



## **Special wildlife scheme beats organic at boosting birds**

Threatened farmland birds are likely to survive the winter better on conventional farms with specially designed wildlife habitats than on organic farms, according to a new study from the University of Southampton.

Winter farmland bird populations compared across three different wildlife schemes showed the 'Conservation Grade' approach, that aims to grow crops efficiently while giving farmers specific designs for wildlife food and shelter plots, produced higher survival rates than the organic sites.

The researcher, Dominic Harrison, said the greatest numbers of chaffinches, yellowhammers, skylarks and lapwings were recorded on Conservation Grade farms. "A strong link was found between the number of specially-designed habitats created and the richness of bird species found. While the organic farms did provide some wildlife habitats, they were dominated by grassland, which meant they provided little winter feed and scored the lowest," he explains.

"This indicates that organic farms don't provide significant benefits to overwintering birds but instead, farm-scale management specifically designed to be beneficial to wildlife can have positive farm-scale effects."

Darren Moorcroft, Head of Conservation Delivery at the RSPB agrees that the best results in sustaining farmland bird populations are to be gained from a targeted approach. "There's no doubt the more specific the approach, the better the results", he said.

Brin Hughes of Conservation Grade says it's important for farmers to be clear what outcomes they want before they start. "Organic production is a philosophy that upholds

certain environmental values, but doesn't specifically focus on achieving specific results in terms of biodiversity improvement," he explains. "We've designed Conservation Grade to deliver biodiversity 'yields' in much the same way farmers aim to optimise their yields of wheat.

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### **Notes to Editors**

Mr Harrison's paper can be downloaded from:

[www.southampton.ac.uk/engineering/research/projects/conservation\\_farming.page?#publications](http://www.southampton.ac.uk/engineering/research/projects/conservation_farming.page?#publications); it was researched independently and funded by the Vitacress Foundation Trust and Conservation Grade.

Conservation Grade is an independent accreditation organisation that facilitates commercial relationships between farmers and consumers on an area rapidly approaching 100,000 acres in the UK through a system of agriculture that optimises both crop yields and biodiversity conservation. Conservation Grade has developed a truly unique system of sustainable farming, founded on science and commercial viability. It is internationally recognised by The Economics of Ecosystems and Biodiversity (TEEB) study, as well as Natural England and leading NGOs such as the RSPB, for its significant contribution to the conservation of biodiversity through the commercial marketplace.

[www.conservationgrade.org](http://www.conservationgrade.org)