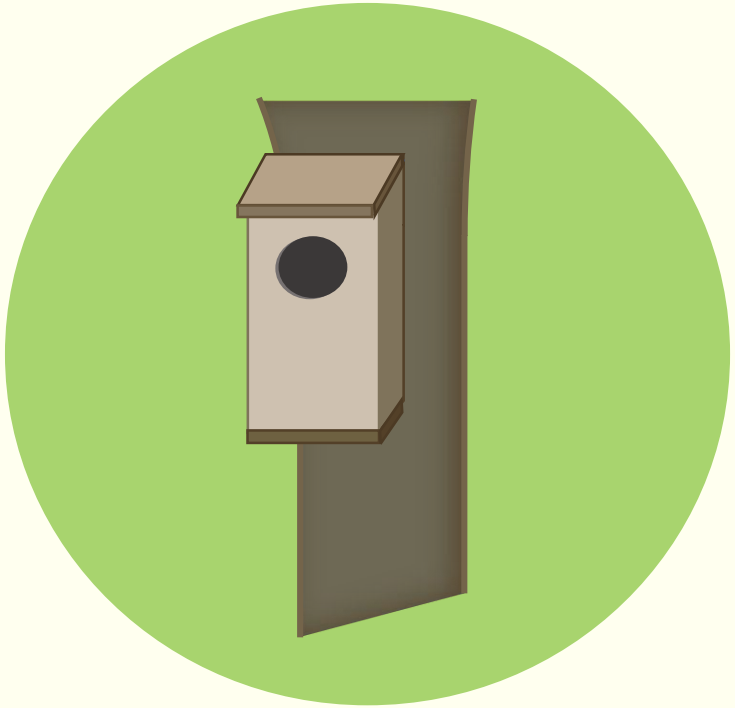
Alternatives

Considerations

Decision Flowchart

Background



Nest Box Guide

Should you install a nest box?

About this Guide

This guide has been developed with the aim to assist individuals, community groups and organisations with deciding whether building and installing nest boxes are an appropriate solution to assist wildlife.

It is important to understand that there are ecological complexities that come with nest boxes, both positive and negative. The individual, community group or organisation installing the nest box have the responsibility to continue to monitor and maintain the nest box over time.

There are many ways to assist wildlife. If a nest box is not suitable to your situation, see **'alternatives for assisting wildlife'** for a list other ways you can support native wildlife.

This guide has been compiled by leveraging the valuable information developed by the **NSW Department of Planning, Industry and Environment** (DPIE) and added to their **helping wildlife in emergencies** web page.

Background

YOUR ENVIRONMENT LEVY at WORK

Wingecarribee SHIRE COUNCIL

Tree hollows

Tree hollows are an incredibly valuable resource for many native species. Here are 7 key facts about hollows:

1. Each hollow is unique.
2. They are normally found in large mature or dead trees.
3. They can take decades to over 100 years to form.
4. Over time they can be created by wind, fire, heat, lightning, rain, fungus and attack from insects and further refined by claws, beaks or teeth by resourceful wildlife over time.
5. A hollows size, shape, depth and other factors will determine how a hollow will be used and by what type of animal.
6. They provide a valuable refuge during weather events as well as protection from predators.
7. They also are an essential roosting and breeding site for several species, including birds, bats, possums, reptiles and frogs.

Nest boxes

A nest box can never fully replace a hollow, but at times can be a suitable addition to assist displaced wildlife after a natural disaster or due to land clearing.

In the case of nest boxes, ‘one size does not suit all’. There are different types of nest boxes that suit different species. Some species have specific requirements (e.g. size, entrance shape) while other species are more flexible. Some generalist species, such as Brush-tailed possums and Sulphur-crested cockatoos, can take advantage of these new homes and often outcompete other more vulnerable species that tend to have very specific hollow/nest box requirements.

Use the following ‘**Decision Flowchart**’ to determine whether you, your community group or organisation should proceed with building and installing nest boxes.

Follow these 5 steps and corresponding flowchart questions, to determine whether you, your group or organisation should proceed with building and installing nest boxes.

STEP 1

Scoping

STEP 2

Site Selection

STEP 3

Nest Box Selection

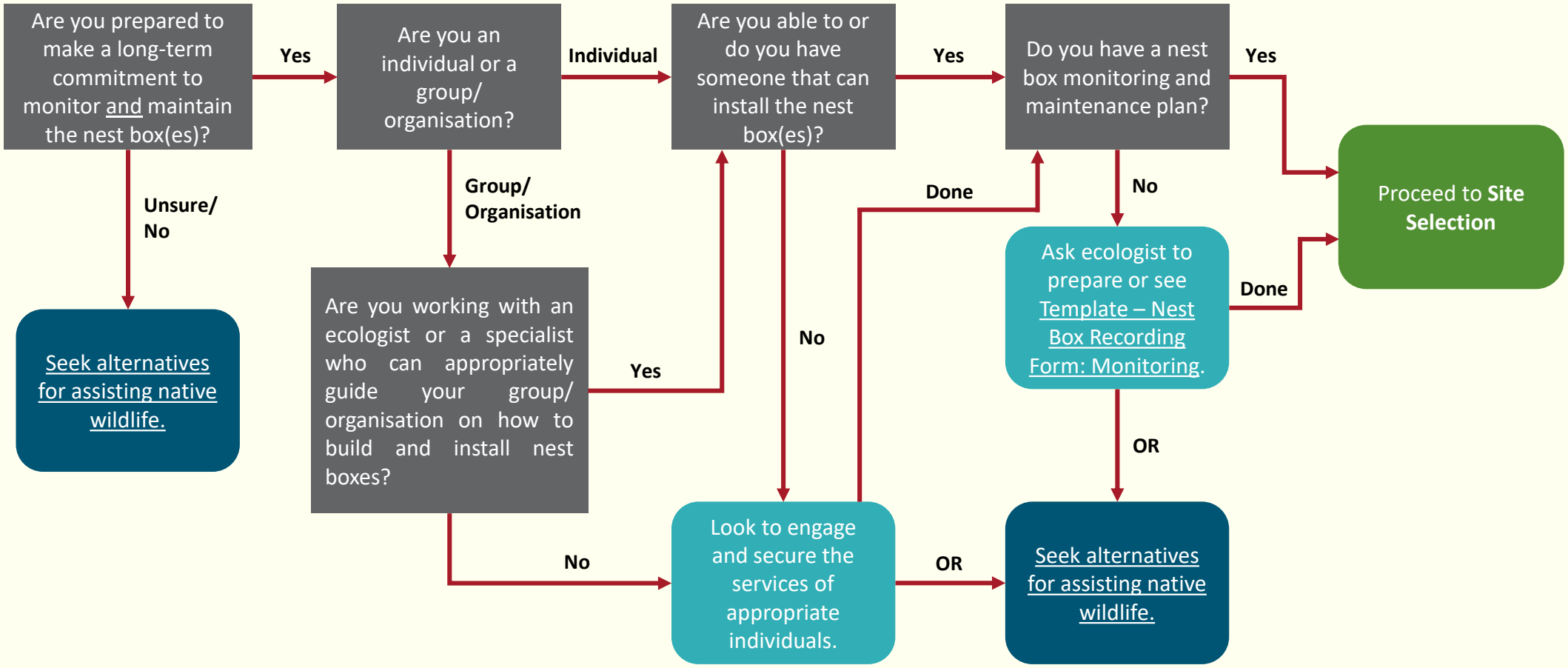
STEP 4

Tree Selection

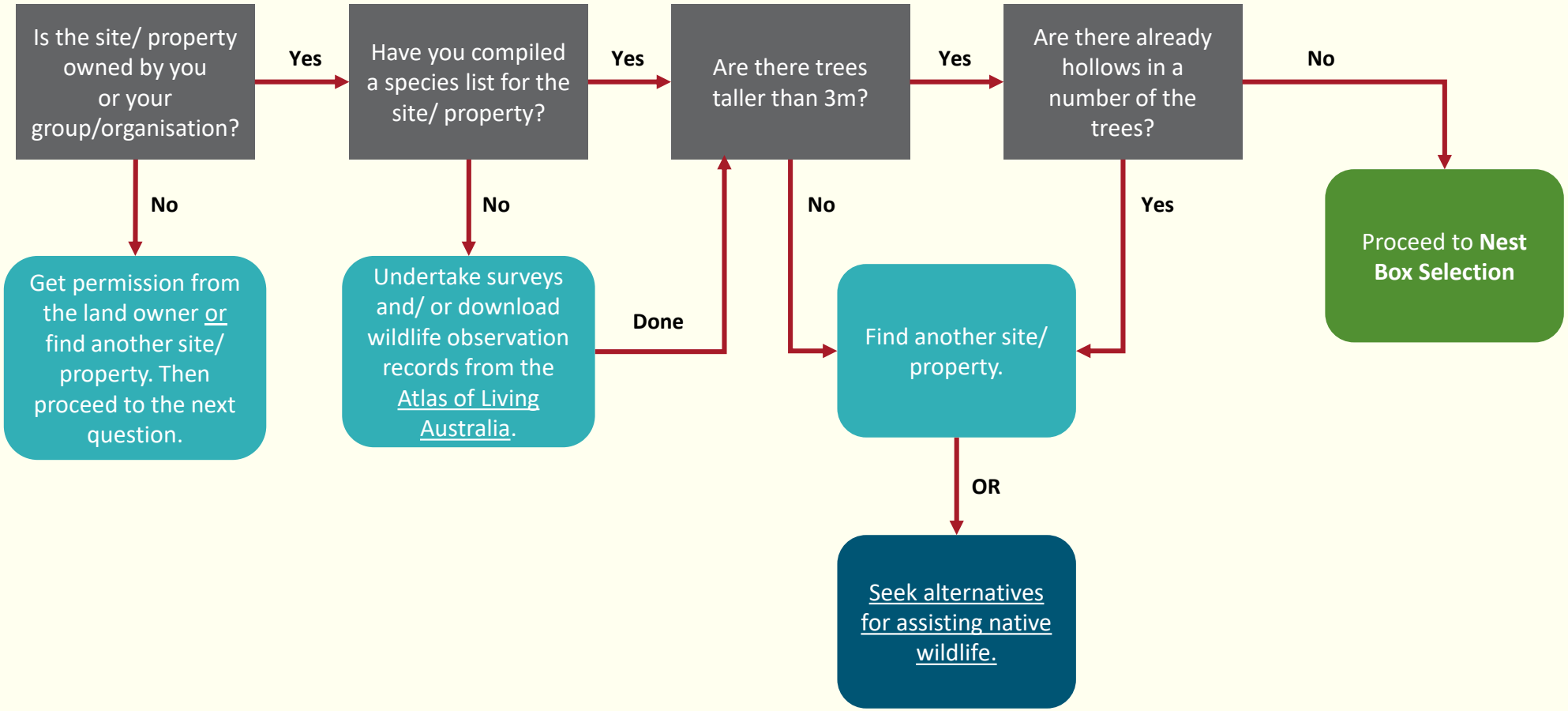
STEP 5

Monitoring and Maintenance

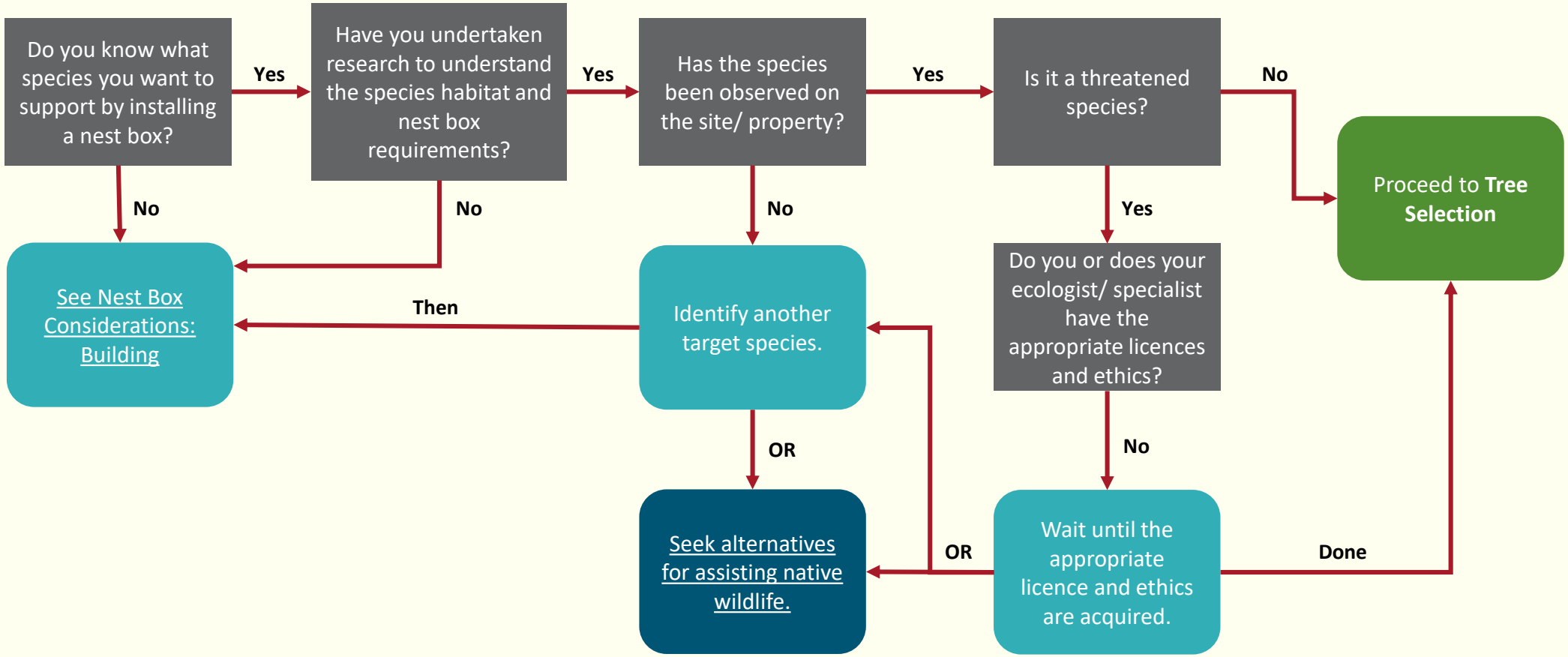
STEP 1: Scoping



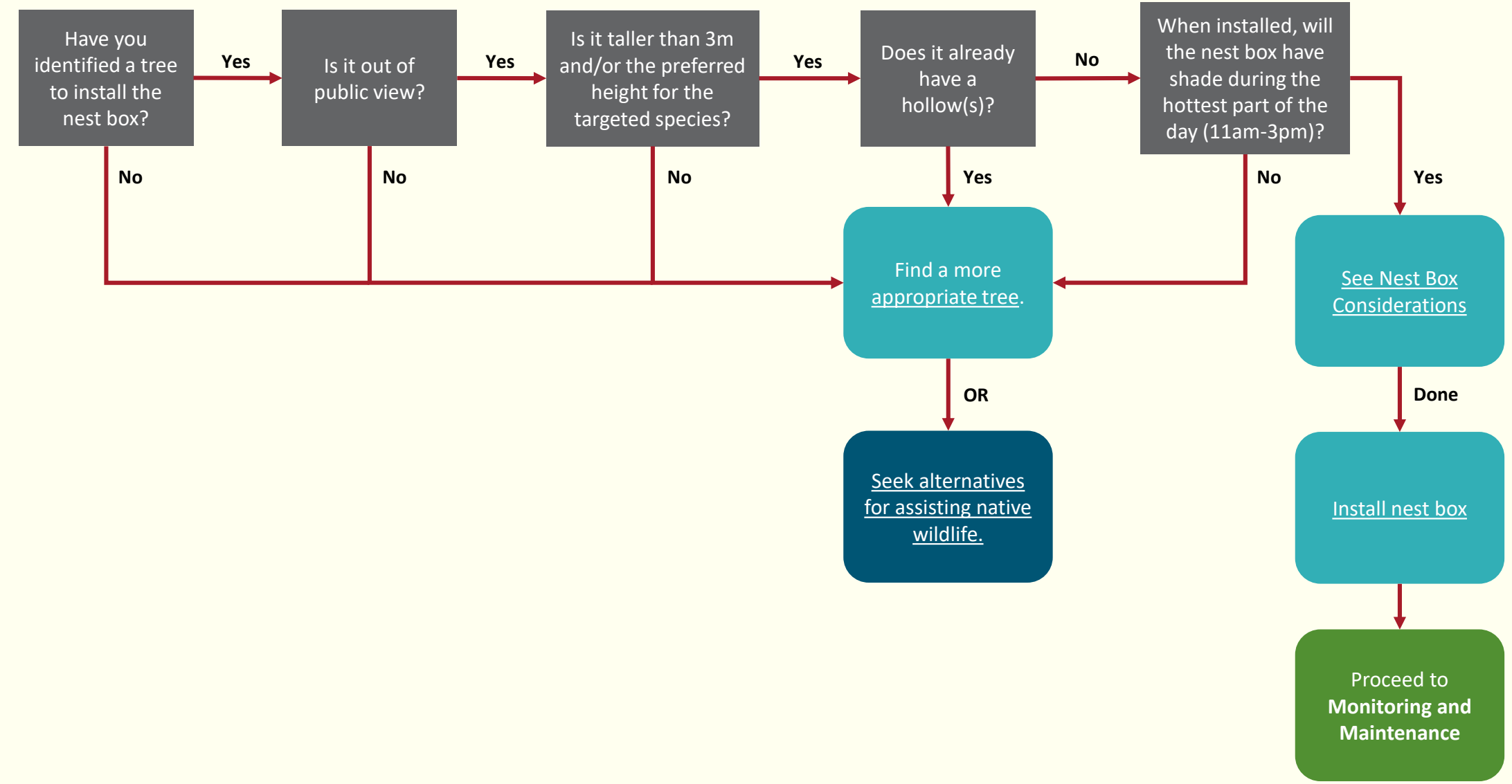
STEP 2: Site Selection



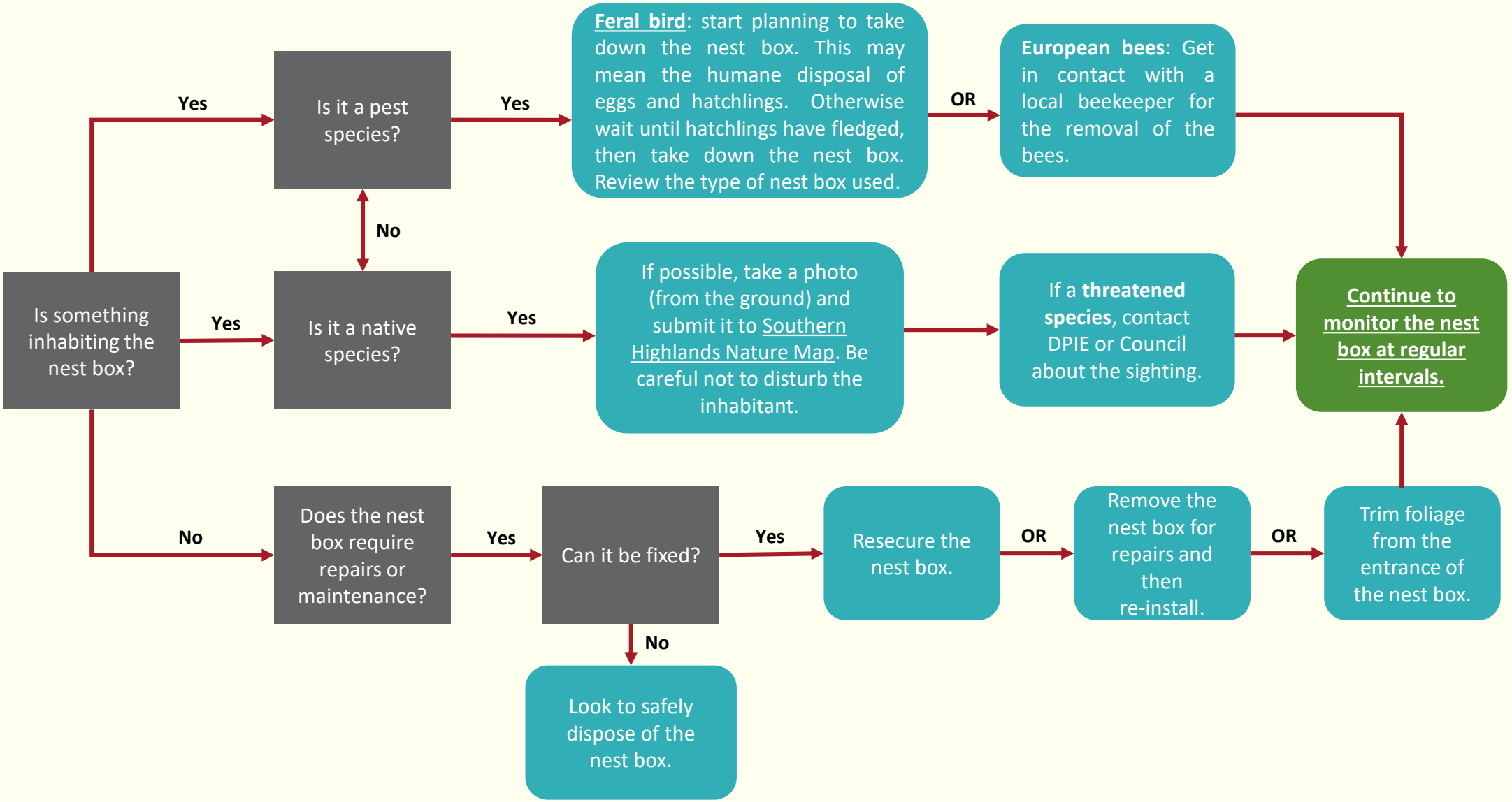
STEP 3: Nest Box Selection



STEP 4: Tree Selection



STEP 5: Monitoring and Maintenance



If the decision flowchart indicates that you should proceed with nest boxes, these are the three key stages that need to be considered.

Building

Installing

Monitoring and Maintenance

Building

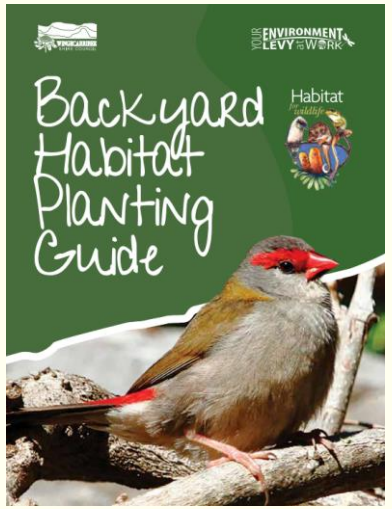
- Make sure the construction method and design features suit the targeted native animal and local weather conditions. See the below resources for more information:
  - **Build your own Wildlife Nest Box**
  - **Birds in Backyards nest box plans**
  - **Nest Box Tales – Designs**
  - **Guideline for Artificial Hollows**
- To assist animals with climbing in and out of the nest box, cut a grid pattern in the side panel and internal sides.
- You can also secure a small branch inside the nest box to prevent entrapment.
- Avoid using wire mesh as it may entangle delicate feet.
- If you are unable to build nest boxes, check in with your local Men's Shed to see if they can give you a hand.
- There are also ready-made nest boxes available online.
- Before installing, make sure there are no sharp edges, including any tin used for waterproofing and protruding nails or screws.

Installing

- Avoid installing in areas where human disturbance is likely or where there is a lot of unnatural light (e.g. near a streetlight).
- Install in a tree species preferred by the targeted animal.
- Ensure your nest boxes are installed at least 3 to 4 metres from the ground.
- Some species require nest boxes to be installed higher than 3 metres and in taller trees.
- Face the nest box away from prevailing winds.
- To avoid overheating or killing nest box inhabitants, ensure the nest box is shaded during the hottest part of the day (11am – 3pm).
- Where tree canopy is diminished (e.g. after a bushfire), place the nest box on the eastern side of the tree, that way the tree trunk will provide protection from the afternoon sun.
- If considering a nest box for a threatened species, make sure you work with an individual who has the appropriate scientific licence and animal ethics.
- See **Template – Nest Box Recording Form: Installation** and record the appropriate information. Adjust the template if required.

Monitoring and Maintenance

- Develop a nest box monitoring and maintenance plan. This should include:
  - Nest box number
  - Photograph
  - Target species
  - Height mounted from the ground
  - Entry hole size and depth
  - Species visitation
  - GPS location of the nest box
  - How frequently you will visit the nest box
  - What to do if a pest species inhabits the nest box
- See **Template - Nest Box Recording Form: Monitoring** and record the appropriate information. Adjust the template if required.
- Have a routine maintenance schedule to inspect and repair, fill cracks and ensure the nest box is still securely attached. If a nest box needs to be repaired, make sure there are no inhabitants be undertaking repairs or removing the nest box.
- If a pest species begins to inhabit the nest box(es), take down the nest box and review whether you should continue with nest boxes or whether another type of nest box will be more suitable.
- Help to increase understanding and awareness about tree hollows by recording observations of hollows and submitting them to **Hollows as Homes** or if you observe a specific species using a hollow, include these in your observation notes when submitting a sighting to **Southern Highlands Nature Map** (or NatureMapr app).

Nest boxes are not always a suitable solution for supporting wildlife. Here are 8 alternatives for assisting native wildlife:

1. Join **Habitat for Wildlife** or **Land for Wildlife**.
2. Record what animals visit your property and upload sightings to **Southern Highlands Nature Map** (website) or NatureMpr (app: **i0S** I **android**).
3. Record and map the location of hollows and submit them to **Hollows as Homes**.
4. Read the **Backyard Habitat Planting Guide** and plant native species on your property.
5. Plan and undertake weeding to reduce the spread of weeds and to assist native plants. For more information, see **Environmental Weeds**.
6. Protect native wildlife from pets. This may include keeping your dog on a leash when walking through or near bushland as well as bringing your cat inside at night.
7. During drought and/or hot days, ensure there is water available for animals. For more information, see **Helping Wildlife in Emergencies**.
8. Join your local **Bushcare**, **Rivercare** or **Landcare group**.