Introducing Curlews and the Curlew Recovery Partnership

Photo: Tom Streeter
The Eurasian Curlew: Ecology

- Eurasian Curlew (hereafter Curlew) is the largest wader in the UK, with a wingspan up to 1m
- Females are slightly larger and longer-billed than males, and weigh about 1kg
- They are long-lived birds, with a typical lifespan of 11 years but sometimes reaching up to 25 years
- Their breeding season runs from Apr-July, although birds arrive on territory through Feb-Mar
- They nest on the ground, and are easily disturbed during the breeding season
- They usually lay four eggs, with incubation taking about four weeks and fledging a further five weeks
- Chicks are independent soon after hatching, picking at small invertebrates
- Adults mostly feed on invertebrates by probing or picking, but also eat prey as large as lizards!
The Eurasian Curlew: Distribution and status (1)

- Eurasian Curlew occurs across Europe and Asia in open landscapes
- Near Threatened on IUCN Red List due to global decline
- UK holds an estimated 58,500 breeding pairs, which is 20–25% of global population
- However, numbers in the UK have halved over the last 25 years, so now UK red-listed
- In England there are estimated to be 30,000 pairs, concentrated in the uplands
- Real risk of extinction as a breeding species in Ireland, Wales and lowland southern England
- Preferred habitats include upland moors, bogs and grasslands
- Wintering population estimated at 125,000 birds
- Preferred winter habitats are extensive coastal estuaries and grasslands
The Eurasian Curlew: Distribution and status (2)

This map shows that Curlews have been lost from much of Ireland and western and lowland UK.

This map shows that Curlews are declining in abundance across most of their remaining range.
The Eurasian Curlew: Threats

- Adult annual survival is generally very high (90%)
- Recent declines are therefore primarily due to habitat loss and poor nesting success:

1. Habitat loss and degradation includes urban development, grassland intensification, drainage, afforestation and peat extraction

2. Some agricultural practices such as early rolling and cutting of grass for silage lead to direct loss of eggs and chicks

3. Abundant generalist predators such as Foxes and Carrion Crows are key threats at the egg and chick stage

4. Recreational disturbance may exclude birds from suitable habitat and can alert predators when birds are flushed off the nest

5. Climate change and extreme weather e.g. drying of breeding sites, inundation of coastal sites
The Eurasian Curlew: Conservation action

- Massive increase in awareness since 2015 paper in British Birds highlighted recent declines
- Conservation action now being delivered in most important Curlew areas, including:

1. Habitat management at landscape-scale, e.g. by Farmer Clusters and on nature reserves
2. Predator exclusion and control, e.g. nest fencing, targeted culling
3. New techniques for survey and monitoring, e.g. satellite tracking, nest cameras, temp loggers
4. Head-starting, involving captive rearing of chicks before release back into the wild
5. Suitable mitigation solutions identified where designated sites for Curlews are impacted by development
6. Public awareness through media engagement and events such as World Curlew Day
The Curlew Recovery Partnership: Origin and aims

- Curlew summits in 2018-20 hosted by HRH The Prince of Wales at Dartmoor and Highgrove House, and by UK Government at 10 Downing Street

- Key outcome was a shared desire for a co-ordinating body for Curlew conservation in England:
  1. The Curlew Recovery Partnership (CRP) was officially launched on 01 March 2021
  2. Initial funding from Defra of £60k and additional funding from WWT allowed a full-time manager to be employed
  3. CRP provides co-ordination and support to those engaged in Curlew conservation, while also providing benefits for other threatened species and habitats and helping people to connect with nature.
  4. CRP acts as a central hub and provides free-to-access resources and advice for anyone involved in Curlew conservation, e.g. farmers, gamekeepers, ornithologists, researchers and policy-makers

Photo: WWT
CRP Steering Group comprises nine organisations that represent a wide range of interests in Curlew conservation.
The Curlew Recovery Partnership: Engagement

- CRP network already has over 210 contacts representing several hundred Curlew enthusiasts
- CRP website, blog, and social media streams are live and attracting a growing audience
- CRP delivered an online seminar as a contribution to World Curlew Day on 21 Apr 2021 – guest speaker videos uploaded to CRP YouTube channel
- CRP is sponsoring Curlew Cam 2021, which is a live webcam of a Curlew nest co-ordinated by Curlew Country

The newly-launched Curlew Recovery Partnership aims to work with farmers, gamekeepers and researchers to support the wading bird.

A project has been launched to secure the future of the curlew which faces regional and national level extinction.

Farming practices, predators and loss of habitat have led to a huge drop in breeding pairs and chicks being born.
CRP Fieldworker Toolkit

Factsheet 1

Basic Fieldcraft

1. Introduction
This factsheet is primarily aimed at inexperienced fieldworkers who are undertaking fieldwork activities for the first time. It aims to provide guidance relating to the preparation of field gear, basic health and safety, survey preparation and basic fieldcraft skills. Note that the CRP and its partners may be able to help with connecting Curlew fieldworkers to experienced individuals or groups, in order to provide training and useful advice about local conditions.

2. Pre-fieldwork preparation
In ensuring a safe and productive time in the field, it is important to be prepared prior to starting fieldwork. The sessions below cover essential equipment, in addition to basic fieldwork health and safety, and how to behave in the field to minimize disturbance and maximize your time. Information on clothing, footwear, and other useful field equipment can be found in the Appendix.

3. Optical equipment
Binoculars and spotting scopes are essential and field monitoring cannot realistically be undertaken without them. A minimum requirement is a good pair of binoculars, but a spotting scope will likely be of equal importance, especially when monitoring from a distance. There is no doubt regarding the suitability of your optics with an experienced fieldworker before you start.

- **Binoculars** — magnification of 8x or 10x is ideal, along with an objective lens size of 50 mm or 62 mm. Binoculars with objective lenses smaller than 50 mm are likely to be too small and harder to use in low light conditions, whereas binoculars with an objective lens larger than 42 mm are likely to be too heavy and bulky.
- **Spotting scope** — a scope with an objective lens of 60-80 mm is ideal. The choice of a fixed magnification (e.g., 30x or 40x) tripod will be a personal one but a zoom eyepiece will be essential if colour ring reading from a distance is required.
- **Tripod** — essential if using a spotting scope. A lightweight model similar to the Yellow Scope 200 will be sufficient. Big, heavy tripods are not recommended if the fieldworker will be covering large distances.
- **Window mount tripod/bean bag** — if using a vehicle then a window mount tripod or bean bag will be required for the spotting scope.

4. Health and Safety Procedures

- **Risk Assessment** — before setting foot in the field the potential hazards and risks that fieldworkers may encounter should be assessed via a Risk Assessment. All individuals should read, understand and sign it prior to commencing fieldwork, and the Risk Assessment should be updated accordingly.
- **Lone working/nature working** — if working alone or in remote and/or isolated areas, fieldworkers should use the “buddy” system in which the fieldworker informs a ‘buddy’ of their location of work, arrival time and estimated time on site before heading into the field. This can be done via a text message or phone call. After finishing on site they should inform their ‘buddy’ of their safe arrival back home.
- **Communicating your location** — fieldworkers may also want to use the What3Words smartphone app. The app has divided the world into 3m squares, each with a unique three-word combination. This can then be used to direct people to your exact location if required, which can be incredibly useful in areas where there are no obvious landmark features. It is also advisable to identify your nearest A&E department, access points to your fieldwork location, and the time required to get there.

www.curlewrecovery.org

BTO Wader Calendar

Wader Calendar Survey 2021

Breeding waders are in steep decline and our society urgently needs more information about how many and where they are nesting in the UK. Farmers are well placed to gather valuable information on waders with the simple weekly survey methodology.

**Wader Calendar**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Week start</th>
<th>Core count</th>
<th>Young</th>
<th>Alarm/agitation</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>31 May</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>07 June</td>
<td>24</td>
<td></td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14 June</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21 June</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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Fill in a row each week, estimating the minimum number of birds of five wader species you have observed on your farm throughout the week. The wader to look out for are Lapwing, Redshank, Curlew, Oystercatchers, and Snipe.

Optionally, please estimate the minimum number you observed (1) with young and (2) screaming or agitated.

Zero counts are just as important — even if you have no breeding waders on your farm at all! A recording form and instructions can be downloaded from www.wadingbrowadens.com/resources, or you can request these by email from waders@bto.org.

Don’t forget to return your form to us by the end of the summer!

Outcomes

- Beginning a record of breeding waders on your farm may assist future ag-envimmental applications
- Information from the Wader Calendar Survey will be used to inform future conservation action for these threatened species in the UK

Curlew, Stone-curlew, Twite, Chis Chug, Lapwing, Grey Plover, Redshank, Wigeon, Snipe, Golden Plover, Herring Gull, Black Tern, Avocet – Dickdodgson.com
The Curlew Recovery Partnership: Future research

• The CRP will be developing a future work programme in the coming months, with a strong focus on how habitat and landscape factors influence wader populations, food availability, and distribution and abundance of key predators – key questions may include:

1. What methods should we use for consistent and accurate monitoring of Curlews?

2. How can future Agri-Environment Schemes be designed to improve outcomes for Curlews?

3. How can we quantify the value of ecosystem services resulting from ‘Curlew-friendly’ farming?

4. Why does the UK have the highest mesopredator densities in Europe, e.g. Foxes and Carrion Crows?

5. What mechanisms are most effective in reducing recreational disturbance, e.g. signs vs fines?

6. How do we retain sufficient coastal habitat for Curlews under long-term sea-level rise scenarios?
The Curlew Recovery Partnership: Join our network

Email: hello@curlewrecovery.org
Website: www.curlewrecovery.org

Photo: Tom Streeter