

Identifying upland wet grassland:

existing and potential value of upland rough and semi-improved grasslands for breeding waders.

The Farm Environment Plan (FEP) is an essential part of an application process for Higher Level Stewardship. The FEP should record the presence and condition of all environmental features which may benefit from HLS management. See ES website www.defra.gov.uk/schemes/es for details and other guidance notes in this series.

This guidance note contains two keys. The first is to help identify areas which currently meet the definition of the FEP feature 'Habitat for breeding waders – Upland' (G14) and this key is intended to support the definition found in Part 4 of the FEP Handbook.

The second key helps to identify upland rough and semi-improved grassland sites that may have potential to become habitat for breeding waders.

These keys will help determine which areas would be suitable for the HLS options HL7 and HL8 (Maintenance and Restoration of Rough Grazing for Birds, respectively). However, these options can also be used where there are other important breeding birds other than waders, such as twite, ring ouzel or black grouse. These species are regionally specific and will be identified in the regional Joint Character Area (JCA) targeting statement. We have not produced keys to help identify habitats suitable for these other species.

Details of existing features should be given in Part 2 of the FEP (Features Data Sheet) and areas identified as having potential value should be recorded in Part 3 (Features at the Farm Scale).

Guidance on using the Keys

Key 1 The main criterion for identifying existing sites is the presence of certain breeding birds. However, bird records will not always be available and visits will not necessarily take place at the right time to compile records. Therefore, the second section of the key concentrates on the known habitat preferences of breeding waders (based on scientific evidence). The land-owner or manager will need to answer the questions in this section. The key also outlines the conditions that confer

Identifying upland wet grassland

particular value on a site and RDS Advisers will take these into account when drawing up an agreement.

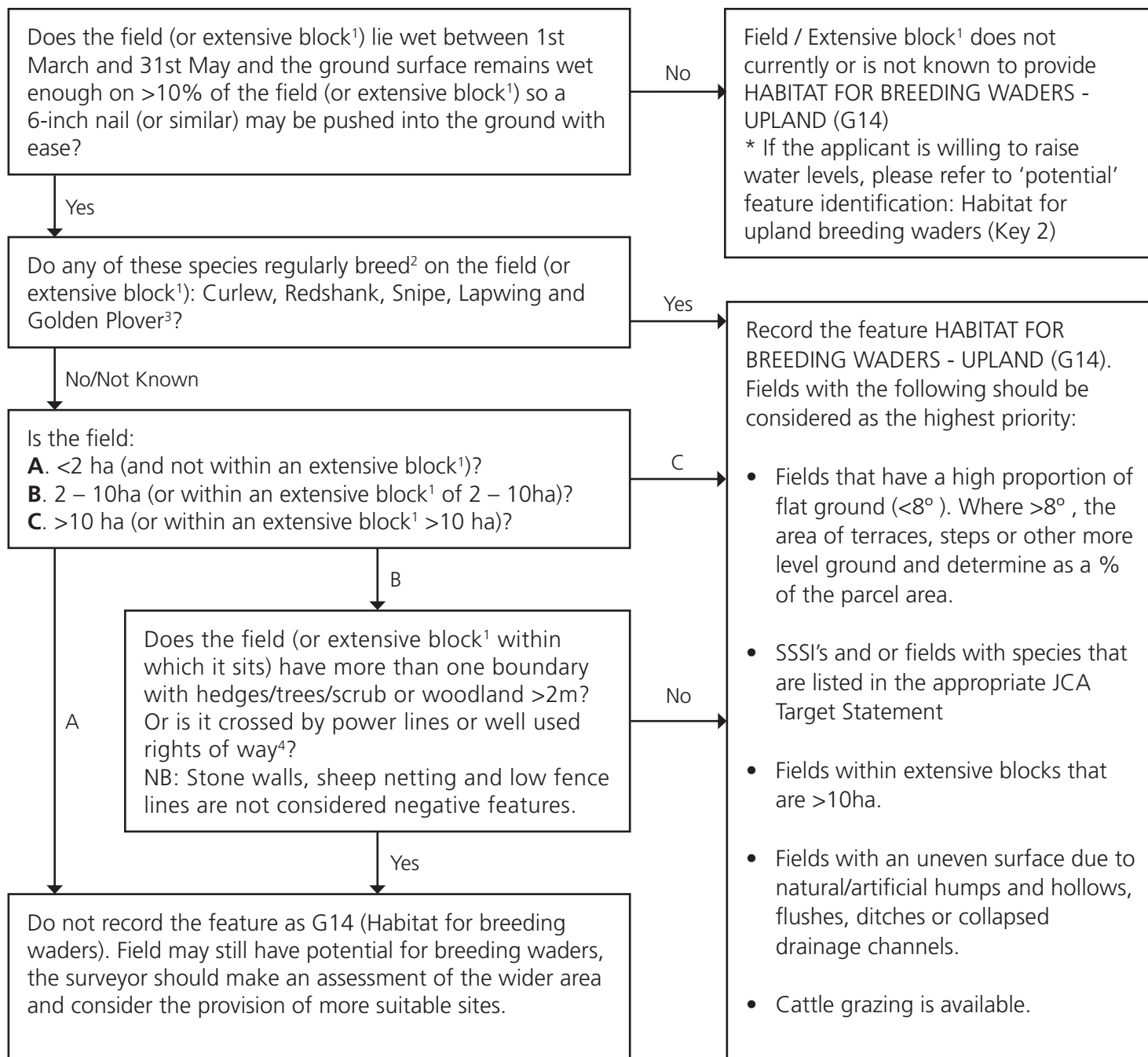
Key 2 looks at the potential value of an existing grassland (where water levels are naturally high or could be enhanced or controlled). It uses the intrinsic properties of the field and may require consultation with the Environment Agency in order to answer questions about water supply and management.

You should note that these keys are for guidance only and any one key cannot reflect all the subtleties of local variation. Therefore, you may vary from the guidance in exceptional circumstances and explain your reasoning on the FEP form. You should also note that identification of a feature is a separate process to determining an HLS option. Different regions will have different priorities and the final decision on the scope and nature of the management option lies with the RDS Adviser. In lowland valleys in the Less Favoured Area it may be appropriate to use the FEP Guidance on identifying lowland wet grassland. But you should consult your RDS Adviser before recommending lowland wet grassland options within the LFA.

Identifying upland wet grassland

GRASSLAND KEY (UPLAND ENCLOSED WET GRASSLAND) - KEY 1

To identify the feature G14 (Habitat for upland breeding waders) and to determine eligibility for entry to grassland option HL7 (Maintenance of Rough Grazing for Birds).



¹ Extensive block means an open block of rough grassland or moorland fringe of which the field is part, provided that the block is not intersected by large scale changes in topography, or by hedges, woodland blocks or other internal structures (excluding low wire fences, stone walls or in-field barns).

² 'Regularly breed' means that a bird has held a territory for at least one month in the previous year or in at least two of the last five years, provided there has not been a major change in management since the last observation.

³ Details of species records should be provided. Sites that support only lapwing are likely to be given a lower priority than those supporting the other species, which have more exacting habitat requirements.

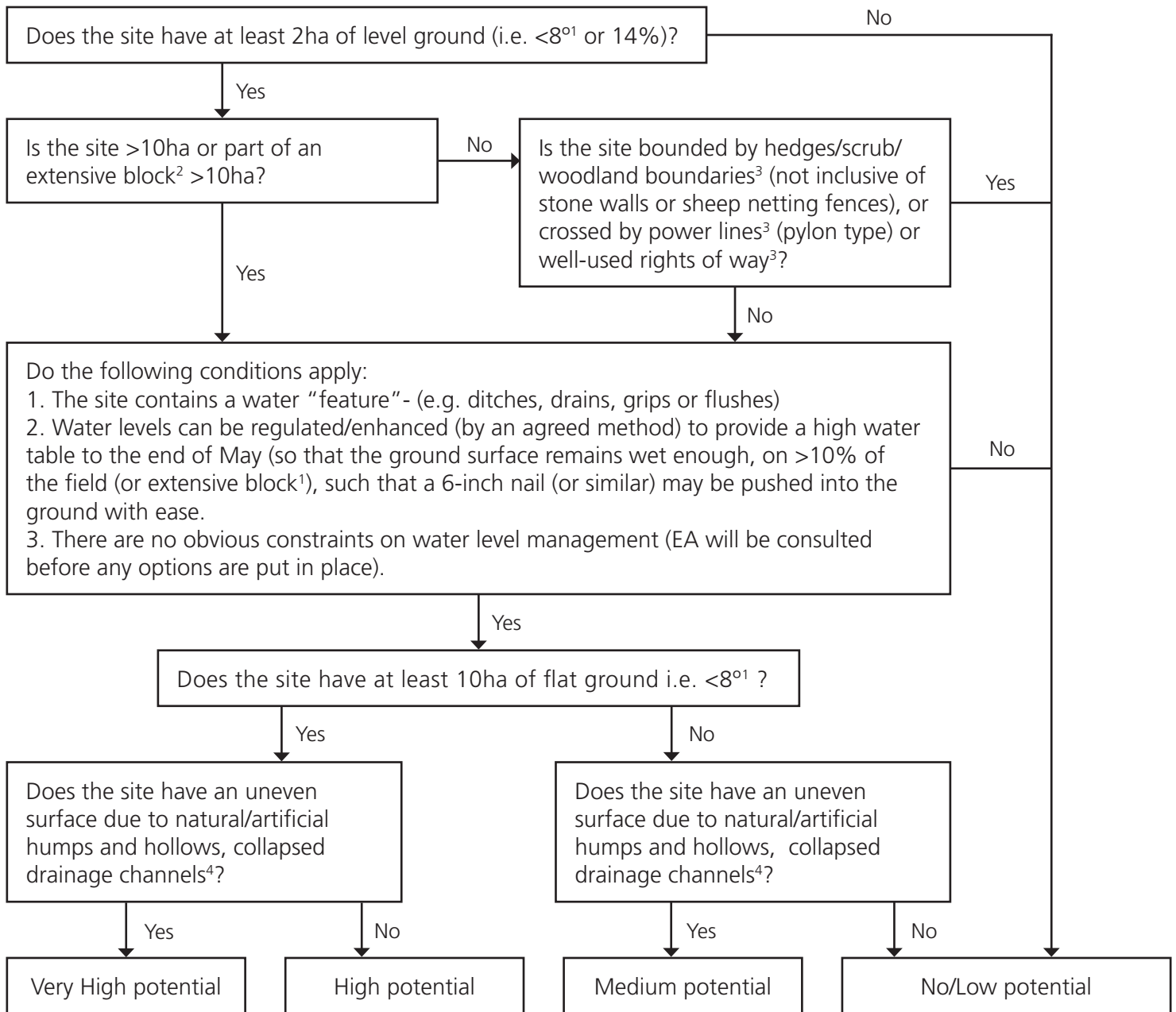
⁴ Field scale (>2ha) can negate some negative boundary issues as central areas can be used for nesting. E.g. the larger the parcel, the less impact negative features would have.

⁵ potential for nesting birds is greatly increased by flatness of ground. Use the following measure as a guide:
>50% of the field flat (0-8°) = good potential, 26-49% = medium potential, 0-25% = poor potential NB: depends on size of the field as e.g. 25% of a 20ha field = 5ha of flat ground.

Identifying upland wet grassland

GRASSLAND KEY (UPLAND ENCLOSED GRASSLAND BREEDING WADER) - KEY 2

To identify **POTENTIAL** for feature G14 (Habitat for Upland breeding waders) and to determine eligibility for entry to grassland option HL8 (Restoration of rough grassland for birds).



NB: Use following issues to prioritise:

- i. Availability of bird records.
- ii. Proportion of site that has very high or high potential (coverage of flat ground, field wetness).
- iii. Proximity to other breeding wader habitat.
- iv. Species likely to be attracted (dependent on vegetation structure).
- v. Availability of cattle grazing.

¹ Potential for nesting birds is greatly increased by flatness of ground. Use the following measure as a guide: >50% of the field flat (0° - 8°) = good potential, 26-49% = medium potential, 0-25% = poor potential. NB: depends on size of the field as e.g. 25% of a 20ha field = 5ha of flat ground.

² Extensive block means an open block of rough grassland or moorland fringe of which the field is part, provided that the block is not intersected by large scale changes in topography, or by hedges, woodland blocks or other internal structures (excluding low wire fences, stone walls or in-field barns).

³ Field scale (>2ha) can negate some negative boundary issues as central areas can be used for nesting. E.g. the larger the parcel, the less impact negative features could have.

⁴ Features which are dependent on soil type could facilitate retaining surface water.