

2020



Working for Waders

Grazing land management



This section provides guidance on how best to manage grazing land to help support and improve existing populations of wading birds.

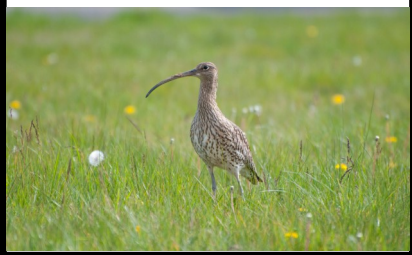
Funding may be available through Agri-environment scheme payments management practices. Follow this link to the Scottish Government website to find out more - [Wader Grazed Grassland page](#)

	January	February	March	April	May	June	July	August	September	October	November	December
Grassland			Allow sward to grow/ maintain height Try to avoid machinery and grazing					Graze/cut to reduce sward height between 5 and 15 cm				
Wader scrapes			Wader scrapes should hold water Management of scrape						Building of scrape			
Rush management			Avoid cutting or spraying								Mid-winter cut	

Management technique

Grassland management

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Wader scrape creation

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Rush management

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How to... Manage grassland

Damp grassland with a diversity of sward structure is favoured by many wader species.

This habitat provides an abundance of invertebrates for the birds to eat and feed their chicks.

Fields should be managed depending on the existing species needs. Larger fields often provide a mix of habitats.



Consider... Wader scrapes

Are there areas of wetland?

If not consider creating a **wader scrape**. Details of how to do this on [page 4](#).

Which field?

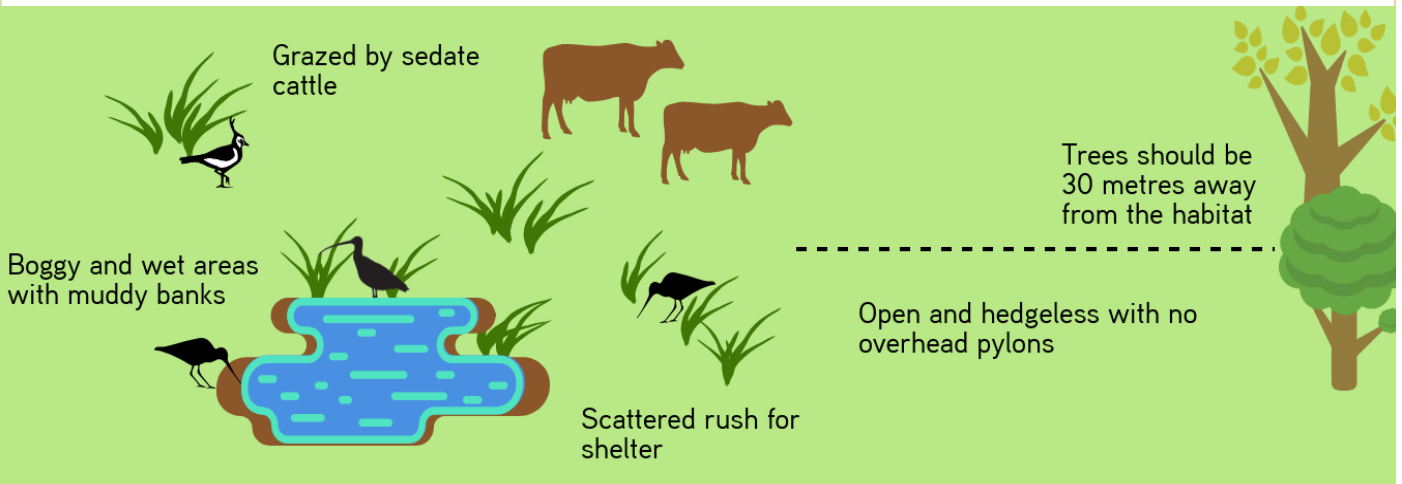
Areas already used by wading birds

Fields that contain boggy areas and wet flushes which are more likely to stay wet into June.

Waders prefer unimproved or semi-unimproved grassland.

Scattered rushes provide shelter, but may require management (see [page 6](#) for how to manage rush for waders).

Grassland for wading birds





Grazing

- Try to create a mosaic of shorter grass and longer tussocks
- Cattle are the best livestock for wader habitats - ideally sedate stock such as suckler cows and calves.

Try to avoid...

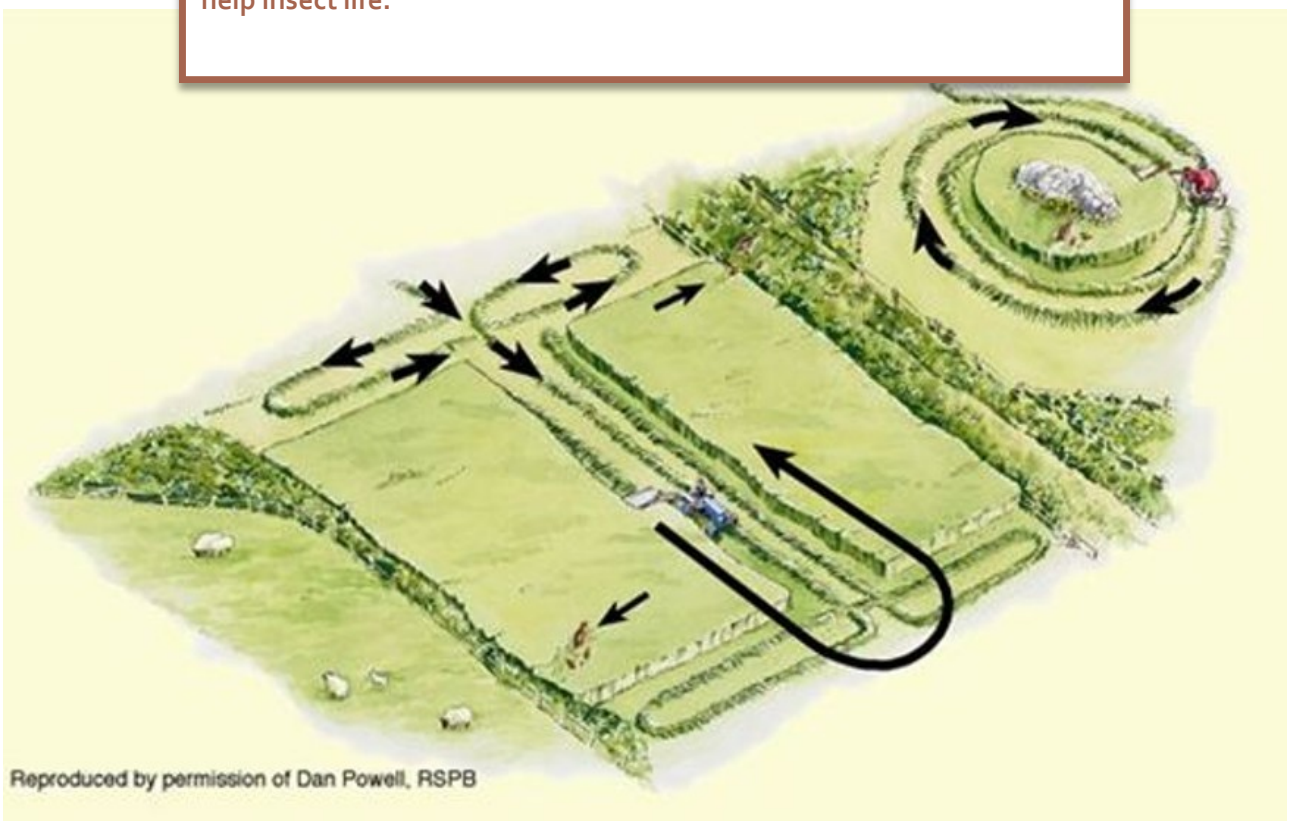
- Grazing through the nesting period to prevent trampling
- Rolling and harrowing during the nesting season
- Applying lime, fertilizer or manure/ slurry in nesting season
- Using pesticides
- Planting trees where they will overlook the breeding waders habitat

Consider...other management

Less rigorous grass growth will improve wader habitat

Consider partitioning sections depending on the wader species present. Different species have different needs.

You could change mowing patterns and leave grass strips of 2 metres to provide areas for birds to escape around field margins. This will also help insect life.



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How to...

Create a wader scrape

Wader scrapes are shallow depressions that are constructed in fields to benefit wading birds. They are designed so that they hold water for only part of the year.

They can be very important feeding sites for the chicks and adults of farmland waders such as lapwing and redshank as their gently-sloping edges support large numbers of invertebrates.

This is great for supporting an existing population of wading birds.



Consider...location

Soil type

Existing damp areas

Existing drain locations

Field features

Existing plants and animals

Is the area a protected site?

Which field?

Impermeable soils, such as clays and silt are best for wader scrape as they keep the water on the surface.

Locate scrapes 100m from field boundaries and away from overhead lines to encourage use by waders.

Fields over three hectares are best and they may already have good wildlife habitat.

Ask the Working for Waders team for advice if in doubt.



More edge effect



More edge effect



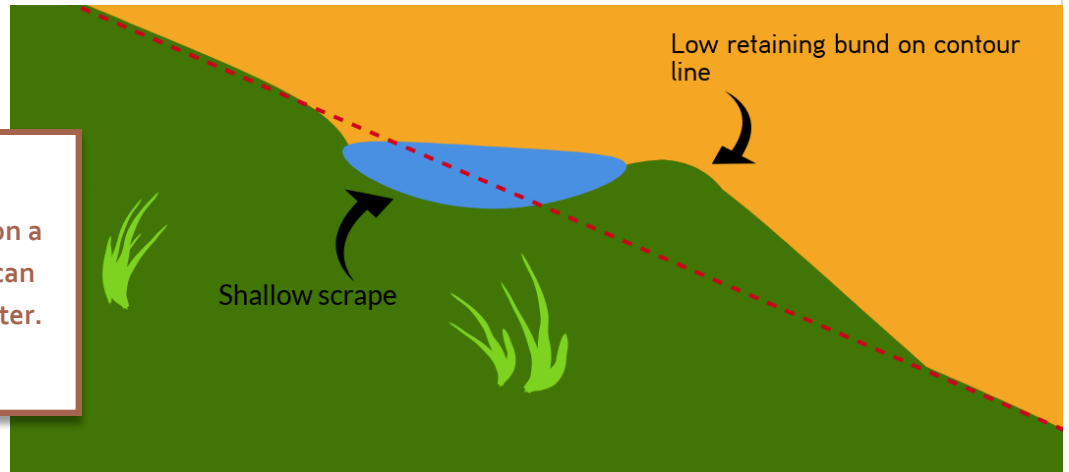
Less edge effect

Linear or irregular shapes are best as these provide more edge compared with a round feature of the same area.





Scrapes can be created on a slight slope and a spoil can be used to retain the water.



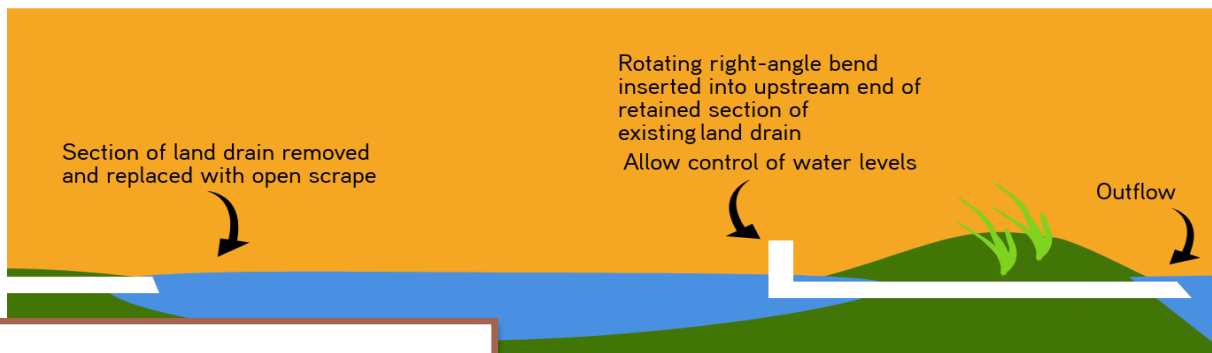
Scrape creation

1. Excavate a minimum area of 20 square metres per scrape
2. Vary the depth, with a maximum of 45cm
3. Create gently sloping edges which will be exposed when the water level is low
4. Excavated spoil may be spread thinly nearby or used as a bund

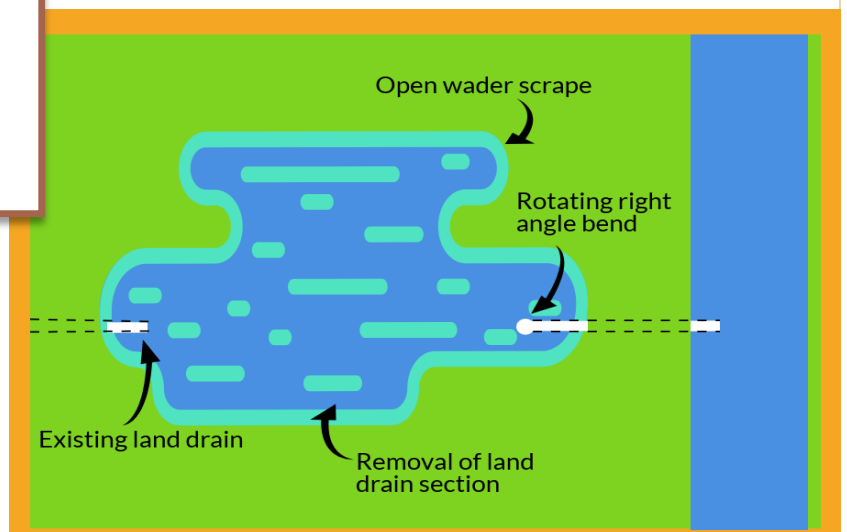
Consider...management

It is important to **manage scrapes** once created.

Grazing with cattle keeps a varied sward structure, but reduce cattle numbers during the breeding season to avoid trampling nests.



Scrape creation can use the already available drainage .
Muddy edges are ideal for waders to forage for insects.





How to...

Manage rush

Rush growth is common in damp grassland areas.

Low levels of rush cover are beneficial to breeding wading birds, providing cover for nests and chick rearing. Where rush gets overgrown this can reduce the value of the field for wading birds.

Rush cover should be limited to one-third of a field's area.



Consider...

Sward height

Amount of rush cover

Use of cattle

Topping

Herbicides as a last resort

Benefits to wildlife

Fields with rush growth are often damp so are good habitat for wading birds.

Rush also helps increase insect life which wading birds feed on.

Rush offer places to hide from predators and nesting areas.

Different species select fields with different sward heights.

Managing rush will...

Prevent over seeding of
rush plants

Allow more light to reach
the grass and clover

Make spreading lime much
easier

⇒ **Improve productivity**



Lapwings like short sward and scattered tussocks to hide their nests while not limiting the view.



Snipe prefer tall sward to hide in





Toppers and mowers

Rush can be cut with a **topper** or **mower**.

Which cutting equipment to use depends on how rough or level the land is and the amount of rushes.

For particularly wet, small or less accessible areas small machinery pulled by a quadbike could be a better option.

Rolling after topping helps destroy the root ball.

Cattle can also be used to trample the rush after cutting

Disc mowers are good for flatter ground where there are fewer rushes



Consider...cutting and leaving

Leaving rushes once cut if cover is not too bad

Use a **flail mower** to chop and mulch stems

Too much mulch once cut can damage the grass

Consider...bailing and removing

Allowing light and air into the sward

Help dry out the soil

Cut rush can provide good bedding



Be aware that rushes set to seed in bales may spread through manure.

Timing...

Early summer cut to prevent seeding but waders will be nesting.

August is the best time to cut as the latest wader chicks will have fledged.

Mid-winter cut when the ground is frozen to avoid damage to the soil and exposes the rush to frost.

Agri-environment scheme payments may be available to help with these management practices.

For more information and to see if you are eligible visit the Scottish Government Rural Payments and Services website — [Wader and Wildlife Mown Grassland page](#)



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A future for wading birds in Scotland

Further information available on the website

www.workingforwaders.com

Partners



Working for Waders