



FarmPEAT Peaty/Wet Grassland Scorecard Guidance

Section A - Ecological Integrity

Section A assesses the current situation in the field in relation to the ecological integrity of the site.

A1. How many positive indicators are present in the plot?

Positive indicators have been selected as they indicate better managed semi-natural grasslands which have received limited fertiliser, herbicide or other agricultural improvement.

Guidance for A.1

During the walk of the field, count the total number of species/group – presence is a positive indicator which occur in the field. Mark off each positive indicator that you see.

A2. What is the cover of indicator species present in the field?

Below is a table describing how to determine the cover of indicator species.

Rare	Occasional	Frequent	Abundant	Dominant
Positive indicator species hard to find	Positive indicators not very visible (you must search to find them)	Positive indicator every couple of steps	Positive indicator every step	Positive indicator with every step and in between steps

A.3 What is the combined cover of negative indicators/weeds throughout the plot?

Negative indicator species include Rye Grass, Docks, Ragwort, Nettles and Thistles (Creeping & Spear). Look for overall cover of negative indicators weeds throughout the field, including at entrance gates and along boundaries. When determining the cover of these, the same approach can be taken as in A.2 (see table above).

A4. What is the vegetation structure in grasslands which are primarily used for grazing?

Sward structure is an important contributor to both prey numbers and prey accessibility. Rush tussocks create foraging and nesting opportunities for small rodents along with Meadow Pipits and other ground nesting birds. Sward structure responds well to management and significant progress can be made in a single growing season. Sward structure does not refer to rush only and includes the structure of all the vegetation in the field. A high-quality site will have a mix of vegetation heights throughout. This is usually delivered through a diverse sward including rushes but also low-growing grasses, sedges and herbs, medium height vegetation such as Wood Rush, Devil's Bit Scabious, Sharp-flowered Rush and Buttercups and tall vegetation such as Soft Rush, Yellow Flags, Meadow Sweet and Purple-loosestrife. Well grazed fields that receive regular chemical fertiliser are more likely to score lower, as are fields that are dominated by so much soft rush that it can't be walked through, let alone grazed.

Guidance for A4a



Poor	Most of plot (>75%) has either tall or short sward; intermediate sward absent or confined to small patches. Few flowering plants.
Moderate	25-50% of plot has tall and/or short sward with occasional to frequent intermediate patches
Good	>50% of plot with sward having variety of taller and /or shorter sward with intermediate height sward throughout.

A4b Vegetation Structure of Hay/Silage field.

Fields that are cut for silage can still provide many important environmental public goods though they are less likely to provide the best structure for Hen Harrier prey and so the maximum score for a silage field is 8 as opposed to 10. The wider the field margins and the more after grazing that takes place the better these fields will perform.

A42 Hay/Silage field Guidance

Poor	No margin, field topped right up to field boundary line. No aftermath grazing. Little or no variation in sward height.
Moderate	Narrow field margins present (~1m). Low number of flowering plants and vegetation structure within the field margin poor to moderate. Some aftermath grazing providing some structural variation
Good	Wide field margins present (2m+) and or good headlands. Aftermath grazing takes place providing variations in height of sward; sward does not look uniform in appearance

Section B Hydrological Integrity

*B1. Wetness as indicated by cover of wetland indicators. Total cover of species marked with an * in A1. Includes rushes and Purple Moorgrass.*

Wetland indicators are a reliable way of determining the hydrological integrity of a plot. A plot with a high number of these species indicates low drainage and in general, wet conditions. Peaty grasslands with a low number of wetland species usually indicates the land is being drained.

Guidance for B1.

To assess the cover of wet species on a plot, the same table in place for A2 can also be used here.

B2. Artificial drainage features (include both internal and perimeter drains – natural and modified watercourses are excluded from assessment). The assessment of effect of drain on plot gets more weighting).



Drains can be found within a plot and more often, along the boundary of a plot. The condition of these drains has a direct impact on the hydrological integrity of the plot. When looking at the drain, it is also important to look at the plot and assess how the plot has been affected by the drain.

Guidance for B2.

Drained	Partly Drained	None
Drains having with a significant effect on water table of plot. Drains predominantly free flowing, unvegetated and unblocked.	Drains present but flow is predominantly impeded (by vegetation/dams) with a moderate effect on water table of plot.	Drains absent <u>or</u> present but non-functioning. No flow, highly vegetated. Minor to no effect on water table of plot.

B3 Water table level in drain (include both internal and perimeter drains – natural and modified watercourses are excluded from assessment). The assessment of effect of drain on plot gets more weighting).

Generally, a drain with a high water table reflects an area that is not well drained and will have a good hydrological status. However, similar to B2, assess the plot and take note of the effect the watertable level is having on the plot.

Guidance for B3.

Drains having significant effect on watertable of plot, water level typically $\geq 1\text{m}$ below drain surface.	Drains having a moderate effect on watertable of plot, water level typically $<1\text{m}$ but $\geq 30\text{cm}$ below drain surface.	Drains having Minor to no effect on watertable of plot, water level typically $< 30\text{cm}$ below surface of drain. Assume highest water table if no drains present.
-10	5	15

Section C Threats to site integrity

C1. What is the cover of encroaching, immature scrub?

Areas of semi-mature/ mature scrub can provide shelter and food for small birds, insects and other wildlife. However, where scrub is encroaching onto the main grassland area, it may indicate abandonment or less than optimal levels of grazing and lead to eventual decline in extent of grassland and loss of plant species diversity.

C1 Guidance

The term scrub includes woody shrubs such as Hawthorn/Whitethorn, Willow, Blackthorn, Bog Myrtle, Gorse/Furze, Briars/Bramble; tree seedlings are also included. Encroaching scrub is that which is under 1.5m in height and with a stem diameter of $<10\text{cm}$, including seedlings.



Any scrub that the farmer would not be permitted to remove without felling licence from the forest service e.g. mature scrub or areas of scrub with a woodland flora beneath should not be included when assessing scrub cover.

>50%	Cover of encroaching scrub patches or individual scrub is over half of the field and likely to include well-established saplings and dense patches of establishing scrub. Scrub along the field boundaries highly likely to have spread onto the field. Access by livestock to denser patches of scrub may be impeded. Field is likely to have few to no signs of management.
26-50%	Between one quarter to half of the field has scrub cover, some well-established saplings may be present. Scrub along field boundaries may be encroaching onto the field. Field is likely to show few signs of management, such as recent grazing, or signs of livestock.
11-25%	Cover of encroaching scrub in patches or individuals with overall cover of between 11-25%. Some spread of scrub from the field boundaries may be evident, particularly Briars/Bramble.
0-10%	Small patches of scrub or individual seedlings of encroaching scrub with overall cover of less than 20%. Grass growth easily seen underneath the scrub.

C2. What is the cover of bracken?

B3. What is the cover of non-native species such as Rhododendron, Japanese Knotweed, Giant Hogweed, Winter heliotrope, Fuchsia, Cherry laurel, Snowberry, Giant Rhubarb? Include margins if present.

Guidance for C3.

If invasive species such as Japanese knotweed or Giant Hogweed are present within or adjacent to the field, this should be noted in the comments and brought to the attention of the farmer. Invasive alien species such as Giant Hogweed, Himalayan Balsam and Japanese Knotweed can have a serious impact on ecosystems. Removal strategies depend on the species involved and the extent of the problem. In serious cases and in all cases involving Japanese Knotweed or in close to watercourses specialist advice should be sought.

C4. Is there any evidence of any damaging activities to vegetation or soil (including damage from supplementary feeding and poaching)? Include margins if present.

Damaging activities, if any, should be assessed over the entire field, including the field boundaries and main grassland area. Where there is more than one damaging activity, of the same or varying



degrees of impact, the most damaging activity may be scored or alternatively score the sum of damaging activity, whichever is considered to be the greater in impact. Where damaging activity is noted in or adjacent to the field, consider whether this may impact either in the short or medium term on the field being scored, e.g. drainage, please note in the comments.

Guidance for C4.

Below are examples of the categories some damaging activities would fall into.

Note: Damage from supplementary feeding should also be considered.

Very high	Application of pesticide Burning Excessive dumping
High	Bare ground in 25% of field Soil disturbance around water course Evidence of burning
Medium	Poaching in wetter soils Small patches of bare ground
Very low/none	Limited poaching on wet soils Small patches of bare ground in areas of thin soil Limited disturbance around wet features