

LAY OFF
THE HEDGES
CAMPAIGN



The Perverse and Widespread Practice of Hedge-Flailing

Each and every year, and for whatever reason, the hedge-flailers are out in force. Widely limiting any habitat potential, killing insects, destroying berries and wrecking trees. In terms of damage it is certainly up there with pesticides, grassland mismanagement, alien species and wind-farms and is a major reason as to why there's no wildlife in the countryside today.



Neat and Tidy but an Ecological Void; no Insects, no Berries and no Cover



Close Up we can see just how Smashed to Pieces and Open to Disease some hedges become



Traditional Hedge-Laying Complete with the all important Stock-Proof Fencing is a Practice everyone should encourage and support

The object is to create an aesthetically pleasing, livestock-proof barrier.

Each section, once laid however, should then be left to take on its own form and character, offer as much shelter and habitat as is possible as well as providing the maximum number of berries and insects for birds. This can hardly happen if a hedge is sliced to pieces each and every year. The decimation of insects in their own right is yet another issue of course, the numbers of Brown Hairstreak Butterflies throughout the UK. are down to critical levels.

Hedge-flailing might well be the commonly accepted good-hedge policy in the modern countryside of today but it is very misguided. If all that energy were directed into pond digging or to keeping their tracks and footpaths in some sort of order, many of which are in a truly disgusting state, things would be much improved.

Please write to:

george.eustice.mp@parliament.uk, amanda.cowan@parliament.uk, defra.helpline@defra.gsi.gov.uk; ccu.correspondence@defra.gsi.gov.uk; jeremy.lefroy.mp@parliament.uk; sajid.javid.mp@parliament.uk; mary.marsh@parliament.uk; david.heath.mp@parliament.uk; davidheath@davidheath.co.uk; richard.benyon.mp@parliament.uk; mp@richardbenyon.com; taylorjl@parliament.uk; enquiries@naturalengland.org.uk; defra.helpline@defra.gsi.gov.uk; webmaster@defra.gsi.gov.uk; farmland.conservation@defra.gsi.gov.uk; catchmentsensitivefarming@naturalengland.org.uk; victoria.fradley@naturalengland.org.uk; Richard.leishman@naturalengland.org.uk; clare.bains@naturalengland.org.uk; Robert.camps@naturalengland.org.uk; Roger.Gerry@naturalengland.org.uk; lisa.chenery@naturalengland.org.uk; eric.popp@naturalengland.org.uk; Sarah.fraser@naturalengland.org.uk;

Yet another unnecessary and damaging practice happening in the countryside these days is hedge-failing. Every section of hedge, once laid, should be left to take on its own form and character, offer as much shelter and habitat potential as is possible as well as providing the maximum numbers of berries and insects, and all this can hardly happen if a hedge is sliced to pieces each and every year. Hedge-flailing might well be the commonly accepted, good-hedge policy in the modern countryside of today, but I believe it to be very misguided and yet another major reason as to why it is we have so few birds left in the UK. All the effort that goes into this every year and for no gain whatsoever; the destruction of insects and berries for birds to feed on, as well as the decimation of Brown Hairstreak Butterfly numbers.



British Farming at its Best: Above we see a very poor attempt at hedge laying in the first place which has since been allowed to be completely nibbled off by sheep. This photograph was taken in September and by that time the new regrowth would have been higher than the fence behind, but instead of a vigorous newly laid hedge, we now have a row of dead sticks. This example, although bad is not uncommon, with others littering the countryside, and no doubt grants would be paid for this kind of work.

The idea of hedging is to create aesthetically pleasing, livestock-proof barriers, but more often than not, hedges are laid with some very glaring faults. Principles dictates they should be well worked, properly structured and should never just be thrown together haphazardly. They should also be organic, you certainly should never have great strands of nylon string littering a site.

- a) The above example, with no protective fencing to prevent sheep-nibbling; it is also essential that the stems, known as a pleachers, are not laid completely horizontal as we see here, this leads to the kinking of the connective strip, which prevents the sap from rising.
- b) Nylon string is all too often used for tying down and securing hedges these days.
- c) We often see inappropriate species like Hazel being kept to form standard trees instead of say Oak, Ash or Holly etc.
- d) Non-native species like Sycamores are generally worked into the hedge whereas they could be ring-barked out to make more room for the natives.
- e) Some examples are so flimsy and look like they might be blown over in a high wind while others are worked where the trees have a six to eight inch diameter trunks at the base. Struggling with hefty material like this is completely unnecessary. Far better to fell the entire hedge, non-natives like Sycamores should be left standing and then ring-barked, the appropriate number of standards should be left remaining (groups of trees left and other sections cut out altogether allows for less uniformity) and then to have a good twelve years of regrowth to develop before finally going ahead with the hedging.
- f) Always work within the appropriate season (Oct-March). I have seen hedges worked as late as May.