

# Wader Scrapes What Are They & How Do I Make One?



**Sussex**  
Wildlife Trust

## What is a wader scrape?

Scrapes are shallow ponds of less than 1m depth which hold rain or flood water seasonally and which remain damp for much of the year. They are shallow depressions with gently sloping edges which create obvious water features in fields. They can make a significant difference to wildlife and can be created in areas of damp or floodplain grassland, arable reversion or set aside land. **A wader scrape on your land can provide invaluable food and refuges for a wide range of wetland wildlife.**



A wader scrape – a shallow depression providing refuge for wetland wildlife © F Southgate

## Why do I need a wader scrape?

Many riverside fields have been ploughed and drained so that natural hollows are levelled and pools are filled in or dried out. These natural variations in ground level would have provided important seasonal habitats for wildlife. They support high densities of insects and earthworms which are important food for birds and amphibians, and a diverse range of plants which benefit water voles and dragonflies etc. A simple way that riverside and low lying fields can be improved (particularly for winter wading birds) is by creating wader scrapes. Once created, wader scrapes mimic natural hollows where water would have naturally accumulated in the past.

## Where should I put a wader scrape?

If you have low lying fields of 3 ha or over, near to rivers that flood in winter, or on wet floodplains, and soils which hold water such as clays and silts. If your land is on permeable soils such as peats where water tables are high, scrapes can provide access to the top layer of water held in the soil. Putting a scrape near where a spring rises can help keep your scrape stay wet. Try not to dig up existing areas of marsh or old river creeks to create your scrape, but create a new wetland feature in otherwise dry land to compliment existing areas of wetland. A good location for scrapes is the line of an old infilled ditch, or in part of a field which you know would stay damp if the land level was lowered.

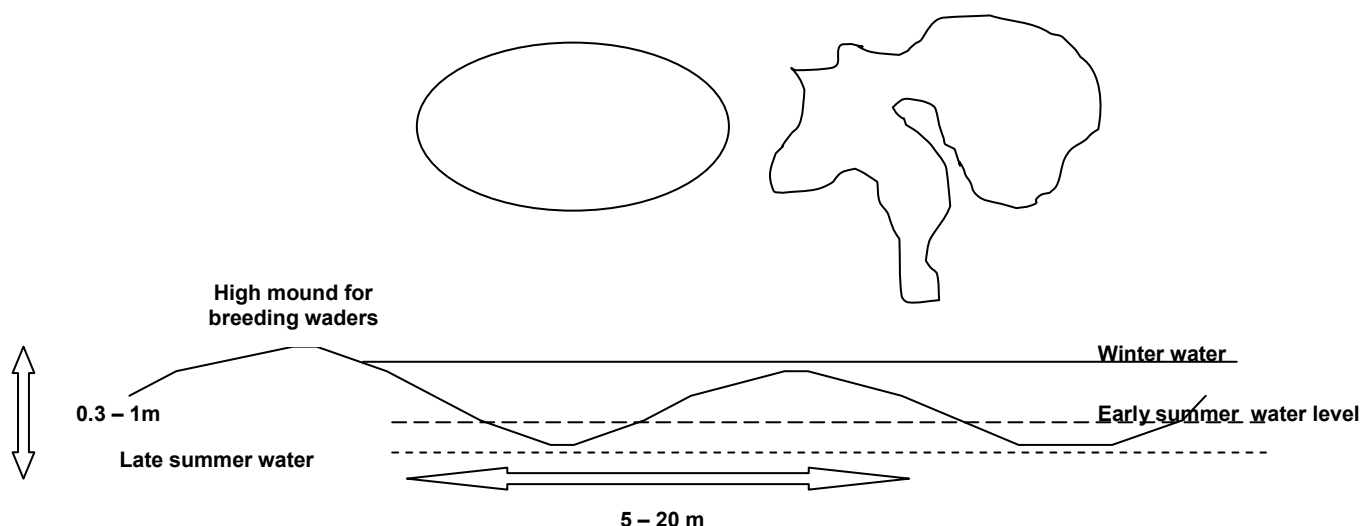
# Wader Scrapes – What Are They & How Do I Make One?

## Where should I avoid putting my wader scrape?

- Areas of free draining soil, unless the water table is close to the surface
- Existing land drain locations (unless you wish to break the land drain to keep the scrape wet).
- Areas where you can see there is already good wildlife habitat such as floodplain meadow
- Near overhead wires which could be dangerous to flying birds
- Anywhere where you would need to create a structure to hold back water
- On top of or near historical features such as Scheduled Ancient Monuments
- In areas such as Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI's) you may need permission from Natural England before you proceed
- Within 50m -100m of a field boundary such as a hedgerow, woodland or fence
- Anywhere which is polluted, or which might receive run off from roads or farm surfaces

## How do I create a scrape?

- You will need a digger capable of re profiling and landforming soil, or a rotary ditcher
- The best time of year to create a scrape is October
- **If you are working within 8m of a main river, you will need land drainage consent from your local Environment Agency Development Control team (08708 506506)**
- Your scrape should be shallow (less than 1m deep) but not a uniform depth all over
- If possible your scrape should be at least 20m<sup>2</sup>
- Create a varied shoreline of spits and bays, with some shallower sides and some deeper sides
- Broad, marshy areas around edges attract more wildlife
- A scrape with uneven edges is better than a round or oval scrape as it provides more edge habitats (see below). If you mow your fields, a simple shape for your wader scrape may be best



## Is grazing and poaching bad for my scrape?

Grazing and poaching is good management for your scrape as long as it is not too intensive. Extensive grazing, particularly by cattle is ideal. This helps create a varied vegetation structure with scattered tussocks and patches of bare, open ground. Occasional mowing of rushes and tussocks may be necessary, to keep some of the sward open and grazeable. During the bird breeding season (usually February to July), keep stock numbers to a minimum to limit disturbance to birds and trampling of bird nests.

# Wader Scrapes – What Are They & How Do I Make One?

## Where do I put the spoil created by digging my scrape?

If possible, spoil should be disposed of outside of the floodplain or spread very thinly across the surrounding field surface. Floodplain soil is often fertile and may be good for spreading on arable fields. Disposing of spoil away from the floodplain increases flood water storage by creating areas which hold extra water, and avoids the creation of unnatural bunds within the floodplain. If you can't remove the spoil completely from the floodplain then disposing of it on slopes around the edges is best. Make sure you are not damaging any existing areas of wildlife interest by spreading soil.

**NOTE:** You may need Environment Agency consent to remove soil from your land.



Wetland birds such as Snipe and Lapwing benefit hugely from wader scrapes © Dave Kilby

## Can I use other machinery to create a scrape?

Yes. A fantastic machine called a rotary ditcher now exists. The machine digs up spoil and chutes it out in fragments across the land, saving the need to 'bank up' or remove spoil. The machine is more expensive but works faster and more efficiently than a traditional digger, and causes less compaction of soils. See contacts for details.



## Do I need to keep my wader scrape wet all year round?

No. It benefits wildlife if the scrape is seasonally wet and dry, and weather is often too unpredictable to be too prescriptive. As a rule of thumb, for wading birds such as Lapwing and Snipe, the ideal is for your scrape to hold water from March to late June, allowing water levels to naturally recede as the weather becomes drier. If your scrape dries out after this there is no problem. Consider putting more than one scrape in a field. This way, when one is dry, another may stay wet. In winter, your wader scrapes may occasionally be completely submerged, and this is fine.

## Can I get funding to create a wader scrape?

Often, yes. Funding can be available through Countryside Stewardship Schemes – See Natural England for more details. Local projects run by Wildlife Trusts, the RSPB and other organisations may also be able to provide grant or charitable funding, or help with machinery and labour costs. Some local Councils also run local wildlife grant schemes. Wader scrapes can help to create additional flood storage in floodplains, and so may be eligible for natural flood management grants.

# Wader Scrapes – What Are They & How Do I Make One?



Wader scrapes don't have to be in the middle of fields. They can create very good marginal habitats for wildlife if they are on the edge of an existing ditch. Fluctuating water levels in the ditch help to keep your scrape wet .

## Contacts

**Sussex Wildlife Trust (Wetlands Project)**

[www.sussexwildlifetrust.org.uk](http://www.sussexwildlifetrust.org.uk)

01273 497555

**Natural England**

0845 600 3078

[enquiries.southeast@naturalengland.org.uk](mailto:enquiries.southeast@naturalengland.org.uk)

**Wildcall Advice Line**

01273 494777

**RSPB Rotary Ditcher**

[www.rspb.org.uk/Images/technicalguidance\\_tcm9-258711.pdf](http://www.rspb.org.uk/Images/technicalguidance_tcm9-258711.pdf)

**Environment Agency**

Ask for Fisheries & Biodiversity or  
Land Drainage consent teams

03708 506506

[www.environment-agency.gov.uk](http://www.environment-agency.gov.uk)

## References & Further Reading

- **RSPB Farming for Wildlife:** Scrape creation for waders
- **Wildlife Trusts:** Wetland restoration manual
- **River Restoration Centre:** Manual of River Restoration Techniques
- **RSPB:** [www.rspb.org.uk/Images/Wader\\_scrapes\\_tcm9-255078.pdf](http://www.rspb.org.uk/Images/Wader_scrapes_tcm9-255078.pdf)
- **Open Space:** [www.openspace.gb.com/conservation-contracting/.../wader-scrapes](http://www.openspace.gb.com/conservation-contracting/.../wader-scrapes)

Sussex wetlands project promotes the sustainable management of rivers and the restoration of wetland habitats for people and wildlife

Copyright Sussex Wildlife Trust March 2013

All information contained within Sussex Wildlife Trust factsheets is to the best of our knowledge true and accurate at the time of printing. The Sussex Wildlife Trust will not accept any responsibility or liability for any losses or damage resulting from the advice given.

Registered Charity No. 207005. Registered in England. Company Number 698851