

Rush management to benefit breeding curlews

Rush cutting

Rush cutting is carried out on many hill farms to create more grazing for sheep and cattle. This can benefit curlew and lapwing when the cutting is carried out to create large open patches with irregular edges rather than straight edged rectangular blocks.



Well managed rush pasture benefits grazing. This photo shows good conditions for curlew with open ground for chicks and cover close by. Annual rush cutting to create scattered rush has worked well here, the curlews will nest in the taller rush areas and the lapwings in the more open sheep grazed pasture in the distance. Aftermath grazing in the autumn will ensure that the pasture and rushes are kept short for the following spring.

This benefits lambs as well by creating a scattered rush landscape providing shelter. Cutting should be delayed until after the middle of August to avoid disturbance to late breeding waders such as Snipe.



Try to avoid straight edges when cutting rushes. Aim to leave bays and coves on the edge to provide shelter from the wind for curlew chicks and lambs. When managing rush within an agri-environment scheme, aim to reduce rush cover to 30% scattered across the field and check the timings of operations in the agreement.



Open rush pasture suitable for breeding curlew in Bowland. The rush cover could be reduced in parts of the field by annual mowing outside the breeding season to benefit both curlews and lapwings and grazing. Aim for 30% rush cover scattered across the whole field.

Forest of Bowland AONB Unit



In this spring photograph, rushes have been cut in early autumn to benefit grazing and breeding curlew. Careful aftermath grazing has kept the rushes and pasture short to suit breeding waders but the rushes have grown back sufficiently to hide a curlew's nest in the denser areas. This level of rush cover will also suit breeding lapwing and oystercatcher which will nest on the more open grass areas.

Northumberland National Park,
North Pennines AONB,
Yorkshire Dales National Park,
Nidderdale AONB
Forest of Bowland AONB

NORTHERN UPLAND CHAIN
Local Nature Partnership



Chemical control of rushes

Where rushes are extensive and dense then chemical control can be considered using either MCPA or Glyphosate. Always consult an agronomist before making a decision on which chemical to use to ensure that the legal label recommendations apply as the legislation is often changing for herbicides. Avoid spraying during the breeding season.

There are two options for applying the chemical: (a) through a Weed wiper using Glyphosate but not MCPA (b) using a tractor mounted or quad bike mounted boom sprayer to apply MCPA but not Glyphosate.

Before making a decision, always check that there are no rare or important plants/wild flowers growing amongst the rushes that may be affected by the chemical or destroyed by cutting and avoid these areas. Your local conservation adviser can help with this.

Weed wiping is the preferred option as it applies the chemical directly to the rushes and the ground flora is largely unaffected provided that the rushes are taller. Grazing or cutting prior to treatment and then treating the rush regrowth can help to protect the ground flora. Unlike using a boom sprayer there is no risk from chemical drift by using a weed wiper.

The chemical should be applied anytime after the middle of August once the waders have finished breeding. Snipe can still have chicks in late July and early August. The rushes should be green and actively growing to absorb the chemical. A surfactant will help the chemical to stick to the rush.

Dense old stands of rushes should be cut from mid August or in the previous winter and left to regrow to at least 20cms before weed wiping.

Further details here:

<https://www.fas.scot/downloads/tn701-control-of-rushes/>



Check for important wildflowers before cutting or chemically treating rush pasture such as from left to right – ragged robin, orchids and lady's smock.