



A guide to estimating ground cover percentage on your Environmental Stewardship site(s)

What is ground cover?

Ground cover is material on the ground that protects soil from the effects of erosion and run-off. It can be made up of plant material (living or dead), mosses and lichens, leaf litter, dung or rocks. Maintaining high levels of ground cover on your site(s) is very important, as high levels of ground cover decrease erosion, increases the amount of rain absorbed into the soil, promote plant growth and provide habitat and cover for reptiles and insects.

How to measure?

Ground cover only needs to be estimated and recorded once per site, per year. Please note that ground cover percentage needs to be recorded at the same time each year, preferably at the same time you take your annual photo-point photograph and record the site's sward height. Ground cover is measured as the percentage of plant material (living or dead), mosses and lichens, leaf litter, dung or rocks covering the ground. The simplest method is to take a standing measurement, the process is described below:

1. Stand with your feet about 50cm apart.
2. Visualise a 50cm square at your feet and estimate the percentage of groundcover in it.
3. Do this a few times across the site and average the results.

Below are some photographs showing examples of different ground cover percentages:



At 20% groundcover



At 40% groundcover



At 70% groundcover



At 90% groundcover