

CRP Briefing on ELM and Curlew Recovery

The Curlew has been described as the highest conservation priority in the UK. It is one of two species specifically mentioned in the 25-Year Environment Plan, and our ability to recover Curlew in England provides an acid test for our ability to meet the legally-binding Environment Act species targets.

- The Curlew is a globally near-threatened species, with the UK holding 25% of the global population, half of which occurs in England;
- Curlew has undergone rapid decline, and since the 1990s, we have lost over half the UK population, an average of 5,500 birds each year;
- At present, we do not believe that ELM will deliver for Curlew, but;
- There are evidence-based solutions to recover Curlew, with farmers and land managers keen to support their recovery but needing the right resources and mechanisms to succeed.

How ELM can help Curlew

Curlews occur across different landscapes in England, including upland moorland, hill country and lowland grasslands. Their rapid decline is driven by poor productivity; essentially, Curlews are not fledging enough chicks. Curlews require a package of evidence-based measures, to address their habitat requirements, reduce predation impacts and protect birds from agricultural operations. These need to be:

- Targeted to the right landscapes;
- Supporting collaborative working across multiple landholdings;
- Backed by high-quality advice and monitoring, and;
- Appropriately resourced.

ELM needs to do more to deliver the evidence-based solutions Curlews need

The Sustainable Farming Incentive does not provide the mechanisms that we need to deliver the right interventions at the right scale and targeted to the right places for Curlew, supported by advice. For ELM to meaningfully deliver for Curlew recovery, it is essential that there is a functioning and effective Higher Tier that enables targeting of Curlew recovery measures such as:

- Creation and maintenance of optimum nesting and foraging habitat to create the right conditions for incubating adults and chicks.
- Protection of nests from farming operations in grass fodder crops, livestock and mammalian predation, through methods such as temporary nest fencing.
- Evidence-based predator management plans, including structured and best practice lethal predator control where it is deemed it could feasibly improve Curlew productivity.

Such measures have wider ecosystem benefits, including for other priority species such as ground-nesting birds, macro-invertebrates, and grassland flora.

The Curlew Recovery Partnership England

The Curlew Recovery Partnership was established in 2020 with Defra funding, following summits hosted by His Royal Highness, The Prince of Wales (now King Charles III). The steering group comprises a roundtable of organisations from across the conservation spectrum: Bolton Castle Estate, BTO, Curlew Action, Curlew Country, Duchy of Cornwall, GWCT, Natural England, RSPB and WWT.

The Curlew Recovery Partnership is committed and ready to work with government to ensure that ELM fulfils its potential to meaningfully deliver towards Curlew recovery.

