



Nidderdale
National
Landscape



PUBLIC FOOTPATH

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A GUIDE TO grassland management for birds of prey

Before using this resource, you may want to use our '**types of grassland found in Nidderdale National Landscape**' guide to better understand what type of grassland you currently own/manage. With this knowledge you will be better equipped to create a species-rich grassland suited to your field.

WHAT ARE BIRDS OF PREY?

Hawks, owls and falcons are all considered birds of prey. They can be identified by their hook shaped beaks and sharp curved claws (talons). They mainly eat small mammals, reptiles, amphibians and other scavengable food such as dead carcasses. **As predators and scavengers, birds of prey are vital to balanced and healthy ecosystems.**

In Nidderdale National Landscape you will be most likely to see the following species:

- Barn owl
- Tawny owl
- Short-eared owl
- Red Kite
- Buzzard
- Sparrowhawk
- Kestrel

There are many other bird of prey species not included within this list.



Red kite soaring, hunting for prey. © Paul Skirrow.

HOW TO HELP BIRDS OF PREY?

Some threats to birds of prey include a lack of food, bad weather and illegal killing. Managing a grassland to benefit these amazing birds will provide some well needed good quality habitat.

Below are grassland management techniques that will help provide birds of prey with both feeding and breeding habitats. This document will primarily focus on grassland management that supports owl populations, but these management techniques will also benefit a wide variety of other birds of prey such as kestrels and sparrowhawks.

MANAGING "ROUGH" GRASSLAND

Rough grasslands are areas of grass that have been allowed to grow unhindered for a number of years **without being mown or heavily grazed**. While they may look "untidy" and not as colourful as hay meadows during summer, **rough grasslands are an amazing habitat where birds of prey can feed.**

Birds of prey such as barn owls require lots of food to sustain themselves – an adult barn owl needs to eat 3 or 4 prey items a night. Prey species like field voles live within tussocky rough grassland, scrubby areas, along hedgerows and woodland edges. Most birds of prey require open grassy areas to hunt effectively, and rough grassland next to a hedgerow or woodland edge is the perfect combination.

Incorporating rough grassland within a landscape is a fairly easy task. If a grassland is managed solely by grazing, then simply fencing off areas will allow rough grassland to develop.

If a grassland is mown, then leave strips along boundary edges or corners of fields unmown. If livestock are also used as management, then unmown areas may need to be fenced off to prevent livestock getting in. However, if the stocking density in the field is low, then light grazing of those areas is OK.

Mow rough grassland with a topper or strimmer, depending on the size of the area, leaving 4 – 6 inches of vegetation standing. Do not cut all the way down to the ground as this may kill small mammals nesting at the bottom of tussocks.

Rough grassland can be managed on a 2-year cycle. Mow or lightly graze a rough grassland every second year in Autumn/Winter to prevent tree saplings from establishing. If possible, having multiple patches of rough grassland in the cycle ensures that while one area is being mown/grazed, there is always some rough grassland untouched.

PROVIDING NESTS AND ROOSTS

Kestrels, barn owls and tawny owls are cavity-nesting birds and would naturally build nests within hollows of dead trees. In a more human landscape, old farm

buildings provide nesting spaces, however, modern developments make these buildings less suitable by patching access holes and removing ledges.

Installing an artificial nest box is a great way to attract birds of prey to your area. In addition to providing rough grassland to feed in, your area will be all set to support birds of prey. Don't be disappointed if a nest box is not used straight away, it can take several years before being used.

OTHER RESOURCES

Below is a list of other resources available on the internet to gather information from.

- [Ulster Wildlife Trust: Improving habitats for barn owls](#)
- [Shropshire Barn Owl Group](#)

FUNDING

To help fund grassland management, try and take advantage of agri-environment schemes. These can help fund restoration works and ongoing management. Below are two funding schemes which you may be eligible for.

Sustainable Farming Incentive (SFI): [Sustainable Farming Incentive: guidance for applicants and agreement holders](#) - this is currently unavailable and will become available in April 2026.

Countryside Stewardship Higher Tier (CSHT):
[Countryside Stewardship Higher Tier](#)

Contact us

If you have any questions about managing your grasslands, please get in touch with our team:

T: 01423 712950

E: Nidderdalenl@northyorks.gov.uk

W: nidderdale-nl.org.uk

Nidderdale National Landscape
The Old Workhouse
King Street
Pateley Bridge
Harrogate
HG3 5LE

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