

Supporting guidance for Wader Grazed Grassland

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For recent changes to this guidance, please see the bottom of the page.

Note: Corrections to links in [Further Information](#) section, 31 July, 2023.

Introduction

The wader group includes birds such as oystercatcher, lapwing, redshank, curlew and snipe. To survive and breed successfully, waders need:

- A safe nesting site. Most waders nest in short or structurally diverse grassland
- An abundance of soil and ground insects
- Damp or wet feeding areas, especially for chicks



Lapwing – Credit: Chris Gomersall – © RSPB images

The [Wader Grazed Grassland](#) option aims to provide nesting and feeding opportunities for waders. The timing and intensity of grazing determines the structure and plant composition of the sward, which in turn influences insect numbers and bird usage.

Patchy swards, which vary in height, provide suitable feeding and nesting habitat. Short grazed areas (less than 10 centimetres) provide easy access to food and open terrain to enable vigilance against predators. Taller vegetation allows nesting birds and chicks to conceal themselves, and generally supports more insects and other wildlife.



Redshank – Credit: Andy Hall – © RSPB images

What needs to be done

Excluding or restricting livestock numbers and avoiding mechanical operations (such as fertiliser spreading, harrowing, rolling and topping) during the breeding season will help improve wader breeding success.

Grazing: You must choose one of the three grazing regimes available under this option. If birds are still nesting in the field following the exclusion period you should not graze at a high stocking rate until all chicks have fledged. Although the option allows grazing levels at up to 1lu/ha, a level of 0.6lu/ha is preferable to protect nests from trampling.

Grazing is required outside the exclusion / restriction period to maintain a suitable sward for nesting in the following season, as birds require a short sward prior to nesting.

Which fields to choose

Fields which contain boggy areas and wet flushes are more likely to remain damp into June. These should be prioritised as they provide ideal nesting sites and food-rich areas for adults and chicks.

Fields can be enhanced by creating wader scrapes to increase food availability during the summer months. See the [Creation of Wader Scrapes](#) capital item for more details. If you have created wader scrapes then these require to be maintained **during** the contract period. Further information on maintenance can be found within the supporting guidance for the Creation of Wader Scrapes capital item.

Waders are more likely to select unimproved or semi-improved grasslands than improved grasslands. Highly productive rye-grass leys are unlikely to support nesting waders, as the sward grows too high too quickly, therefore, avoid these fields and choose older grass swards.

The area of ground submitted for the option should be at least one hectare, although areas greater than three hectares that may cross field boundaries and are without boundary features will be of more benefit, especially on larger farms.

Research has shown that waders avoid nesting and feeding in areas close to tall trees and hedges. Therefore you should keep the managed area at least 30 metres from any line or group of trees or hedgerows, and you should not plant new hedges between fields entered into this management option.

Note:

Although it is not an eligibility requirement that the Wader Grazed Grassland option cannot be adopted within 30m of a hedgerow, trees or woodland, this is best practice. We advise you choose to include a 30m buffer which must be clearly shown on your management map with the width labelled. If your application is successful the area to be claimed in the contract for this option will be minus the buffer.

Rushes are common in wet areas, and will often require annual management. Scattered rushes provide adults and chicks with protection from the elements, nesting sites and cover from predators. However, waders also need short, open areas for their chicks to walk through and so they can see approaching predators. Therefore heavy infestations of rush or thatched vegetation tend to be avoided.

Knowing if you have 'too much' rush and what the 'right amount' of rush is will depend on the species you are managing for – the RSPB's advisory leaflets provide detailed information on the needs of each species.

It is worth bearing in mind that sward and water level variations across larger fields means that you can often create conditions for more than one species.

Payments are available through the [Cutting of Rush Pasture](#) capital item for areas needing control. Note, however, that control methods and timings will need to be planned to meet the requirements of the [Wader Grazed Grassland](#) option.

Further information

Different species of waders have differing habitat preferences, particularly relating to sward height, structure and soil dampness. Therefore, if you are considering this option, you need to understand the habitat requirements of the particular species you have on your land, and how you can best manage your land to conserve them.

Further advice on four common farmland waders is available at the following links:

- [Lapwing](#)
- [Snipe](#)
- [Redshank](#)
- [Curlew](#)

Further advice on helping waders on farmland is on the [FAS website](#).



[Managing grassland for waders \(PDF, Size: 238.6 kB\)](#)

doc_external_url: <https://www.ruralpaymentsandservices.org/media/resources/Managing-grassland-for-waders.pdf> RSPB leaflet

- [Grazing Land Management \(Working for Waders\)](#)

The integration of grazing management with other options, such as [Wader and Wildlife Mown Grassland](#), and capital items such as [Creation of Wader Scrapes](#) may well be appropriate.

[Getting advice](#)

There are a number of wader-focused projects whose staff will be able to provide advice on waders and their management. To find your local advisor, contact your local NatureScot office.

[Recent changes](#)

Section	Change
What needs to be done	Additional information added
Which fields to choose	Additional information added and removal of text related to 2021 round

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