

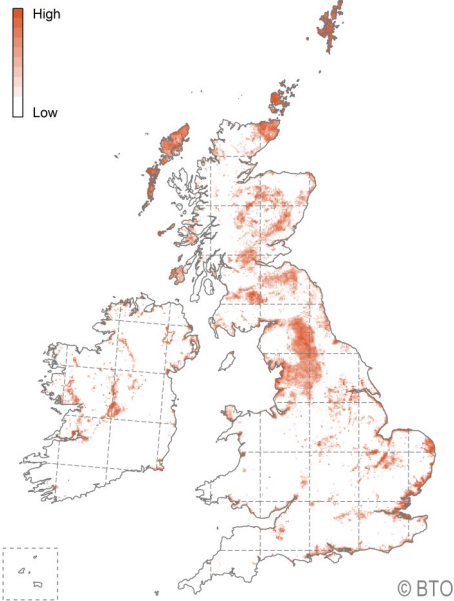


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LAND MANAGEMENT FOR WILDLIFE

REDSHANK (*Tringa totanus*)

Breeding Relative Abundance 2008-11



Breeding abundance map reproduced from Balmer et al 2013 Bird Atlas with permission from British Trust for Ornithology.



Chris Gomersall (rspb-images.com)

The redshank has a red bill and red legs, and shows white on its wings and tail in flight. They breed on wet grassland areas on upland and lowland farms, as well as on salt marshes. There has been a significant decline in redshank numbers in many areas of the UK. On farmland, the main reasons for this reduction have been the drainage of grassland together with the general intensification of grassland management and an increase in predation effects.

WHAT DO REDSHANK NEED?

Nesting habitat

Redshanks are most likely to be found in fields with a mosaic of short damp grassland for feeding, and grass or rush tussocks in which to nest. These features are often associated with the edges of temporary floods, or standing water. They like a short to medium sward with larger pools and ditch features.

In saltmarshes they are associated more with areas which are cattle grazed than sheep grazed as this regime encourages a diverse sward.

Food

Redshanks prefer to feed on insects along the edges of pools and ditches, and feed on wet grassland that holds shallow surface water or damp soil at least until June. On saltmarshes they eat surface invertebrates and probe into the top of the silty mud that saltmarsh forms on. They also feed on associated mudflats near the saltmarsh.

ANNUAL LIFECYCLE

	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
Coastal areas feed on invertebrates	■	■										
Return to breeding areas, feed on worms etc			■									
Main nesting period				■	■	■	■	■				
Return to wintering on the coast							■	■	■	■	■	■

HOW CAN I ENCOURAGE REDSHANK?

Nesting habitat

Pasture

- Retain and restore wet pasture.
- Extensively graze to provide a mosaic of short, damp grassland (5–15 cm high), with some taller vegetation/ tussocks of sedges, rushes and grasses for nesting through the breeding season.
- Aim to go into the nesting season with the sward structure above so grazing can be the minimum required to maintain this structure. Graze with quiet stock, used to their surroundings.
- Cattle are often preferred, as they create a favourable tussocky vegetation structure, but sheep, horses or a combination of livestock types can also be used effectively.
- Avoid pastures becoming overgrown with rushes. Redshanks benefit from small, scattered stands of rush, but levels above 30% cover are detrimental to both bird numbers and productive grazing (see advisory leaflet on rush management).

Meadows

- Redshanks sometimes nest in meadows, particularly damp, unimproved fields. Redshanks need a month to incubate their eggs and chicks fledge a further month after hatching. Redshanks move their newly hatched chicks to insect-rich feeding areas such as the edge of standing water, ditches or wet flushes. Leaving such areas uncut to provide a haven for unfledged chicks may be an effective compromise.
- Retain and restore traditional hay meadows.

Mechanical operations

- Mechanical operations, for example muck spreading and harrowing, should be timed

before or after the breeding season in areas used by redshanks.

Tree cover

- Redshanks generally avoid nesting in areas close to tall tree and shrub cover. Avoid planting trees close to areas used by nesting redshanks.

Feeding habitat

- Retain boggy ground as this provides suitable feeding areas. Create wet areas by blocking drains and small ditches in suitable areas. It may be necessary to raise water levels using structures such as sluices.
- Existing ditches should be re-profiled to have at least one side with a slope no greater than 45° and pulling occasional sections back to provide a very gentle slope.
- Shallow open water provides vital invertebrate-rich feeding areas, particularly later in the breeding season, in May and June. Digging shallow surface drains or shallow scrapes can create this (see advisory leaflet on scrape creation for waders).

Predator management

- Redshank nests and chicks are vulnerable to predation when there are only a few pairs on a site.
- Monitoring to assess the main predators is essential to understand the best control mechanism
- On some sites predator fencing may be a solution, particularly from mammalian predators
- Legal control of some predators may be necessary for breeding success

KEY POINTS

- Extensively graze wet grasslands to provide a mosaic of tall and short vegetation
- Provide standing water into June to provide insect rich feeding areas for the chicks
- Predator management may be necessary on some sites

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