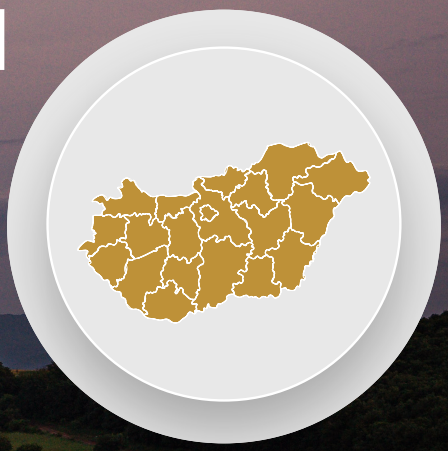
Low Intensity Grassland Management in High Nature Value Grasslands – Grassland Reserves Scheme



Kóspallag, Hungary. Photo by: Szabolcs Toth/unsplash.com

Skylark *Alauda arvensis*
Photo by: gerhard hofmann/EyeEm/stock.adobe.com

Geographic coverage

- (●) **National: Hungary, High Nature Value grasslands – Grassland reserves**
- ( ) Regional

Focus of the scheme

- (●) **Conservation (i.e. maintaining or improving the conditions of an existing habitat)**
- ( ) Restoration (i.e. restoring a degraded habitat or recreating one that has been destroyed)
- ( ) Combination of both

Type of scheme

- (●) **Prescription – based**
- ( ) Result – based
- ( ) Combination of both
- (●) **Addressing individual farmers**
- ( ) Collaborative scheme

Novelty of the scheme

- ( ) New scheme
- (●) **Improvement of existing scheme: Grassland AEC measures in High Nature Value Areas**

Target species

Montagu's Harrier (*Circus pygargus*), Crested Lark (*Galerida cristata*), Grey Partridge (*Perdix perdix*)

Birds benefitting

Skylark (*Alauda arvensis*), Yellowhammer (*Emberiza citrinella*), Barn Swallow (*Hirundo rustica*), Black-tailed Godwit (*Limosa limosa*), Curlew (*Numenius arquata*), Whinchat (*Saxicola rubetra*), Turtle Dove (*Streptopelia turtur*), Common Redshank (*Tringa totanus*), Northern Lapwing (*Vanellus vanellus*)

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More about the conservation schemes developed by the Birds @ Farmland initiative is available at: https://bit.ly/farmlandbirds

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Aim

The aim of the conservation scheme is to address the abandonment of grassland as well as their overuses while allowing for the flexibility needed to support the habitat needs of farmland bird species.

Scheme interventions

List of main actions or commitments	Threat that is addressed by the action/commitment	Enhanced component
Possibility to use the total area covered by the contract for mowing or grazing for two years during the entire payment period (5 years), on the basis of a grassland management plan approved in advance by the competent National Park Directorate (NPD)	Increase of homogeneity of grassland habitat due to simplified management practices	Food supply, foraging habitat, nesting sites and refuge areas
Obligation to leave between 10% of the parcel (minimum) and 15% (maximum) unmowed with a minimum width of unmowed areas is 6 m	Reduction of critical habitats for bird species and food availability	Food supply, foraging habitat, nesting sites and refuge areas
Obligation to use bird-friendly mowing techniques (no spiral mowing, use of game repellent chains and devices, speed up to 8 km / h), leaving a sward height of at least 10 cm	Nest failure and chick mortality	Nesting sites
Obligation to report the exact location and planned start of the mowing to the competent NPD at least 5 working days before their start	Nest failure and chick mortality	Nesting sites
Prohibition of storing fodder on grassland beyond 30 days after mowing	Abandonment of grasslands	Food supply, foraging habitat, nesting sites and refuge areas
Obligation to stop the establishment and spread of invasive plant species by mechanical control or the application of special pesticides	Abandonment of grasslands; spread of invasive plant species	Food supply, foraging habitat, nesting sites and refuge areas
Prohibition to damage the grassland surface during farming activities (e.g. from overgrazing, use of heavy machinery in wet areas)	Loss of habitat	Food supply, foraging habitat, nesting sites and refuge areas
Obligation to report immediately the presence of nests or chicks of strictly protected birds to the national park directorate; Establishment of a protection zone of 1 ha (minimum)	Damages of nests caused by grassland management machinery	Provide undisturbed habitat patches during the whole vegetation period (food supply, nesting habitat)

Description

The conservation scheme targets High Nature Value Areas in Hungary and upgrades the existing Grassland AEC measures in High Nature Value areas. This existing AEC measure prohibits - among others - all mechanical work on water-logged ground, irrigation of grassland, mechanical work on the grassland from sunset to sunrise, and the use of slurry, sewage, sewage sludge, and compost containing sewage sludge. Only cattle, sheep, goats, donkeys, horses, mules and buffaloes can graze on grassland. The scheme integrates the prescriptions of Natura 2000 grassland regulation, which is compulsory for all farmers in Natura 2000 grasslands in Hungary.

The farmers must apply a Grassland Management Plan approved in advance by the competent authority, National Park Directorates (NPDs) the regional bodies responsible for nature conservation. The land user must approach and agree on the grassland management plan within 30 days of receiving the support decision on their application.

CAP intervention(s) applied

- (●) **Agri-Environment & Climate measure (2nd Pillar)**
- ( ) Eco-scheme (1st Pillar)
- ( ) Natura 2000 compensation (Art. 67. of CAP SPR)
- ( ) Non-productive investments (Art. 68. of CAP SPR)
- ( ) European Innovation Partnership scheme Agri (Art. 71 of CAP SPR)
- ( ) Farm Advisory Service (Art. 72 of CAP SPR)
- ( ) Good Agricultural and Environmental Conditions condition
- ( ) Statutory Management Requirement (SMR)

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What makes the scheme attractive to farmers and landowners?

Agronomic and economic factors:

- Practical guidance/expert support to assist farmers during the application and the implementation of scheme.

Economic factors:

- Amount of payments provided per hectare.
- Compatibility with other potential CAP payments (e.g. CAP SPR Art. 73 non-productive investments).

Environmental factors:

- Multiple biodiversity benefits of the scheme e.g., for small game, pollinators, etc.

Preliminary calculation of costs for compensating farmers

The calculation is based on the cost estimation of each individual management commitment (income foregone, additional costs, costs saved). It is also based on the production value of grassland fields in Hungary, surveyed by the Central Statistical Office and compared to payment rates defined in the Hungarian CAP Strategic Plan.

The estimated payments are as follows:

- For the compulsory commitments (including cases where 1 ha needs to remain unmowed to protect nests): 392 EUR/ha
- For voluntary commitments: 275 EUR/ha

The maximum available payment amounts to 667 EUR/ha.

Please note that exact calculations of costs for compensating farmers can only be undertaken by the competent authorities.

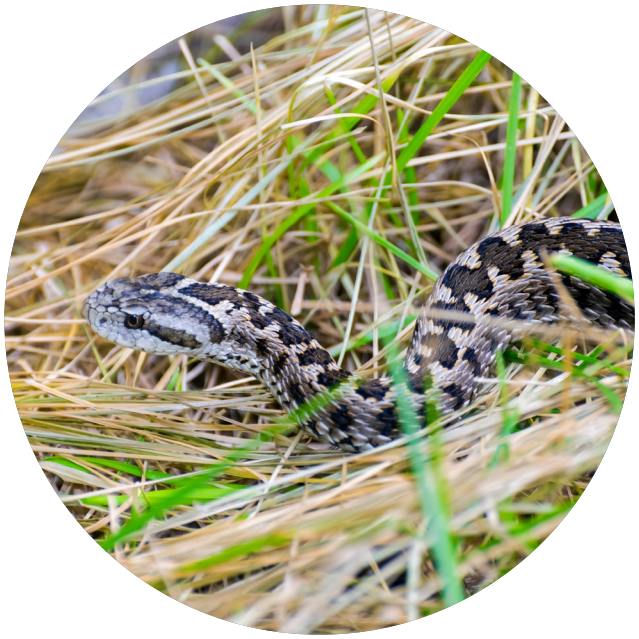
Factors to consider for the compensation of farmers

Income forgone:

- Higher cultivation costs due to bird-friendly mowing
- Decrease in yield due to the establishment of a nest protection zone
- Decreased yield due to reduced nutrient replenishment
- Decrease in yield due to unmown areas
- Deterioration of yield quality caused by utilisation later than average
- Decrease in yield due to limits in grassland utilisation

Additional costs:

- Additional cost for keeping grazing animals
- Additional costs for grazing (watering, guarding, electric shepherd maintenance, etc.)
- Additional costs of grassland management planning



Hungarian Meadow Viper *Vipera ursinii rakosiensis*
Photo by: belizar/stock.adobe.com

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Measuring the success of the scheme

Indicator/s to measure success of the scheme	Applicability
Number of applicants applying the scheme	Easy
Surface of land where the scheme is applied	Easy
Changes in FBI trend	Medium
Changes in area of landscape features important for biodiversity	Medium

Benefits to biodiversity

Plants:

Promotes the diversity of flowering plants.

Arthropods, including pollinators:

The increased habitat heterogeneity will promote insects (wild pollinators: bees, butterflies).

Reptiles:

Protection of the Hungarian Meadow Viper (*Vipera ursinii rakosiensis*).

Mammals:

Conservation of protected mammalian species, including European Ground Squirrel (*Citellus citellus*) and European Blind Mole Rat (*Nannospalax leucodon*).

Benefits to farmers

Improved water quality:

- Extensive management reduces pollution of groundwater resources.

Improved soil quality:

- Reduction of hydrogeological risks such as erosion.

Pollination services:

- Increased pollination and better yields (in terms of quality and quantity) for pollinator-dependent crops.

Public recreation and ecotourism:

- Potential for additional income from tourism. Multifunctional or direct sales farms can show customers an intact environment and thus promote business.

Benefits to society

Improved water quality:

- The conservation of temporary water surfaces has a beneficial effect on groundwater resources. Limits in nutrient supply minimise the risk of nutrient run-off.

Pollination services:

- Promotion of nectariferous plants and creation of refuge areas for wintering pollinators and pollinator reproduction.

Public recreation and ecotourism:

- Enhancement of landscape attractiveness in areas of tourism and maintenance of traditional rural areas.

Reduced greenhouse gas emissions:

- Extensive management of grassland contributes to the increase of the carbon storage capacity and the reduction of emissions.

This conservation scheme was developed by the Birds@Farmland Initiative. For information on financial support for measures for farmland birds available in your country please contact your Farm Advisory Service.

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