

REVISED GUIDELINES FOR SELECTION OF BIOLOGICAL HERITAGE SITES (2006)

(These Guidelines relating to birds replace those in the Biological Heritage Sites Guidelines for Site Selection, published in 1998 and those approved and adopted by the Lancashire County Council Scheme of Delegation 6 July 2005)

7.5 BIRDS

Introduction

The Biological Heritage Sites Guidelines (LCC 1998) included guidance for the selection of sites for bird interest based upon the best available data at that time. However, the publication of the status of European birds (Tucker G.M. & Heath M.F. 1994), national data on the status of birds (Gregory R.D. 2002) and systematic information on breeding birds in Lancashire (Pyefinch R. and Golborn P. 2001) together with subsequent surveys or published information, provided the basis for an update and review of the bird guidelines.

The new bird guidelines more or less follow the same format as those published in 1998 but have been modified to take into account European, national and county changes. At a national level the Red and Amber Lists (Gregory R.D. 2002) provide a link with UK Biodiversity Action Plan priority bird species. The identification of important sites for such species is an important contribution to the delivery of UK and Lancashire biodiversity action.

In the 1998 guidelines the abbreviation (Bi) prefaces each of the bird guidelines, in order to prevent confusion this is replaced by (Av) in the new guidelines.

Guideline (Av8) has undergone the most significant change. In the 1998 publication the SSSI guidelines were followed with only the thresholds changed to recognise county rather than national status. This had the disadvantage of including many species that were never likely to occur as wild breeding species in Lancashire. In these guidelines, Pyefinch R. and Golborn P. (2001), has been used to develop more appropriate assemblages of species for Lancashire habitats.

There is no equivalent to guideline (Bi8) in the new guidelines, as the particular survey and report on which the guideline was based, has not been repeated. In addition new guidelines under (Av8) are intended to cover reservoirs and other water-bodies.

Most Biological Heritage Sites selected by these guidelines comprise discrete areas of semi-natural or artificial habitats. However, one particular guideline (AvW) deals with over-wintering wildfowl and involves considerable tracts of land used for intensive agricultural production. Whilst these sites reflect a different kind of relationship between the bird species concerned and their environment, the purpose of the guideline is to recognise the international importance of flocks of wildfowl and waders, principally Pink-footed Goose, Whooper Swan and Bewick's Swan. Considering that Lancashire supports over 10% of the world population of the Pink-footed Goose, the international obligation and the conservation importance of these areas needs to be recognised. The wildfowl and wader sites are mapped differently than in other Biological Heritage Sites in order to maintain a distinction.

Application (all bird guidelines)

For the purposes of these guidelines, acceptable evidence of breeding by bird species includes: the presence of a territorial male; repeated sightings of the species concerned in suitable habitat during the breeding season; pair behaviour during the breeding season; birds seen nest-building or carrying nest-material; birds seen carrying food or faecal sacs; fledgling birds seen; or an occupied nest found. These guidelines apply to important sites for other essential activities by breeding birds, i.e. feeding areas where these are an integral part of the breeding sites and lek sites. However, it is not intended that these guidelines should be applied to domestic, industrial or agricultural buildings, whether or not they are in use.

Account should also be taken of the fact that birds are generally far more mobile than other animals; many show well defined, but sometimes complex, patterns of migration. This means that sites other than breeding sites are also essential to their well being. Such areas may include those regularly used for major pre- or post-breeding gatherings, migration staging posts, moulting and during different stages of the winter.

In applying these revised guidelines reference should be made to Part A: Introduction of the Biological Heritage Sites Guidelines (LCC 1998) and particularly to paragraphs 3.11 to 3.16 covering species guidelines.

Justification

More recently obtained, systematic data is available on the occurrence and distribution of birds in Lancashire than for other species-groups (Pyefinch R. and Golborn P. 2001). Moreover, Lancashire's birds are, as a species-group, of national and international importance, principally by virtue of the breeding raptor populations in the uplands, rare breeding species of lowland wetlands and the huge flocks of wintering and passage-migrant waders and wildfowl in coastal locations. Such factors, together with the need to protect breeding as well as non-breeding sites (see above), mean that the guidelines for site selection on the basis of birds are organised somewhat differently to those for most other animal species-groups.

Av1

Any site which regularly supports a wild breeding population of a nationally rare species.

Application

Nationally rare breeding species are defined as: all UK Red List and Amber List species (or which qualify for inclusion on the Red List), which have been identified as rare breeders in Gregory R.D. *et al* (2002): all SPEC1 species; SPEC 2/3 species identified in view of a small breeding population size or restricted distribution in Tucker G.M. and Heath M.F. (1994). All sites regularly supporting such species should be identified. The species to which this guideline should be applied in Lancashire include:

- Black-necked Grebe
- Bittern
- Spoonbill
- Little Egret
- Pintail
- Garganey
- Honey Buzzard
- Osprey
- Red Kite
- Marsh Harrier
- Spotted Crake
- Ruff
- Black-tailed Godwit
- Mediterranean Gull
- Black Redstart
- Savi's Warbler
- Marsh Warbler
- Firecrest
- Common Rosefinch

Justification

Britain has a national and, in many cases, an international obligation to conserve these species and their habitats.

Av2

Any site which regularly supports a wild breeding population of a rare Lancashire breeding bird species.

Application

Rare Lancashire breeding bird species are those recorded from five or fewer tetrads/sites in Lancashire. All sites regularly supporting such species should be identified. The species to which this guideline should be presently applied include:

- Pochard
- Eider
- Red-breasted Merganser
- Black Grouse
- Quail
- Hen Harrier
- Goshawk
- Hobby
- Water Rail
- Avocet
- Great Black-backed Gull
- Arctic Tern
- Common Tern
- Turtle Dove
- Nightjar
- Bearded Tit
- Crossbill
- Hawfinch

Justification

Whilst not as rare nationally as breeding species as those under Av1, these birds are rare as breeding species in Lancashire, in some cases with very small populations. A Lancashire rare breeding bird is taken as occurring in 5 or fewer tetrads or sites in the County i.e. <0.6% of tetrads, a recommended threshold in line with UK Biodiversity Action Plan (BAP) Guidance, *Evaluating priorities and setting targets for habitats and species*. Guidance Note 4. UK Local Issues Advisory Group (UK LIAG. 1997). The *Atlas of the Breeding Birds of Lancashire and North Merseyside* (Pyefinch R. and Golborn P. 2001) together with subsequent surveys or published information has been used as the base-line data.

Av3 Any site which regularly supports a significant breeding population of a scarce Lancashire breeding bird.

Application

Scarce Lancashire breeding bird species are those recorded from 32 or fewer tetrads/sites in Lancashire. Sites regularly meeting the qualifying threshold should be identified. The species, together with their individual threshold population size, to which this guideline should be presently applied include:

- Grey Heron (5 occupied nests)
- Teal (1 pair)
- Gadwall (2 pairs)
- Shoveler (2 pairs)
- Merlin (1 pair)
- Peregrine (1 pair)
- Little Ringed Plover (2 pairs)
- Ringed Plover (2 pairs)
- Golden Plover (2 pairs)
- Dunlin (1 pair)
- Long-eared Owl (2 pairs)
- Short-eared Owl (1 pair)
- Lesser Spotted Woodpecker (1 pair)
- Yellow Wagtail (2 pairs)
- Ring Ouzel (1 pair)
- Wood Warbler (1 pair)
- Willow Tit (1 pair)
- Raven (1 pair)
- Twite (1 pair)

Justification

A Lancashire scarce breeding bird is taken as occurring in 32 or fewer tetrads or sites in the County i.e. <4.0% of tetrads, a recommended threshold in line with UK Biodiversity Action Plan (BAP) Guidance, *Evaluating priorities and setting targets for habitats and species*. Guidance Note 4 UK Local Issues Advisory Group (UK LIAG. 1997). The species listed and their thresholds come from survey work undertaken for the *Atlas of the Breeding Birds of Lancashire and North Merseyside*

(Pyefinch R. and Golborn P. 2001) up dated by subsequent surveys or published information. Populations of these species at the minimum thresholds are considered significant in a Lancashire context.

Av4 Any site which regularly supports a significant and regular wild breeding population in Lancashire of certain UK bird species suffering a rapid decline.

Application

This guideline applies to UK BAP priority species or those included on or qualifying for the “Red List” in Gregory R.D. *et al* (2002) by reason of suffering a rapid national population decline of more than 50% in the last 25 years. Consideration may be given to any site which regularly supports a significant proportion of the Lancashire population, or which represents a significant extension of the range of the species concerned in the county. Significant importance in Lancashire is defined as 0.5% or more of the county population and the individual thresholds have been calculated on this basis. This guideline should be applied to the following species:

- Grey Partridge (12 pairs)
- Skylark (40 pairs)
- Song Thrush (25 pairs)
- Grasshopper Warbler (2pair)
- Spotted Flycatcher (3 pairs)
- Marsh Tit (2 pairs)
- Starling (75 pairs)
- House Sparrow (175 pairs)
- Tree Sparrow (5 pairs)
- Linnet (25 pairs)
- Bullfinch (9 pairs)
- Yellowhammer (5 pairs)
- Reed Bunting (10 pairs)
- Corn Bunting (5 pairs)

A few of these species regularly use man-made habitats. However, this guideline is not generally intended to apply to domestic dwellings, or gardens, or to industrial, or agricultural buildings.

This guideline may also be applied to register the presence of one or more of these species on a site qualifying under another guideline, even when the population, in terms of the qualifying threshold, is not considered significant.

Justification

These UK BAP priority species that are included on the Red List in Gregory R.D. *et al* (2002) are species of high conservation concern whose national, or international populations, or ranges have rapidly declined recently or historically. Some are of global conservation concern. Whilst a number of species from the Red List included under this guideline are not necessarily rare in Lancashire they are nonetheless species for which there is a national or international responsibility and whose populations should be taken into account in the site selection process.

Av5 Any site which regularly supports 0.5% or more of the total wild British breeding population of any native bird species.

Application

Sites identified under this guideline may include habitats or features used for activities associated with breeding including feeding and display.

Justification

The figure of 1% of the national population has become the accepted standard for identifying nationally important sites for those bird species, which gather in large numbers at relatively few sites. Similarly a number of non-statutory site systems have used a figure of 0.5% as being indicative of an important site at County level; this figure has been adopted in these guidelines.

Av6 Any site which regularly supports 0.5% or more of the British population of any wild species outside the breeding season.

Application

Sites identified under this guideline comprise habitats and features which regularly support significant numbers of non-breeding birds. They may include roosting, over-wintering, passage or other sites not used for breeding. Population sizes of most wildfowl and wader species are given in the Annual Report of the Wetland Birds Survey (WeBS) published by the Wildfowl and Wetlands Trust and the British Trust for Ornithology; whilst a range of journals and publications give population sizes for other species.

Justification

Such sites are important for the conservation of these species outside the breeding season and/or for juvenile non-breeding individuals. The figure of 1% of the national population has become the accepted standard for identifying nationally important sites for those bird species which gather in large numbers at relatively few sites. Similarly a number of non-statutory site systems have used a figure of 0.5% as being indicative of an important site at County level; this figure has been adopted in these guidelines.

Av7

Any site which regularly supports a significant non-breeding population in Lancashire of a bird species not included in Guideline Av6.

Application

This Guideline may be applied to any site which regularly supports a significant proportion of the County's population of certain bird species when roosting, over-wintering, on passage or at other times outside the breeding season. Roosting and over-wintering populations should normally occupy a site for a minimum of six weeks per annum whilst passage sites must, by necessity, be for a shorter period. At present, this guideline has been applied to the following:

Bittern	1 or more birds;
Long-eared Owl	3 or more birds;
Hirundine flocks (swallows and martins)	300 or more birds.

Consideration may be given to other species in the future as adequate data become available.

Justification

Such sites are important for the conservation of these species outside the breeding season and/or for juvenile non-breeding individuals.

Av8

Any site which supports a breeding wild bird assemblage with a total score, calculated from the values in Table 6, which equals or exceeds the threshold site index values shown in that Table.

Application

The general note on definitions of terms used in bird guidelines applies here. Site boundaries should include land used for activities associated with breeding.

Justification

This guideline is intended to identify important assemblages of different bird species, characteristic of particular habitats, which are significant in a county context. The bird species listed under each habitat-type, and their scores, have been based on the *Guidelines for the selection of biological SSSIs* (NCC 1989), but have been modified according to information on distribution and population size in Lancashire from *Atlas of the Breeding Birds of Lancashire and North Merseyside* (Pyefinch R. and Golborn P. 2001) updated by subsequent surveys or published information. Threshold site-index values have been revised and set at a level (between half and two thirds the SSSI threshold) to reflect County significance.

Table 6 Breeding Bird Assemblages of Different Habitats (See Guideline Av8)

a) Sand-Dunes and Saltmarshes					
Spoonbill	6	Black-tailed Godwit	5	Short-eared Owl	3
Shelduck	2	Curlew	2	Whinchat	2
Eider	2	Redshank	2	Stonechat	2
Oystercatcher	2	Mediterranean Gull	5	Wheatear	2
Avocet	4	Black-headed Gull	1	Grasshopper Warbler	3
Ringed Plover	3	Herring Gull	1	Sedge Warbler	1
Lapwing	1	Great Black-backed Gull	3	Linnet	1
Dunlin	3	Common Tern	3	Reed Bunting	1
Ruff	5	Arctic Tern	3	Corn Bunting	2
Snipe	2	Cuckoo	2	Grey Partridge	
Threshold Value: 14					

b) Lowland Damp Grassland					
Mute Swan	2	Corncrake	5	Redshank	2
Shelduck	2	Oystercatcher	2	Cuckoo	2
Gadwall	4	Avocet	4	Short-eared Owl	3
Teal	3	Lapwing	1	Yellow Wagtail	3
Pintail	5	Ruff	5	Whinchat	2
Garganey	5	Snipe	2	Grasshopper Warbler	3
Shoveler	4	Black-tailed Godwit	5	Sedge Warbler	1
Marsh Harrier	5	Curlew	2	Reed Bunting	1
Quail	5	Grey Partridge	1		
Threshold Value: 10					

c) Lowland Fen					
Little Grebe	2	Spotted Crake	6	Grasshopper Warbler	3
Bittern	5	Water Rail	3	Sedge Warbler	1
Gadwall	4	Moorhen	1	Reed Warbler	2
Teal	3	Coot	1	Marsh Warbler	5
Garganey	5	Snipe	2	Bearded Tit	4
Shoveler	4	Cuckoo	2	Reed Bunting	1
Pochard	4	Whinchat	2		
Marsh Harrier	5	Cetti's Warbler	4		
Threshold Value: 10					

d) Lowland Open Waters and their Margins

Little Grebe	2	Tufted Duck	2	Black-headed Gull	1
Great Crested Grebe	2	Red-breasted Merganser	3	Common Tern	3
Black-necked Grebe	5	Marsh Harrier	5	Cuckoo	2
Bittern	5	Osprey	5	Kingfisher	3
Grey Heron	3	Spotted Crake	6	Yellow Wagtail	3
Spoonbill	6	Water Rail	3	Grey Wagtail	2
Mute Swan	2	Moorhen	1	Cetti's Warbler	4
Shelduck	2	Coot	1	Grasshopper Warbler	3
Gadwall	3	Avocet	4	Sedge Warbler	1
Teal	3	Little Ringed Plover	3	Reed Warbler	2
Pintail	5	Ringed Plover	3	Marsh Warbler	5
Garganey	5	Snipe	2	Bearded Tit	4
Shoveler	4	Redshank	2	Reed Bunting	1
Pochard	4	Mediterranean Gull	5		

Threshold Value: 19**e) Upland Waters and their Margins**

Little Grebe	2	Osprey	5	Mediterranean Gull	5
Great Crested Grebe	2	Moorhen	1	Herring Gull	1
Black-necked Grebe	5	Coot	1	Great Black-backed Gull	3
Grey Heron	3	Oystercatcher	2	Common Tern	3
Mute Swan	2	Ringed Plover	3	Kingfisher	3
Wigeon	4	Little Ringed Plover	3	Grey Wagtail	2
Teal	3	Dunlin	3	Pied Wagtail	1
Shoveler	4	Snipe	2	Dipper	2
Tufted Duck	2	Curlew	2	Grasshopper Warbler	3
Goldeneye	5	Redshank	2	Sedge Warbler	1
Red-Breasted Merganser	3	Common Sandpiper	2	Reed Bunting	1
Goosander	3	Black-headed Gull	1		

Threshold Value: 15**f) Upland Moorland and Grassland with Water Bodies**

Little Grebe	2	Black Grouse	4	Great Black-backed Gull	3
Wigeon	4	Grey Partridge	1	Cuckoo	2
Teal	3	Moorhen	1	Short-eared Owl	3
Pintail	5	Coot	1	Grey Wagtail	2
Goldeneye	5	Golden Plover	2	Dipper	2
Red-breasted Merganser	3	Lapwing	1	Whinchat	2
Goosander	3	Dunlin	3	Stonechat	2
Hen Harrier	5	Snipe	2	Wheatear	2
Buzzard	3	Curlew	2	Ring Ouzel	4
Osprey	5	Redshank	2	Raven	3
Merlin	3	Common Sandpiper		Twite	4
Peregrine	4	Black-headed Gull	1	Linnet	1
Red Grouse	2	Herring Gull	1		

Threshold Value: 20

g) Upland Moorland and Grassland without Water Bodies

Teal	3	Golden Plover	2	Short-eared Owl	3
Hen Harrier	5	Lapwing	1	Whinchat	2
Buzzard	3	Dunlin	3	Stonechat	2
Merlin	3	Snipe	2	Wheatear	2
Peregrine	4	Curlew	2	Ring Ouzel	4
Red Grouse	2	Redshank	2	Raven	3
Black Grouse	4	Cuckoo	2	Twite	4
Grey Partridge	1			Linnet	1

Threshold Value: 15**h) Lowland Heath**

Hobby	4	Cuckoo	2	Whinchat	2
Quail	5	Long-eared Owl	3	Stonechat	2
Snipe	2	Nightjar	3	Wheatear	2
Curlew	2	Woodlark	4	Grasshopper Warbler	3
Redshank	2	Tree Pipit	2	Linnet	1

Threshold Value: 12**i) Scrub (excluding heath)**

Turtle Dove	5	Song Thrush	1	Linnet	1
Cuckoo	2	Grasshopper Warbler	3	Lesser Redpoll	1
Long-eared Owl	3	Whitethroat	1	Bullfinch	1
Nightjar	3	Lesser Whitethroat	2	Yellowhammer	1
Woodlark	4	Garden Warbler	1	Reed Bunting	1
Tree Pipit	2	Blackcap	1		
Whinchat	2	Tree Sparrow	1		
Stonechat	2	Goldfinch	1		

Threshold Value: 10**j) Woodland**

Grey Heron	3	Nightjar	3	Long-tailed Tit	1
Little Egret	5	Green Woodpecker	2	Marsh Tit	2
Honey Buzzard	5	Great Spotted Woodpecker	2	Willow Tit	3
Red Kite	5	Lesser Spotted Woodpecker	4	Coal Tit	1
Goshawk	5	Tree Pipit	2	Nuthatch	2
Sparrowhawk	2	Redstart	1	Treecreeper	1
Buzzard	3	Song Thrush	1	Jay	1
Kestrel	2	Mistle Thrush	1	Jackdaw	1
Osprey	5	Garden Warbler	1	Raven	3
Hobby	4	Blackcap	1	Tree Sparrow	1
Black Grouse	4	Wood Warbler	3	Siskin	2
Woodcock	2	Chiffchaff	1	Lesser Redpoll	1
Stock Dove	1	Goldcrest	1	Common Crossbill	3
Cuckoo	2	Firecrest	5	Bullfinch	1
Tawny Owl	2	Spotted Flycatcher	1	Hawfinch	3
Long-eared Owl	3	Pied Flycatcher	2		

Threshold Value: 23

k) Rivers and Canals

Little Grebe	2	Little Ringed Plover	3	Dipper	2
Great Crested Grebe	2	Ringed Plover	3	Cetti's Warbler	4
Mute Swan	2	Common Sandpiper	2	Sedge Warbler	1
Tufted Duck	2	Kingfisher	3	Marsh Warbler	5
Goosander	3	Sand Martin	1	Reed Warbler	2
Red-breasted Merganser	3	Yellow Wagtail	3	Reed Bunting	1
Coot	1	Pied Wagtail	1		
Moorhen	1	Grey Wagtail	2		

Threshold Value: 19

Av9 Any site comprising in-bye land or lowland permanent grassland which regularly supports a significant breeding population of wader species not included under Guideline Av2.

Application

This guideline should be applied to sites which support:

- 10 pairs of breeding lapwing; or
- 3 pairs of breeding snipe; or
- 4 pairs of breeding curlew; or
- 3 pairs of breeding redshank.

This guideline should be applied to individual fields or clusters of adjacent fields, which are managed in a similar way. The current level of knowledge in the county does not permit the use of a breeding density measurement in this guideline, or the use of a composite index based upon combinations of two or more of the above species.

Although they can be of considerable importance for breeding lapwing, arable fields, short-term leys or other disturbed land are not covered by this guideline.

Justification

Much concern has been expressed about the threat presented to breeding wader populations by agricultural change within the UK. Surveys (Campbell *et al.* 1993 and White 2003) have highlighted the importance of Lancashire for breeding waders.

Av10 Any site from which the following have been recorded:

- a) 45 breeding bird species; or
- b) 60 breeding and wintering bird species; or
- c) 100 breeding, wintering and passage species.

Application

This guideline may be applied to sites which offer an exceptional range of habitat opportunities for birds. Any authentic record of a species making regular use of the site may be included.

Justification

Complex habitat mosaics may be very valuable for birds, including sites which are of particular importance to passage migrants and winter visitors outside the breeding season.

AvW Any site within which 0.5% or more of the British population of any wild non-breeding species of wildfowl or wading bird is regularly present.

Application

Certain sites qualifying under this guideline usually cover considerable tracts of land used for intensive agricultural production. This applies to feeding sites for Pink-footed Goose, Whooper Swan and Bewick's Swan. The conservation interest of these sites is, in part, a direct result of this agricultural use. However, in any one year, the birds will tend to use specific fields within a larger area, depending on the crop grown – the fields used by birds will consequently shift from year to year within the larger area.

Population sizes of most wildfowl and wader species are given in the Annual Report of the Wetland Birds Survey (WeBS) published by the Wildfowl and Wetlands Trust and the British Trust for Ornithology. Data from several consecutive years is essential, not only to establish the regular use, but also to determine the boundary of the area within which the birds will move from year to year.

It should be noted that sites identified under this Guideline are shown differently than other Biological Heritage Sites owing to the nature of their interest; being in the main extensive areas of intensive agricultural land rather than discrete habitats or features. In this way they differ from sites selected under Guideline Av6.

Justification

Wintering and passage populations in Lancashire of certain wildfowl and wading birds are of national, and in some cases, of international significance.

References:

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