UK.

The Madingley Estate is owned by the University of Cambridge and managed by their Estates Division. It is home to the University in-hand dairy and sheep farm, used for the clinical teaching of vet students, and the University's Institute of Professional and Continuing Education. It includes several woodlands, which in 2025 underwent forestry operations including thinning, tree safety works and regeneration felling of disease-impacted ash and sycamore. Balancing the sensitivity of these works around the woodland areas, each with its unique constraints, required proactive planning and management.

Ash dieback has transformed the outlook for lowland Britain's woodlands, with few sites unaffected. One such site, the 15-hectare Madingley Wood, is both a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) and an Ancient Semi-Natural Woodland (ASNW), with a history stretching back centuries. Continually wooded since at least the 16th century and designated a SSSI in 1981, its management demands balancing unique ecological, landscape, historical and cultural value with the realities of disease, climate change and modern land use.

Madingley Wood is one of the longest-studied woods in Europe, with research records going back 350 years. To the East, it adjoins the Cambridge American Cemetery and Memorial - the only military cemetery in the UK that commemorates American service members killed in World War II - and is clearly a woodland of significant value.

Woodlands like Madingley represent approximately 0.8% of the total land coverage of Cambridgeshire. Opportunities to manage and help steer such historical sites into the future equally presents challenges. Industry equipment has scaled up to meet the demands of economies of scale, increasingly unpredictable weather seasons and disease pressures. **There is no one-size-fits-all solution, and using both the grant system and income derived from timber is key to ensuring these irreplaceable habitats are managed sustainably into the future.**



A Forestry Commission approved woodland management plan and a Statutory Notice of Operations through Natural England guided the recent interventions at Madingley. The focus was on removing trees most severely impacted by the disease, using specialist machinery fitted with flotation tyres to spread the machine's weight and prevent wheel ruts forming, thereby minimising disturbance of ancient soils and reducing habitat loss. Work was supported through the Woodland Tree Health Grant which pays landowners in England up to £6,000 per ha, helping to offset the costs of restoration and replanting.



Timber markets vary, like those of any commodity. Ash timber continues to dominate, with its most sought-after products - chip wood, firewood and sawlog - enjoying healthy returns. Maximising the products out of trees is not just about maximising the financial return for the client in order to fund the cost of restocking. It is also about utilising the tree in the best possible way. Equally, deadwood habitat, both standing and fallen, needs to be retained on site. **Safeguarding the SSSI should be seen as a minimum, with the view of enhancing it into the future seen as the ultimate objective.**

Careful planning extended to timing, avoiding the bird nesting season (typically March to September), and access, using neighbouring woodland to limit disturbance. Although a much longer access and egress route, this avoided using open space habitat and ride networks, which are integral parts of ancient woodlands and

would quickly become degraded. Ultimately it is these areas, alongside the trees, that create the special characteristics that make an ancient woodland site unique.

Felling created small clearings resembling traditional woodland management, but in the 21st century and with a mechanised approach. Allowing more light to reach the woodland floor, retaining oak and field maple to create a dappled effect, minimising soil disturbance and control of deer all support natural regeneration. However, we cannot rely on natural regeneration alone. The species that establish may not be in keeping with the ASNW designation – sycamore, for example - and the need to diversify species to increase resilience in an accelerated changing climate is key.

Post-harvesting, promotion and planting of historic ancient woodland indicator species, such as small-leaved lime and wild service tree, is vital. They play a crucial role in restructuring the woodland while

conserving existing species and ground flora. Selecting replacement tree species whose leaf litter, when fallen and decomposing, mimics those of the leaf litter of ash, which has been removed from the site, is essential in ensuring the balance of soil pH and moisture levels remain consistent to maintain soil function and ground layer communities. Using high quality cell grown peat-free nursery stock for replacement trees gives the best chance of establishment.

Managing ancient woodland sites is complex, involving work with stakeholders and securing the necessary permissions, whilst balancing a holistic and cost-effective approach. With a clear plan, careful operations and targeted regeneration, sites like Madingley can be protected and enhanced, maintaining their character while building resilience for the decades ahead. If you require guidance on how best to manage these sites or the steps involved, then please do not hesitate to get in touch.





BY
ROSS GUYTON

Woodland Division Manager



RIGHT TREE, RIGHT PLACE, RIGHT REASON

Woodland creation for a changing climate.

Woodland creation is a national priority, with DEFRA committing over £1 billion to tree planting and announcing three new national forests in England. Yet success depends on planning woodlands that thrive for decades, not just years. Ensuring that woodland planting works for the landowners is the only way of ensuring that

this national priority translates into actual delivery.

Planting a single tree has benefits for people, wildlife and the environment and those benefits vastly increase when planting a whole woodland. Our woodlands are vital for providing timber, protecting wildlife, providing game cover and roosting and helping us improve our

environment for future generations. Woodlands are central to climate resilience, carbon sequestration, biodiversity and rural economy.

Whether you are planting a new woodland, replanting a felled area, or expanding an existing woodland there are a number of decisions to be made.

WHY DO YOU WANT TO PLANT TREES?

Before the first spade hits the soil, clarify your objectives. Are you aiming to:

- Improve wildlife habitat?
- Enhance game cover and shoot quality?
- Increase farm biodiversity?
- Produce timber?
- Offset carbon emissions?

Your goals will shape species choice, stocking density and woodland design. A woodland for biodiversity can look very different from one optimised for carbon sequestration or timber production.

SITE SELECTION AND WOODLAND DESIGN

Even the most productive farms have room for shelter belts and wet corners to be planted with trees. One of the most rewarding strategies is creating connectivity: linking existing woods to form wildlife corridors that benefit countless species.

A well-designed woodland should include:

- Rides and open spaces for light and movement
- Shrub layers for structural diversity
- Mixed species for resilience

Whilst there is a great deal of emphasis put on planting native broadleaves, a conifer element adds biodiversity, a more diverse food source as well as much needed winter warmth and shelter, maintaining the woodland structure over the winter months.

BUILDING RESILIENCE FOR THE FUTURE

Woodlands are long-term assets. Diversity is key: avoid single-age, single-story blocks, and aim for diversity of structure. Think ahead to a climate that may be 1–4 °C warmer. Current guidance recommends sourcing oak from more southern regions, such as mid-France, to ensure tolerance of hotter, drier conditions in the summer.

Plan for:

- Protection against rabbits, hares, and deer
- Weed control during establishment
- Long-term management for structure and health
- Disease resistance (e.g. new Elm cultivars)
- Climate adaptation and suitability

CARBON SEQUESTRATION

Ultimately, the growth of any tree is non-linear, and carbon sequestration peaks during the early decades, depending on individual species. Fast-growing species, often conifers, lock up carbon quickly, while broadleaves deliver long-term habitat and structural diversity. Under the Woodland Carbon Code, species and provenance selection is critical: once registered, sequestration performance is fixed and verified every 5–10 years, so it is important to get it right.

SPECIES CHOICE AND DIVERSITY

Tree species diversity is a fundamental building block of forest resilience. To help planning, operations and investment, the Forestry Commission (FC) have identified a core species list of 30 tree species.

The FC used a 'multi-criteria decision analysis' to rank and prioritise tree species. For a longlist of 63 species, they gathered detailed information across 10 criteria (including confidence in planting establishment, tolerance to 'high risk' pests and diseases not yet in the UK, future potential productivity and range of timber end uses). Finally, they created an overall national list – 'Species for the Future'.

The FC list of tree species for the future:

- | | | |
|--|--|--|
| • Aspen (<i>Populus tremula</i>) | • Grey alder (<i>Alnus incana</i>) | • Sessile oak (<i>Quercus petraea</i>) |
| • Beech (<i>Fagus sylvatica</i>) | • Hornbeam (<i>Carpinus betulus</i>) | • Silver birch (<i>Betula pendula</i>) |
| • Coast redwood (<i>Sequoia sempervirens</i>) | • Japanese red cedar (<i>Cryptomeria japonica</i>) | • Sitka spruce (<i>Picea sitchensis</i>) |
| • Common alder (<i>Alnus glutinosa</i>) | • Lodgepole pine (<i>Pinus contorta</i> var. <i>latifolia</i>) | • Sweet chestnut (<i>Castanea sativa</i>) |
| • Corsican pine (<i>Pinus nigra</i> subsp. <i>laricio</i>) | • Macedonian pine (<i>Pinus peuce</i>) | • Sycamore (<i>Acer pseudoplatanus</i>) |
| • Douglas fir (<i>Pseudotsuga menziesii</i>) | • Maritime pine (<i>Pinus pinaster</i>) | • Western hemlock (<i>Tsuga heterophylla</i>) |
| • Downy birch (<i>Betula pubescens</i>) | • Norway spruce (<i>Picea abies</i>) | • Western red cedar (<i>Thuja plicata</i>) |
| • European silver fir (<i>Abies alba</i>) | • Pedunculate oak (<i>Quercus robur</i>) | • Wild cherry (<i>Prunus avium</i>) |
| • Field maple (<i>Acer campestre</i>) | • Red oak (<i>Quercus rubra</i>) | • Wild service tree (<i>Sorbus torminalis</i>) |
| • Grand fir (<i>Abies grandis</i>) | • Rowan (<i>Sorbus aucuparia</i>) | |
| | • Scots pine (<i>Pinus sylvestris</i>) | |

The list above contains many species already forming the bulk of England's woodland creation species mix, from both a commercial and resilient point of view, which is reassuring that we have been planting robust woodlands over the past few years.

There are some species in the list that need to be given proper consideration before selection such as sycamore, which is a very good species but is very susceptible to squirrel damage and sooty bark disease in more dryer parts of the UK. Similarly, spruce planting is currently banned in large parts of Southeast England and East Anglia due to an imported bark beetle infestation, and shallow rooted species such as beech, Scots pine and birch are beginning to suffer in lighter, thinner soils in East England.

Finally, the commerciality of some species needs to be explored further as demand for Grand fir, as an example, is low due to its poor strength qualities, and it is very difficult to find a Lodgepole pine that is straight and usable for anything other than wood chip!

THE WOODLAND CREATION MANTRA

"Right tree, right place, right reason" remains as relevant as ever. With careful planning, today's woodlands will provide timber, wildlife habitat, game cover and carbon storage for generations to come. Get in touch for help and to discuss your woodland creation needs and considerations.

STEWARDSHIP BRIEF: WHAT'S CHANGING IN 2026

2025 certainly lived up to the old saying that farming is an ever-changing industry.

From the sudden closure of the Sustainable Farming Incentive (SFI) on 11th March, to the welcome return of the capital grants scheme at the beginning of July (then its subsequent closure on 1st August); to the delayed decision on extending 5,000 Mid-Tier schemes that were due to expire on 31st December, farmers, landowners and Oakbank advisors alike have had to keep up with the latest, often last-minute news and try to adapt as best we can.

So what do we now know (and what are we still waiting to hear)?

COUNTRYSIDE STEWARDSHIP HIGHER TIER (INC. WOODLAND)

The new Higher Tier (CSHT) scheme officially opened for full applications on 18th September 2025. This was available only to those who had been invited to apply and had received pre-application advice from either Natural England (NE) or the Forestry Commission (FC). Those with CSHT agreements ending in 2025 were prioritised. Invitations to apply will continue to be sent out by the RPA on a rolling basis throughout 2026.

If you have an agreement finishing in 2026 that you wish to renew, it would be prudent to start a conversation with your local NE or FC advisor as soon as possible, to seek their opinion on whether a new CSHT is for you and to begin any preparatory work you may need to carry out, such as feasibility studies or species management plans.

STANDALONE CAPITAL GRANTS

What we do know

The application window for Higher-Tier capital grants opened on 5th January. Items available under this scheme must be discussed with either your local NE or FC advisor, who will aid you with the application. Capital items under this scheme offer funding for specific improvements on environmentally significant sites, including woodland.

Funding is also available for management plans and feasibility studies that may be required to enable you to enter a Higher-Tier agreement. For example, an FC-approved 10-year woodland management plan is required to apply for woodland funding under Higher-Tier.

What we don't know

Whilst we expect another round of the capital grant scheme to be announced and opened in 2026 no confirmation of this has been received as of mid-January.

However, if you are looking to carry out capital projects that would require approval from your local Catchment Sensitive Farming Officer, such as concrete yard renewal, it is worth having an initial conversation with them to begin the approval process so you are in a position to apply if and when the window opens. This was a pitfall of the 2025 scheme as time was very limited to get an application submitted.

BY
ANN GIBSON

Senior Farm Environment
& Stewardship Advisor



FARMING IN PROTECTED LANDSCAPES (FIPL)

At the Oxford Farming Conference (OFC) on 8th January, Secretary of State for DEFRA, Emma Reynolds, confirmed that the FiPL programme, aimed at providing funding to support farmers and landowners to undertake projects to protect nature, climate and local communities will be extended for an additional three years with guaranteed funding of £30 million in the next year.

SUSTAINABLE FARMING INCENTIVE (SFI)

Also on 8th January, the Secretary of State announced that the SFI scheme will open again in 2026. This will be in the form of two application windows. The first, in June, for 'small' farmers and those who are not in any land management scheme and the second, in September, for all farmers.

We do know that there will be more emphasis on actions that support sustainable food production, along with a streamlining of agreement actions and the application process.

What we don't know

However, as of going to press we have not yet received confirmation of:

- What actions will be available to farmers to add in to a scheme. At Oxford, the Secretary of State confirmed that 90% of the revenue from SFI goes to only 40 of the 102 actions. This may mean that some actions will be removed from the 2026 offer.
- Payment rates – as well as individual action values, they are also reviewing whether an upper limit cap should be applied to the monetary value of a scheme.
- Limited area actions - Defra are considering increasing the number of actions that are 'limited'. Currently, there are ten limited-area options, such as winter bird food (CAHL2), which collectively can be included on up to 25% of your land.
- What constitutes a 'small' farm – although 50 hectares was mentioned, we are hopeful that there will be further discussion on how a 'small' farm is defined.

KEEPING UPDATED

It is safe to say that in all the years I have been involved in the world of agribusiness and environmental schemes (which I am rather scared to add up), I have not experienced a time until now, when I have been unable to give solid information and facts to a client regarding what is happening and the options they have. This is due in large to the change in government, the sudden closures of schemes with no notice, the changing of rules as they are going along (hello 25% rule) and the unfulfilled promises of deadlines for when we will find out information. Such a frustrating time!

At Oakbank we will always aim to keep you informed of what is going on and the latest developments that are hot off the press. To keep up to date with these updates and to sign up to our newsletter just click on the QR code included on this page to go to our website.



So here's to 2026 – I'm sure it will be just as unpredictable as 2025 and will be certainly keeping us all on our toes once more!



SUPPORTING MAGPAS AIR AMBULANCE

In 2023, Oakbank supplied 400kg of grass seed at cost price to Magpas Air Ambulance for their new airfield at Alconbury Weald.



The grass was being established by a local farmer and was to surround the new helipad at the site. Unlike most products we sell, this particular grass needed to discourage wildlife in order to reduce the likelihood of bird strikes. A mix of Tall Fescue and Ryegrass was provided, and we recommended that it be maintained at a height of 15cm, producing a tall, stiff and sharp coverage unsuitable for birds to comfortably land in. The grass has now been established for 2 years and is both looking fantastic and doing its job for the charity.

BY
**ARCHIE
HUMPHREYS**

Farm Environment &
Stewardship Advisor

FARMING WITH WATER

Water is becoming an increasingly significant challenge in the UK, with the past few years alone seeing both unrelenting drought and persistent rainfall.

Managing our land to cope with these changing weather patterns is imperative, and the earlier changes are considered, the better. It may seem a vast undertaking with such huge variability in our weather, but by taking a step back and evaluating what we do, we can find some actionable goals to work towards. But what are these key focus areas?

SOIL HEALTH

Within agriculture, your soil is the foundation of every facet of your business, and this is no different when it comes to water. A healthy, well-structured soil will have a much greater capacity to hold on to water in times of drought and absorb (and release) it far better when it arrives in excess. There is a wealth of information available about improving soil health and much of this is relevant to improving water efficiency on farm.

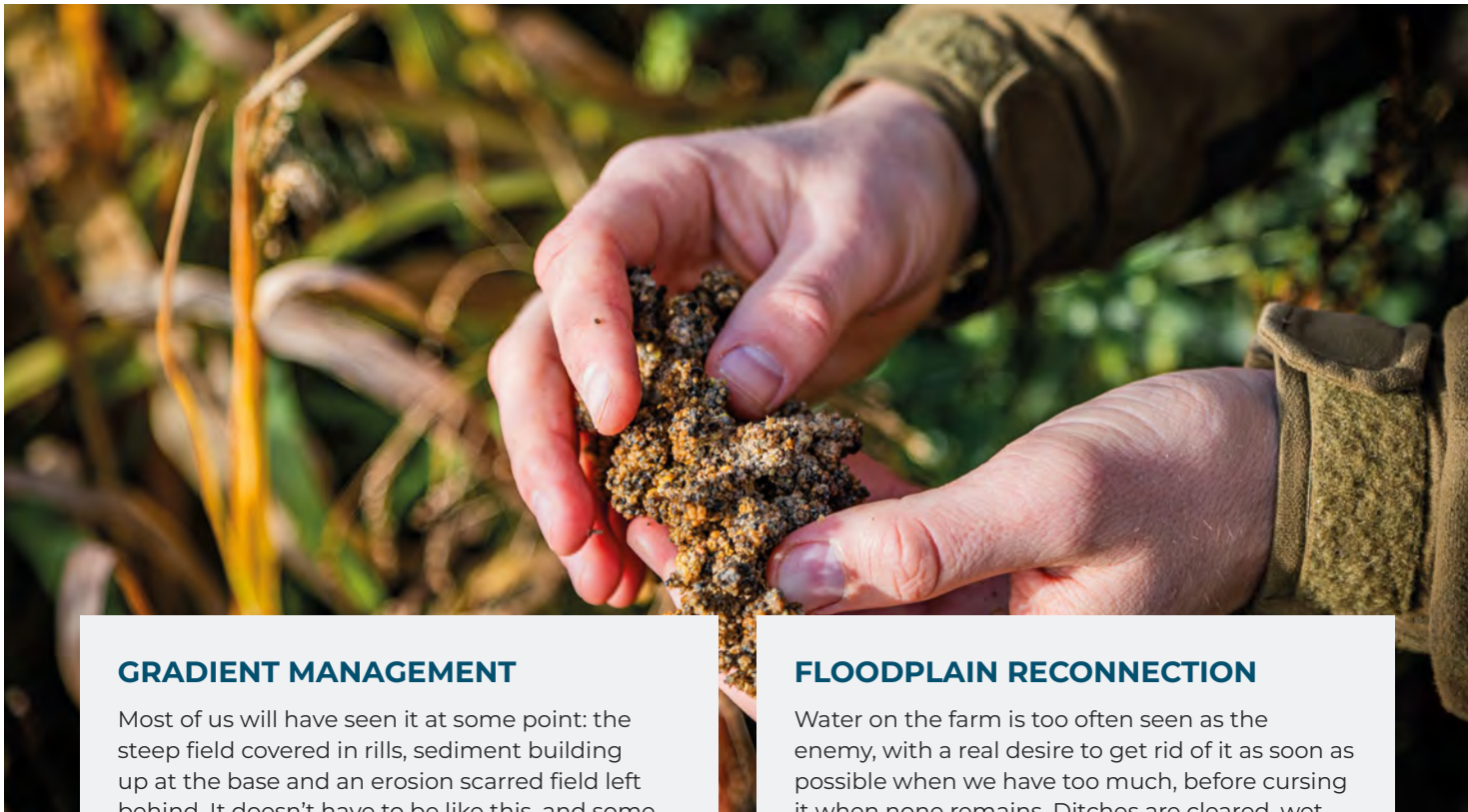
Maintaining green cover is a key tool here, with living roots in the soil helping to reduce the erosion risk, by holding soil particles together and creating channels for water to enter the soil, while the leaves above reduce the damage caused by heavy rain and direct sunlight.

Considerate tillage is another important measure to take, too much can destroy soil structure and lead to slumping, whereas zero tillage on the wrong soil can increase the risk of capping or pans

forming within the soil. Both will reduce the soil's ability to hold or absorb water, causing it to run off faster and worsen these effects.

The incorporation and building of organic matter will further build soil health. This can be achieved through cover cropping as above, organic material spreading, or incorporating livestock into the rotation. The higher the organic matter, the greater the capacity to hold water, providing resilience across a range of conditions.





GRADIENT MANAGEMENT

Most of us will have seen it at some point: the steep field covered in rills, sediment building up at the base and an erosion scarred field left behind. It doesn't have to be like this, and some simple changes can be put in place to mitigate this by breaking the flow of water and preventing its rapid movement down the field.

Often, the first step is to identify where the biggest risks lie. This can be done through your own knowledge, but also with the use of several online tools. The Environment Agency's ALERT data is fantastic for showing the high-risk areas of erosion down a field. Once you know where water is likely to flow, you can then look to manage it. In arable and intensive grass environments, a change as simple as cultivating and drilling across the slope can be enough to break the water's path and provide enough time for it to infiltrate.

Beyond this, the slope can be broken up with hedges, beetle banks, or in-field strips, a physical barrier to the flow of water which encourages infiltration and the deposition of sediment. For the most serious cases, changing the land use entirely can solve the issue. Moving towards a lower input grassland system on these fields can make the world of difference once established. A herbal ley or legume fallow would also work well here while benefitting the soil and the farming system. The addition of trees in these fields will also provide additional opportunities for water capture.

FLOODPLAIN RECONNECTION

Water on the farm is too often seen as the enemy, with a real desire to get rid of it as soon as possible when we have too much, before cursing it when none remains. Ditches are cleared, wet holes and ponds fought with, and rivers canalised and disconnected. When the rain finally comes, and doesn't stop, it then floods our fields, yard and neighbours. This is where a holistic vision to work with our water becomes essential.

The actions we take here can vary from small scale management changes to projects that transform the local environment. Simple changes can include rotational cutting of your ditches and allowing their buffers to become tussocky to slow the flow of water into and through them. Widening these buffers will also enhance this further and can provide a basis for later improvements.

Pond creation, management and enhancement can further improve the land's capacity to hold water in the landscape, where we want it. It is important however, to differentiate ponds by their use. Ponds that capture muddy or dirty surface runoff will have a lesser biodiversity value but will be able to hold water still, providing opportunities for groundwater recharge and flood risk reduction. Clean-water ponds are vital for biodiversity and can support a huge range of species so should be considered too. They will also have further flood risk benefits and can be a key aspect of your risk management toolbox.

Expanding this, rivers and ditches can also be encouraged to flood by reconnecting them to their floodplains. Installation of leaky dams, riverbed level raising and bank reprofiling are some of the measures that can be used here, linking with the previously mentioned options to help re-establish wetland mosaic habitats.

These actions can be combined with cricket bat willow planting, stewardship and BNG as funding mechanisms to provide an incentive on top of the biodiversity, flooding and water resilience benefits.

BY
RORY SAUNDERS

Senior Environmental Advisor



NOTES FROM A FARM SHOOT

After a moderately successful debut season, helping to keeper Bob's shoot here at the Oakbank office, we were keen to continue the momentum of Operation Grey Partridge and further improve the shoot for the coming season.

Our wild population of greys had mirrored the national statistics for winter losses, which were just under 50%, with our 30 individuals from 2024 culminating in 8 breeding pairs come the spring. As we maintained supplementary feeding throughout the winter, we hoped that some of these losses were from migration as opposed to solely from mortality. By March we were dusting off the Larsen traps and were kindly donated several more by neighbouring farmer, Mark Chapman. We also built a large ladder trap to further help ease the corvid pressure on our nesting farmland birds.

Despite encouraging Bob to invest heavily in longer-term habitat for the AB9s in 2024, the wet spring that year meant establishment was patchy for some plots, and they would need to be replaced this year. However, inspired by the presence

of our increasing wild partridge and pheasant populations, Bob and his farm worker, Colin, set about ploughing, power harrowing and spraying the poorer winter bird food plots to get them in prime order for drilling. It all seemed to be going too well, and by the end of May we were drilling a diverse AB9 mix into ideal soil conditions. We are often sceptical around advising our clients to pre-emergence herbicide their winter bird food plots - a useful tool in weedy situations, if applied correctly, but risky should heavy rain follow soon after spraying.

Sure enough, the following day, the light drizzle that was forecast turned out to be a deluge that lasted the afternoon. Over the coming days and weeks, it was clear that our emergence was limited to the sorghums and sunflowers with lots of the small seeds appearing to suffer. Then, with perfect irony, we

didn't receive another drop for six weeks, which seemed to allow the fat hen and amaranth to flourish.

Fortunately, some of the previous year's crops were perfectly serviceable with teasel, fennel and chicory delivering some good brood-rearing cover and with no rain in the forecast we held off redrilling and focused our attention on the predator control. In a dry spring, such as the one we experienced in 2025, corvid pressure on farmland birds can intensify as crows and magpies seek not only nutrition from the eggs they steal, but moisture as well. Luckily, our Larsen and ladder traps were performing well, and by the time we packed them up in July we had accounted for 30 magpies and 18 carrion crows, along with 9 foxes from nights out with the rifle.





Having been called 'Bodge' my whole life, the title suddenly felt under threat from Jamie as he set about 'improving' the pheasant pen with neolithic tools and stubborn determination. Credit where it's due, he did an excellent job of straining the wire, felling trees and replacing posts. In true 'head keeper' style, he even left me (his 'underkeeper') and our placement student, Max, ('apprentice gamekeeper') an extensive to-do list to get the pen finished off before the poults arrived, whilst he enjoyed a grand tour around the National Parks of North America!

We managed it in time and, with the birds settled and growing nicely, the AB8 on the farm was cut giving us a chance to measure the success of the breeding greys. To our astonishment, seven out of the eight pairs had produced broods, and we were now custodians of 73 wild grey partridge - a huge improvement from the 6 individuals we had nurtured over two years ago. For us, this average brood size of 7.1 chicks just reaffirmed how extraordinary this native bird is, and how quickly it will reward good management if you follow the three-legged stool of species conservation: habitat creation, food provision and predator control.

By October, Jamie started strategically placing feeders round each drive and planning our first shoot day for the 1st of November - which arrived quickly. Despite



seeing plenty of game during morning feeds and dogging in, the morning of the shoot was, ironically, rather quiet and we blanked the first drive. At least things couldn't get any worse than that, and luckily the bag built steadily as the day went on. Once again, we drew on Tim's expertise to help steer birds over the guns, with a particular focus on trying to add some greys to the bag. We managed to get greys over the line on several drives, but I was sharply scolded for allowing a large covey to slip through my flank and was promptly demoted from position of underkeeper. We finished the day with a bag of 22 - no greys shot.

Two weeks later we were at it again. The first day had revealed most of the birds were concentrated on just two of the drives, so Jamie altered his feeder placement, and as a result we were seeing more birds spread around the farm and were hopeful for an improvement of the bag - and even more hopeful to get more greys over the guns. We achieved this on 4 out of the 5 drives with not a single partridge shot and some flying particularly

well. We took this as a sign that perhaps our small population was not quite ready to be harvested, and another year with hopefully another successful breeding season would see more to go at next year. With any luck, we could see around 16 pairs of greys in the spring with our numbers approaching 100 or more by the start of shooting season.

Jamie and Tim's tactics proved effective, and we had doubled the bag on the second day. With plenty of game still about for a potential third day later in the season.

Once again, we are in debt to Bob for allowing us to run riot around the farm for another year, and to his wife Lucy and Jamie's partner, Katie, for the exceptional catering on shoot days. As some will already know, Jamie has now left Oakbank to pursue a new career in North Yorkshire, meaning my demotion was mercifully short-lived.

As the newly-appointed headkeeper, I shall of course be abolishing all habitat in favour of wall-to-wall maize and will be releasing 8,000 red-legs. Stay tuned. *(Editor's note - over my dead body!)*



OAKBANK

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PURDEY AWARDS FOR GAME & CONSERVATION

We are delighted to announce that the entries for the 2026 Purdey Awards for Game and Conservation have opened! If you think that your shoot is worthy of recognition by the Purdey panel, then enter now for the chance to win this prestigious award. Entries may be submitted by individuals, syndicates, estates, farm shoots, and wildfowling clubs.

To download an entry form please go to:
purdey.com/shooting-life/purdey-awards



SCHÖFFEL COUNTRY AWARDS

In partnership with the GWCT, Schöffel Country has launched its own National Awards, recognising private land managers who are improving the health of the British Countryside. There are six award categories, from the Nature Friendly Farm/ Estate of the Year Award to The Rising Star Award and Working Conservationist Award.

For details of all the awards and how to nominate individuals and projects please go to:
schoffelcountry.com/pages/countryside-awards

THE OAKBANK SEED HOUNDS

