

3.1 Breeding Wader Sites

Definition: Breeding wader sites are fields of improved, unimproved or rough pastures with at least one breeding pair of curlew, redshank or snipe. These sites are usually wet for much of the year and the vegetation present includes a range of grasses, sedges and rushes. Breeding waders benefit from cattle or mixed grazing which gives a range of sward heights with tussocks for nesting in and short-grazed areas for feeding. There are *two* options for managing breeding wader sites – closed grazing or restricted grazing. The most suitable grazing option will be decided at the outset of the agreement and will be noted on the farm management map.

Aims: to maintain and increase the breeding success of breeding waders through appropriate management.

Biodiversity objectives: breeding wader sites contribute to the NI Biodiversity Action Plan targets for the curlew, redshank and lapwing. The proposed NI Biodiversity Action Plans and the NI Priority species – grasshopper warbler and reed bunting – will benefit.

Management requirements

- **Breeding wader site; closed grazing** – no grazing permitted from 15 April – 30 June. From 1 July – 14 April there are no stocking density restrictions, however cattle should be grazed at some point during this period, if possible.

OR

- **Breeding wader site; restricted grazing** - from 15 April to 30 June the stocking density must not exceed 0.75 LU/ha for cattle or sheep. From 1 July – 14 April there are no stocking density restrictions, however cattle should be grazed at some point during this period, if possible.
- Cattle must not be released directly on to breeding wader sites after being wintered indoors.
- Field operations are not permitted between 15 April and 30 June.
- Do not apply any organic or inorganic fertiliser or lime between 1 February and 30 June. When using farmyard manure, do not apply between 15 April and 30 June.
- On unimproved grassland sites nitrogen must not exceed 125kgN/ha. No fertiliser, slurry, farmyard manure or lime is permitted on rough moorland grazing sites.
- No cultivation, reseedling, reclamation, infilling, dumping or application of herbicide, pesticide, sheep dip, poultry litter or any other material is permitted on these sites.
- Installation of new drainage systems is not permitted.

- Supplementary feeding sites, between 15 April and 30 June, require the written permission of DARD and their location marked on the farm management map.
- Where a silage crop is taken from breeding wader sites, the fields must not be closed up until 1st July.
- Rush control must be carried out where rushes cover more than one third of the area. Rushes must be controlled by cutting between 15 July and 15 March retaining 10% uncut. Herbicide control is not permitted. If ground conditions do not permit rush cutting contact Countryside Management Branch for further advice*.
- The spread of scrub/trees must be controlled.
- New tree or hedge planting, or fencing on or next to breeding wader sites requires written permission from DARD.
- No poaching.

Further advice

From 1 July to 14 April there are no stocking density restrictions, but cattle should be grazed at some point during this period, if possible. Aim to create a medium sward less than 15cm (6 inches) with taller tussocks 30cm (12 inches) or above for nesting by mid April. Heavier grazing after 30 June is recommended to remove rank grasses and create a mixture of tussocks and open areas for next year's breeding season.

Cattle must be outside for at least one week before being put on to breeding wader fields.

Water levels in sheughs and drains should be maintained as close as possible to bank height during the period 1 March to 30 June to create soft ground if this is within the farmer's control.

Noxious weeds such as thistles and ragwort may be controlled by cutting between 15 July and 15 March or with herbicides, applied using a spot sprayer only.

Cutting dense rushes twice in one year, within a four to eight week period, will help reduce rush cover in the following year. Ideally cut rushes should be removed by baling, raking or burning. Where this is not possible graze with cattle immediately after cutting to help break up the mat of cut rush.

Existing drainage systems can be maintained but not widened, deepened or extended.

****Prior written approval must be obtained from Countryside Management Branch if you wish to use any method of rush control other than cutting.***

Management plans are provided for participants in the
**Environmentally Sensitive Areas and
 Countryside Management Schemes**

