

# Supporting guidance for Wader Grazed Grassland

**This is an old version of the page**

**Date published: 15 December, 2025**

**Date superseded: 19 February, 2026**

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

## 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 you opt for one of the six-week grazing breaks, but birds are still nesting in the field following the exclusion period, you must not graze at a high stocking rate until all chicks have fledged. If you operate a system of mob/adaptive grazing on your holding, any fields managed under this option must not have large numbers of stock put back on the field until young birds have fledged.

Although the third grazing option allows grazing levels of up to 1lu/ha over the nesting period, a grazing level of between 0.3 and 0.6/ha is preferable to protect nests from trampling.

Consider what type of livestock will be put onto the field after the grazing exclusion. Large numbers of sheep and groups of young, boisterous cattle are more likely to trample nests. 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 where they can see approaching predators. Areas with heavy infestations of rush or thatched vegetation tend to be avoided, so if you choose a field with heavy rush cover, this must be addressed in your application by including rush cutting, aiming for around 30% rush cover across the area.

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.ruralpayments.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	Grazing: Text updated to make it clearer when to resume grazing and by how much if there still birds that have not fledged present after the grazing break. Text added, If you operate a system of mob/adaptive grazing on your holding, any fields managed under this option must not have large numbers of stock put back on the field until young birds have fledged. Consider what type of livestock will be put onto the field after the grazing exclusion. Large numbers of sheep and groups of young, boisterous cattle are more likely to trample nests.
What fields to choose	Text added, Rushes: so if you choose a field with heavy rush cover, this must be addressed in your application by including rush cutting, aiming for around 30% rush cover across the area.
Further information	Broken links for RSPB pages Lapwing, Snipe, Redshank and Curlew updated.

## Previous versions

[Previous versions of this page](#)

## Download guidance

Click 'Download this page' to create a printable version of this guidance you can save or print out.