

Supporting guidance for Wader Grazed Grassland

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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



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 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 is required outside the exclusion / restriction period to maintain a suitable sward for nesting in the following season.

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.

Waders are more likely to select unimproved or semi-improved grasslands than improved grasslands. The area of ground submitted for the option should be at least 3 hectares and this may cross field boundaries.

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.

Rushes are a common problem in wet areas, and heavy infestations can have an adverse effect on the value of the grassland. Payments are available through capital items 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.



Grazed grassland for waders – Credit: RSPB

Further information

Different species of waders have different management needs, in addition to grazing management. For this reason, implementation of this option alone is unlikely to benefit the birds. Therefore, if you are considering this option, we recommend you consider the particular species you intend to manage and any additional measures they may require.

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

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

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.



Snipe – Credit: Tom Marshall – © RSPB images

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 Scottish Natural Heritage office.