

The Adams Scale: Hedgerow Management Cycle

By Nigel Adams

Green numbers... Represent a healthy zone for the hedge

Amber numbers... Represent a warning zone

Red numbers... Represent hedges that are in poor condition or have become a line of trees.

- Score each hedge within the lifecycle scale to plan future management.
- Assign the hedge a number from 1-10 on the hedgerow management lifecycle scale.
- For each hedge prescribe a plan of management for the next 5 or 10 years which is suitable for its score within the life cycle scale.
- Allow the hedge to slowly progress through its natural life cycle using occasional incremental trimming.

SCORE 1

These hedges have suffered from severe over trimming for many years and would contain many gaps and infrequent stems. The only option is to coppice to ground level and plant up the gaps. There is also the opportunity to remove invasive species such as Elder and Sycamore if necessary. If the hedge forms part of a hedged bank, the condition of the bank may be very poor.

SCORE 2

These hedges will not have quite so many gaps as score 1 and the canopies may well be touching but the option to allow the hedge to grow up to be laid or coppiced to ground level is negated by the fact that there are not enough stems to form a dense hedge. The hedge might have developed a 'mushroom' shape with little shelter at the base. Coppice to ground level and plant up the gaps to at least 5 plants per m. Each cut stump can count as one stem when replanting. Invasive species can be removed at this stage.

SCORE 3

These hedges will have plenty of stems which does offer options of management, but they will have been hard trimmed to a set height for many years. The frequency of stems would allow the hedge to gain height to be laid in the future or could be coppiced to start the life cycle again. Continuous trimming at this height will cause the hedge to degrade to stage 2 and eventually stage 1.

SCORE 4

These hedges will have been recently rejuvenated by either laying or coppicing within the last 5 years. They should be receiving very light incremental trimming to encourage them to become thicker at the base.

SCORE 5

Healthy dense hedgerows with many stems and now over 1.5m tall. They will be receiving light trimming either each year or every 2nd or 3rd year to produce abundant blossom and berries.

Height should be incrementally increased whenever signs of a knuckle forming at the trim line can be seen.

SCORE 6

These hedges will be healthy with many stems having been allowed to slowly gain height to over 2.5m. These can be trimmed lightly as required never smashing down into thick wood but rather incrementally increasing height and width over time. This trimming can be done annually or every 2nd or 3rd year. They could also be left alone as a non-intervention hedge and reshaped every 8-10 years with a circular saw.

SCORE 7

A hedge with frequent healthy stems between 3 to 5m tall. These hedges are perfect for laying at this stage before they become too large. They can also be coppiced to provide wood fuel and allowed to regrow through the life cycle. Leave any emerging trees as landscape features.

SCORE 8

These hedges are starting to become quite tall and wide with spreading tops. Stems may be becoming too large (over 20cm in diameter) for laying and too infrequent. Lay the hedge if possible or coppice to ground level and re-plant the gaps leaving occasional trees if present.

SCORE 9

These hedges are now over mature and beyond the point of laying. Stems may be very infrequent and showing signs of dieback at their tops. Tree species may be starting to dominate. Coppicing is the only option here leaving some trees as standards. Gaps can be planted up following coppicing.

SCORE 10

These are hedges that have developed into lined of trees. There are no options for rejuvenation at this point but lines of trees are important for wildlife in their own way. Some thinning might be needed and if any hedge structure remains underneath, the lower tree canopy should be raised slightly to allow more light in.