

Drain and Ditch Management



Drains and ditches can support a rich variety of wildlife, including Otters, Water Voles, fish, amphibians, birds, invertebrates and numerous aquatic plants. They also form important corridors, enabling the movement of species between habitats and through the landscape.

The biodiversity value of drains and ditches is greatly influenced by their management and that of the surrounding land.

Drains and ditches can be managed under Environmental Stewardship.

Managing Drains and Ditches with Wildlife

In-channel Vegetation

- The optimum time for in-channel management is late summer or early autumn, to avoid the bird breeding season and when water levels are low
- Management of vegetation is best done in sections, on a rotation, to help maintain a range of habitats
- Undertake management from one bank side only, or for only half of its length/height in any one year
- Maintain a fringe of aquatic vegetation at the base of one or both banks, which maintains habitat and helps bank stability
- Spread cut vegetation on the bank top, not on the banks

Bank sides

- Cut banks on a rotation to create a range of habitats
- Avoid cutting between March and end of August
- Manage trees, scrub and hedgerows on bank tops to avoid shading of large sections of ditch

Water Quality

- Create buffer strips adjacent to drains and ditches to help reduce the amount of agricultural chemicals and nutrients that end up in the water
- Use of Local Environment Risk Assessment for Pesticides (LERAP) help keep chemicals away from the water
- Avoid spreading manure/slurry within 10m of drains and ditches
- Clear water and a good range of aquatic plants and invertebrates indicate good water quality



For further information please contact: