

Hedgerows

Hedgerows are a defining feature in many landscapes, and may have a long heritage (though many hedges have been planted much more recently). Some hedges are hundreds or thousands of years old!

The definition of a hedge is 'a row of bushes forming a hedge, with the trees growing in it'. A hedge may support up to 80% of our woodland birds, 50% of our mammals and 30% of our butterflies. Currently, 130 priority Biodiversity Action Plan (BAP) species are associated with hedgerows and their immediate surroundings; hedgerows are Section 41 priority habitats in the UK Biodiversity Action Plan.

There are other important habitats associated with hedges, of course, and these include ditches and banks, which provide habitats for many other species of animals and plants. Hedgerows also act as wildlife corridors to aid the movement of species through our landscape. They also play an important role in conserving natural resources such as soil; they store carbon, thereby reducing the rate of climate change, and act as a physical barrier to pollution.

Hedgerow protection

The [Hedgerows Regulations 1997](#) (often referred to as the Hedgerow Regs.) are intended to protect important countryside hedges from destruction or damage in England and Wales. The legislation is very complicated but the UK Government has a useful website covering [countryside hedgerows protection and management](#) which summarises pertinent parts of the Hedgerow Regulations.

It should be noted that the regulations do not apply to hedges around houses and between neighbours in urban areas. However, these regulations are often a very important consideration for new developments in the wider countryside.

The law on trimming and managing hedges

There is often some confusion as to when it is legal to trim hedges. The [Wildlife & Countryside Act 1981](#) makes it an offence to disturb a bird's nest which is in use, under construction, or with eggs, chicks or birds using it regularly - even if they are not actually in it at the time. The general advice is for people not to work on or trim hedgerows between 1st March to 31st July.

The law on removing hedges

Any landowner who wishes to remove a hedgerow must serve a Hedgerow Removal Notice in writing to their local planning authority, unless the removal is for one of the many reasons that provide an exemption. The authority then has 42 days to determine whether or not the hedge is considered 'important' under the regulations, and if so, whether or not to issue a Hedgerow Retention Notice. During this time the local authority must consult the local Parish or community council and consider their views, but it does not have to consult anyone else.

The hedgerow survey handbook is a comprehensive document that tells you how to survey to see if hedgerows meet hedgerow regulations. It is freely available on the [gov.uk](#) and [hedgelink](#) websites at the end of this document. As a quick guide, the link to countryside hedgerows protection and management can show what needs to be considered when deciding if a hedgerow can be removed.

Further information and advice

Hedgerow Regulations

www.legislation.gov.uk/ukxi/1997/1160/contents/made

Government guidance - Countryside hedgerows: protection and management

Find out if you can remove or work on countryside hedgerows

www.gov.uk/guidance/countryside-hedgerows-regulation-and-management

Books

Oliver Rackham. "The History of the Countryside". (1986. Dent and Sons, London).

E Pollard, M D Hooper and N W Moore. "Hedges". (1974. New Naturalist, Collins, London).

Advice

Hedgelinek - Lots of resources available relating to hedgerows and the wildlife that uses them

www.hedgelinek.org.uk/

RSPB - Advice on how to manage farmland hedgerows for wildlife

www.rspb.org.uk/our-work/conservation/conservation-and-sustainability/advice/conservation-land-management-advice/farm-hedges/

The Conservation Volunteers Hedgerow Handbook

<https://www.conservationhandbooks.com/hedging/>

Surveys

Hedgerow survey handbooks

www.gov.uk/government/publications/hedgerow-survey-handbook

www.hedgelinek.org.uk/cms/cms_content/files/89_hedgerow-survey-handbook.pdf

People's' Trust for Endangered Species (PTES) Hedgerow Survey

<https://ptes.org/hedgerow/>