

## Seasonal tips for farmers in Entry Level Stewardship.

If over-wintered cereal stubbles are part of a Stewardship option they should be maintained until 15 February and can then be returned to the farm rotation. Overwintered stubble provides a winter food source for seed eating birds and essential habitat for hares. The spring grown crops that follow can provide breeding sites for ground nesting birds such as lapwing. Wild bird seed mixture areas should be retained until 1 March before re-establishing them in the spring. This should be done every year or every other year to maintain seed production. Sowing should be done at the optimum time for the particular seed mixture and when seed bed conditions are right. Wild bird seed mixtures provide a winter and early spring food source for seed eating birds such as the yellow hammer and tree sparrow and also provide essential habitat for hares. Tines or discs can be used to create rough areas on uncropped arable land for ground nesting birds. This should be done between 1 February and 20 March to make sure they are in place before farmland birds start breeding. Cultivating in wet conditions should be avoided. These areas will provide in-field breeding and nesting sites for birds such as the skylark, but also foraging habitat for birds such as the yellow wagtail and habitat for hares.

## Animal road casualties

Hundreds of thousands of wild mammals and birds are killed on Britain's roads annually, but many are not killed outright and could be saved if appropriate action is taken. Further details are here:

[www.helpwildlife.co.uk/sick-or-injured-wildlife/rta/](http://www.helpwildlife.co.uk/sick-or-injured-wildlife/rta/)

But can anything be done to prevent such incidents in the first place? Whistles fitted to the front of vehicles and activated by the ram effect of air with forward motion have been shown to be ineffective in preventing collisions involving deer. Rob Found, a PhD candidate and wildlife researcher associated with the University of Alberta says there are precautions we can all take to reduce wildlife collisions such as keeping speeds down. If one animal is seen, then very likely there will be more. Motorists should be especially cautious on rural, two lane roads during early morning or evening. Hares and other wildlife are often on the move between foraging areas at these times whilst laid up during the day. In his Wildlife in the North blog Ray Collier says there are often mountain hare road casualties on roads to the south east of Inverness as the hares use the roads as access between feeding areas. But are the authorities doing enough? Found has conducted studies which show that more selective placing of wildlife-crossing warning signs would help. On Dartmoor trials are being carried out on a reflective spray paint applied as a single stripe on the sides of free ranging animals. The aim is to produce a paint durable for four to six months.

## Snowless landscapes leave mountain hares conspicuous

A mountain hare spotted against a snowless, green hillside has highlighted the unseasonably mild conditions in Scotland's hills this December. The hare was seen in the Southern Cairngorms recently by the Scottish Avalanche Information Service (SAIS). The service's latest season started last week amid some of the warmest conditions experienced by its teams. Man remains, however, a far greater threat to the mountain hare than any climate induced increase in natural predation.

## Drones to help track Spain's wandering Iberian lynx.

By the turn of the century the Iberian Lynx's population had plummeted to a critical level of 94, but following a huge conservation effort, including a captive breeding scheme, numbers have recovered to 327 in the wild. However, they often travel long distances following release, exposing them to greater risk, especially from traffic. Last year 21 were killed on Spanish roads. Monitoring is currently carried out by fitting radio collars to the animals and an operator tunes in, but an aerial tracking system based on drones is under development. It is hoped this scheme will eventually replace the need for the lynxes to wear radio collars.

*(Radio collars have been used for many years by the University of Bristol to track hares on the Somerset Levels during research into habitat preferences. A drone based system could benefit such research in the future since hares are very susceptible to stress induced illness resulting from capture. Ed.)*