

## Hedgerow Management and Laying

November 2024

As part of SPconservations' habitat management work, we recently undertook a traditional hedge laying project to restore a declining field boundary and improve its ecological function. The hedge, originally planted decades ago, had become gappy and overgrown, offering limited benefit to wildlife and minimal stock-proofing value. Our goal was to rejuvenate this important landscape feature, enhancing its structure, longevity, and biodiversity.

The process involved careful preparation and the skilled laying of each stem at a low angle, encouraging new growth from the base while retaining a living, stock-proof barrier. We worked during the winter months, outside of the bird nesting season, when the plants are dormant and most resilient to cutting. Stakes and binders were used to support the laid hedge, creating a tidy and structurally sound finish in the local Devon style.

Ecologically, the benefits of laying are significant. The dense regrowth provides excellent nesting and shelter opportunities for birds such as wrens, robins, and hedge sparrows, while the thicket-like structure offers refuge for small mammals and insects. Over time, the hedge will also deliver increased flowering and fruiting, supporting pollinators and foraging species throughout the seasons.

By restoring this traditional boundary, the project not only revived an important element of the historic countryside character but also reinforced the vital role that hedgerows play as wildlife corridors and carbon sinks—demonstrating the value of low-impact, heritage techniques in modern conservation work.

This work also aligns closely with current environmental stewardship schemes and grant funding available to landowners, including those under Countryside Stewardship and Local Nature Recovery schemes. Hedge laying is often eligible for financial support due to its recognised value in enhancing biodiversity, restoring traditional landscape features, and improving habitat connectivity. For landowners, this means the cost of management can be significantly offset while contributing to national conservation targets and earning public goods payments - making it a practical and rewarding investment in both wildlife and the land.

