



Lowland livestock farms for breeding waders



Andy Hay (rspb-images.com)



George McCarthy (rspb-images.com)

Lapwings prefer to nest on bare ground, but redshanks choose rough sward.

LOWLAND LIVESTOCK FARMS FOR BREEDING WADERS

From the tumbling display of lapwings over a newly cultivated field to the characteristic call of curlews across grasslands, waders are a familiar and much-loved feature of our farmland. Worryingly, numbers are declining in Scotland for a range of reasons. We are asking if you can do your bit to help ensure that we don't lose these wonderful birds from our countryside.

This worksheet aims to show a number of techniques that allow you, as a farmer, to improve the chances for nesting waders to breed successfully on your land, at minimal cost to yourself.

Here are some immediate suggestions about what you can do if you have birds in a field that you are about to operate on. Two species of breeding wader, lapwings and oystercatchers, are commonly associated with short grass swards or patches of bare ground, together with new re-seeds. This choice of habitat makes their nests susceptible to damage or destruction by farming operations. Two other species, redshanks and curlews, often occur where the grass sward structure is rough and/or where there are pools of water. These birds nest in tussocky vegetation. Some of these wetland patches are not large (eg 10 m by 40 m) and can be within larger

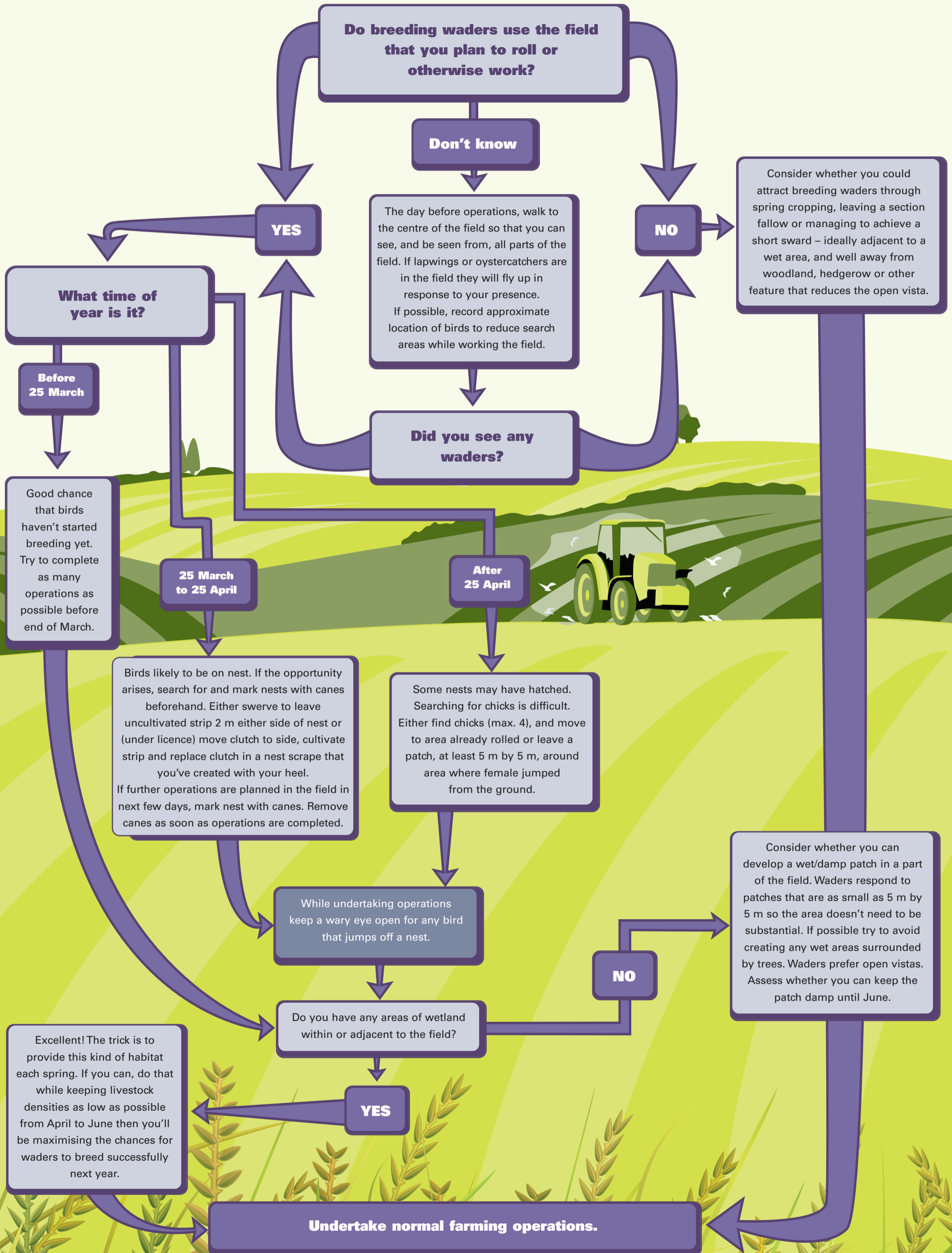
grassland areas. This is also likely to be the kind of site that lapwing and oystercatcher chicks move to once they have hatched. Minimising operations in these areas would be ideal.

You can determine whether you have any waders nesting in a field that you plan to cultivate by walking to the centre of the field looking for any birds taking off from the ground. Lapwings and oystercatchers will tend to fly when you get to within 200 m of the nesting area. Therefore, as long as you can see all parts of the field, you should be able to determine whether there are birds present. If the birds are sitting on eggs they will fly away to an

adjacent field and return 20-50 minutes later to resume incubating. If they have chicks, they are more likely to fly overhead, calling anxiously. You should ideally walk the field on the evening before you plan operations because if birds are sitting they have plenty of time to get back on the nest before you start working the field. When you are in the tractor working the field the birds will sit much more tightly, often not flying off until you are 5-10 m away from the nest. So, by checking the evening before you know where, in the field, you need to be particularly vigilant for locating birds sitting on nests when you are on the tractor.




OPEN UP FOR MORE ADVICE

WADER-FRIENDLY FARMING ON LOWLAND LIVESTOCK FARMS



WADER-FRIENDLY FARMING

MANAGEMENT CALENDAR FOR LOWLAND LIVESTOCK FARMS

Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
	<p>ACTION: Try to complete all machinery operations particularly in all large, open fields</p> <p>BENEFITS: Minimises disturbance of future nests</p>		<p>ACTION: If machinery operations are necessary, try to complete within 10 days (then leave for six weeks). Consider marking or moving nests (under licence) during operations</p> <p>BENEFITS: Minimises disturbance of any replacement nests</p>					 <p style="writing-mode: vertical-rl; transform: rotate(180deg);">Andy Hayl (rspb-images.com)</p>			
 <p style="writing-mode: vertical-rl; transform: rotate(180deg);">Sue Tranter (rspb-images.com)</p>			<p>ACTION: Try to maintain short sward, while minimising stocking densities on fields where waders are nesting</p> <p>BENEFITS: Maintains appropriate sward structure while reducing accidental nest losses to trampling</p>	<p>ACTION: Introduce light summer grazing, ideally using cattle*</p> <p>BENEFITS: Maintains an open sward valuable for adults to re-nest and as chick feeding areas</p>	<p>ACTION: Introduce sufficient late summer and/or winter grazing to produce a short sward (circa 5 cm) with tussocks for nesting and hiding</p> <p>BENEFITS: Graze the site sufficiently to provide vital nest sites in the following spring</p>						
			<p>ACTION: Consider spring-sown arable fodder crops (not maize) or whole crop silage*</p> <p>BENEFITS: Provides valuable nest sites for lapwings and oystercatchers</p>					 <p style="writing-mode: vertical-rl; transform: rotate(180deg);">Andy Hayl (rspb-images.com)</p>			
			<p>ACTION: Try to maintain some damp areas or wet flushes</p> <p>BENEFITS: Provides valuable insect food for adults and chicks</p>								

This leaflet is supported by the following organisations:



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*There may be opportunities to support these management practices through agri-environment schemes.

The Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB) is a registered charity: England and Wales no. 207076, Scotland no. SC037654.

For further information about improving conditions for farmland waders, contact the RSPB on 0131 311 6500 or via waderfriendlyfarming@rspb.org.uk 770-1052-09-10