ACRES Breeding Waders SCORECARD TIP SHEET

This scorecard should be assigned within the breeding wader hotspots OR in other areas where there is evidence of breeding waders being present between March and July.

Suitable fields will generally have an open aspect and include semi-improved grazed or mown grasslands, including machair, rushy pastures and peatlands, often with wet features.

These fields can support Curlew, Snipe, Lapwing and/or Redshank.

Lapwing may also breed on improved grasslands in open areas.

TIPS Positive indicators may occur throughout the field and may be sparse or found growing in clumps.

In order to adequately survey the field plot, walk a "W" throughout. Use the plant identification key to identify the plants encountered during this walk.

Note the plant leaves, as not all species may be in flower during the assessment.

During the walk, ensure to cover a selection of vegetation types and structures, such as slopes, hollows and hammocks.

Target any obvious potential problem spots e.g. access points, roads/tracks, areas adjoining coniferous plantations, water crossings.

It is essential to look around as you walk to get a feel for the wider areas – to estimate the overall grazing level, proportion and type of scrub, etc.

A4 Vegetation structure for breeding waders: Sward height

Generally waders require a short or mixed sward with a frequent distribution of tussocks. A uniformly short sward is preferred by Lapwings, while a varied sward of short and medium heights is preferred by other species such as Redshank, Curlew and Snipe. Waders will generally avoid nesting in swards exceeding 15cm in height as the long grass can obscure their view of predators.

Poor/long: (>15cm) at least 70% of field is mostly tall vegetation. This can occur if the site is undergrazed and the sward becomes lodged/ rank.

Moderate/short: (<5cm) at least 70% of the sward is short, with occasional patches of tall vegetation .

High/mosaic: at least 70% of the sward is a mosaic of short (5cm or less) and medium (5-15cm) length. This is highly suitable for breeding waders.

B Wet features and hydrology

An integral part of suitable habitat for breeding waders is the presence of 'wet features'. They are typically drains, pools and river margins. They are also naturally low-lying areas where wet flushes occur when the water table is high, and areas of damp ground (shallow depressions or low permeability soil) with an open vegetation structure.

The first two below are good quality wet features. Both have some shallow open water, with muddy, wet and bare patches. The surrounding ground slopes gently towards the feature. The third is a poor wet feature - the steep banks will be dangerous to foraging chicks and there is no vegetated wet area, essential for invertebrates.

A6 Combined cover of all large rushes

The amount and distribution of rush (generally soft rush) can impact on the suitability of a site for nesting waders.

Low levels of rush cover are beneficial because some species use rush tussocks for nesting and cover. However, infestation of rush is a common problem.

As a rule, waders prefer rush cover of less than 30% of the field; more than this will reduce the value of the field for nesting waders.

Achieving the most favorable rush coverage can greatly improve the score of the field.

1. Assess whether rush cover is mainly in dense clumps or is sparser and more open in structure.
2. Decode which rush cover is dominant and select either A6a OR A6b.
3. Assess level of occurrence. Is it in scattered patches or confined to one area, or be abundant throughout the field?

Dense rush: mainly heavy clumps.

Sparse rush: lighter clumps or fewer stems.

C7 Machinery operations 15th March - 30th June

As breeding waders nest on the ground, machinery operations can destroy nests and young. For this reason, it is ***essential that NO machinery operations are undertaken from mid-March to late June***. Evidence of this will significantly impact the overall score.

Machinery operations identified.	-60
No machinery operations identified.	10

ACRES Agri-Climate Rural Environment Scheme

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C4-C6 Scrub & Trees

Adult waders normally avoid nesting near scrub or trees, as these obscure their view of predators. They also provide perching posts and nesting places for corvids and cover for foxes and other mammalian predators which take the nests and young of breeding waders.

The spread of scrub into open habitats such as grasslands where waders nest, also generally indicates sub-optimal grazing levels and requires action.

The aim is to encourage limiting the spread of scrub in fields where waders are nesting.

The cumulative cover of spreading immature and established scrub proportional to the field area should be used to score the extent.

Scrub species include bramble, blackthorn, whitethorn, hazel, gorse and willow. Trees relate to any mature trees, both native and non-native.

C4: Spreading immature scrub is the recent establishment and growth of new shrubby vegetation. In the early stages, when it is <1m in height, the impact will be small. However, if left unchecked, it will become increasingly problematic.

C5: More established scrub is generally >1m in height and is more problematic and may be impacting breeding success through increased predation risk.

C6: Trees >1m, including native species, should be removed to create an open aspect and help reduce predation risk to nests and chicks.

For further clarification consult Farmland Identification Key

Positive Indicator species

1. Bedstraws & stitchworts
2. Birds-foot-trefoil
3. Eyebrights
4. Forget-me-nots *(all)*
5. Knapweeds
6. Lady's Smock *(Cuckoo flower)*
7. Lesser spearwort
8. Louseworts *(Common & Marsh)*
9. Marsh cinquefoil
10. Marsh marigold
11. Mints *(all)*
12. Orchids
13. Oxeye daisy
14. Ragged robin
15. Scabious *(Devil's-bit & Field)*
16. Sedges
17. Selfheal & Bugle
18. Small Rushes *(Woodrush Spike rush, Heath rush)*
19. Sorrel *(Sheep & Common)*
20. Tormentil *(Common & English)*
21. Vetches & vetchlings
22. Violets *(all)*, Harebell
23. Wild thyme
24. Yellow composites *(Cats ears, Hawkweeds, Hawkbits & Goats-beard)* - *not dandelion*
25. Yellow rattle *(Hay rattle)*