

Supporting guidance for Cutting of Rush Pasture

This is an old version of the page

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For recent changes to this guidance, please see the [bottom of the page](#).

Introduction

Low levels of rush in damp grassland is beneficial for wading birds. Rushes can provide adults and chicks with shelter from the weather and cover from predators. However, heavy infestations reduce the suitability of the field for waders.

Each of the five target species – lapwing, curlew, oystercatcher, snipe, redshank – have different preferences.

RSPB Scotland's advisory leaflets provide details on individual species needs and how much rush pasture each species can tolerate. Check the requirements for the species you aim to manage and tailor rush cutting accordingly.



Redshank – Credit: Andy Hay – © RSPB images

What needs to be done?

Rushes need to be cut close to the ground – under 10 centimetres. Cutting higher than this will not reduce tussock height or vigour.

To achieve more variation in the sward, avoid cutting uniform linear strips. Where possible, remove cuttings because otherwise they can mulch down and encourage new rush growth.

After cutting graze the area, preferably with cattle, to trample the rushes. You should cut 20 to 45 per cent of rushes in the field (this is based on the area of rush within the field, not the overall field size).

From 2017 onwards, the payment rate has been reduced, to allow you to claim on the total area of eligible rush within the field, rather than the area cut, which can be harder to measure. You must cut each year and keep detailed records in your management diary.

Cutting in winter when there is a hard frost, allows machinery to cut close to the ground, prevents soil damage and promotes winter kill of cut rush stems.

Heavy rolling after cutting can also help break down the rootball.

Avoid poaching or creating wheel ruts as this can damage the soil structure and the sward, and encourage the establishment of invasive weeds.

If water levels can be raised, flooding to above the remaining growth can help control rushes. However, this should only be done outwith the breeding season where management is targeting waders.

Be sure to check the detailed prescriptions of other options that apply to the same land. For example, if the Wader and Wildlife Mown Grassland option is in place, you may not roll, harrow or graze from 1 April until 30 June inclusive. The use of herbicides is also restricted.

Which fields to choose?

Choose fields that already support breeding waders or Greenland white-fronted geese and where rush management will create the sward conditions needed by the target species. Read RSPB Scotland's advisory sheets on the target species to understand the cutting regime you will have to implement. There is no advisory leaflet for oystercatcher; if oystercatcher is a target species on your farm, assume they benefit from the same management as lapwing.

To benefit waders the [Cutting of Rush Pasture](#) item requires you to choose fields managed under one of the breeding wader management options – [Wader Grazed Grassland](#) or [Wader and Wildlife Mown Grassland](#). This ensures that the field is suitable for breeding waders, and that other agricultural activity in the field does not affect birds in the breeding season.

This item can only be taken as a stand-alone capital item if the field is managed to benefit Greenland white-fronted geese.



Field suitable for rush management – Credit: Hywel Maggs



Field after good rush management – Credit: Hywel Maggs

Complementary options

If managing rush pasture for waders, you must combine this capital item with one of the following management options:

- [Wader and Wildlife Mown Grassland](#) (cutting of rush can be in the same field but not over the same area as this option)

- [Wader Grazed Grassland](#) (cutting of rush can be in the same field but not over the same area as this option)

[Further information](#)

RSPB habitat management advice note: [Rush Management for Wildlife](#)

Soil Association Scotland Field Lab notes: [Cutting Rushes](#)

[Recent changes](#)

Section	Change
What needs to be done?	Tightening of language, changing 'can' to 'should' Addition of information regarding the payment rate from 2017 onwards Text removed regarding use of glyphosate or MCPA
Complementary options	Additional information added

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