

HEDGEROWS – an integral feature of the Welsh landscape

Why are they important?

Hedgerows are vital for Welsh Biodiversity within the Agricultural landscape, providing a huge number of benefits to humans and wildlife and livestock. They provide shelter, foraging and travel corridors for a wide range of wildlife species, such as birds, amphibians, bats and invertebrates, they capture carbon and filter pollutants, they provide privacy, and deliver to the optimal functioning of our environment.

Service provision of hedgerows:

- Biodiversity - Hedges provide food, breeding sites and shelter for many plant and animal species, from livestock to the 130 Biodiversity Action Plan species closely associated with hedges.
- Climate regulation – carbon is stored in the biomass of the above ground hedge itself and in the soil beneath it. A new hedgerow may store 600 – 800 kg of carbon per year per 1,000m, for up to 20 years.
- Water quality – Hedges can reduce the amount of polluting fertilisers, pesticides and sediment that reach watercourses by acting as a physical barrier increasing infiltration into the ground, and by the trees, shrubs and other plants recycling nutrients.
- Water regulation – reduce water loss through evaporation in crops by reducing wind speed.
- Flood alleviation – Hedges can reduce flooding by increasing the rate of water infiltration through the root system and slowing flows of water.
- Hedges with banks can regulate the rate of flow of water within catchments, reducing peak flows and increasing minimum flows.
- Erosion regulation – Hedges prevent loss of soil from fields, through reducing wind erosion or through acting as a barrier to soil run-off in overland flow scenarios.
- Pest control – Hedges are important winter refuges for predators of crop pests and are of proven economic importance in this respect.
- Pollination – Hedgerows and vegetation at the base of hedgerows provide shelter and flight lines for crop pollinators such as bumblebees, and nectar and pollen sources essential for pollinator survival when crops are not in flower.
- Boundaries and barriers – Hedges mark both land ownership boundaries and facilitate livestock management. Robust Farm boundaries are a biosecurity measure to stop neighbouring livestock touching.
- Protection of livestock – Hedgerows provide shelter for livestock from wind, and shade from the sun. The importance of this role is likely to increase with climate change. Livestock on farms without shelter have a higher mortality and require more food. Shelter can increase lamb survival rates by reducing the effect of wind chill and thus hypothermia. In the summer months, heat stress can reduce milk yield in dairy herds.



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