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Sent: 10 January 2015 11:56

To: Nature Conservation

Subject: Government policy on Hedgerow management.

It is one of the great tragedies of the last 20 years that one of the government initiatives designed to improve the quality of the countryside has been one of the main reasons why hedgerows now hold almost no biodiversity value. It was the first REPs scheme which encouraged the annual flaying of hedges in order to "tidy/beautify" the countryside. This was a total misapplication of the principles of the EU Agro-Environment scheme whose intention was to enhance biodiversity within the framework of the greater CAP. Such short cycle, and brutal hedge management means that vigorous invasive hedge species come to dominate at the cost of overall diversity, and fruit bearing bushes almost never come into fruit. This has had the opposite of its intended effect, and unfortunately has cemented the practice of hedge over management within the farming community.

A means should be found to make the correct management of hedges, over an extended cycle of at least 4 years, to allow for diversity to return to the hedges and to support the farmland bird species (and woodland species) which depend on them. Hedgerows represent one of the potentially greatest assets to an increasingly intensively managed countryside and we need to set national policies which recognise this and reward farmers for correct management.

Unfortunately the whole field of Agri-Environment measures has been misapplied from the outset, with priority given to easy administration and easy application. The Conservation sector has been marginalized in favour of the agricultural lobbyists with the effect that most of the measures have been marginally effective and oftentimes counterproductive. The European Commission has already pointed this out in a European Auditors report, and the likely outcome will be that the pillar two of the CAP will be withdrawn unless it can be shown to be correctly targeted and evidence based. The introduction of legally enforceable guidance on hedgerow management would go a long way to restore and reverse the damage caused by the original REPS scheme and the culture it has engendered.