Introducing Curlews and the Curlew Recovery Partnership

CURLEW RECOVERY PARTNERSHIP ENGLAND

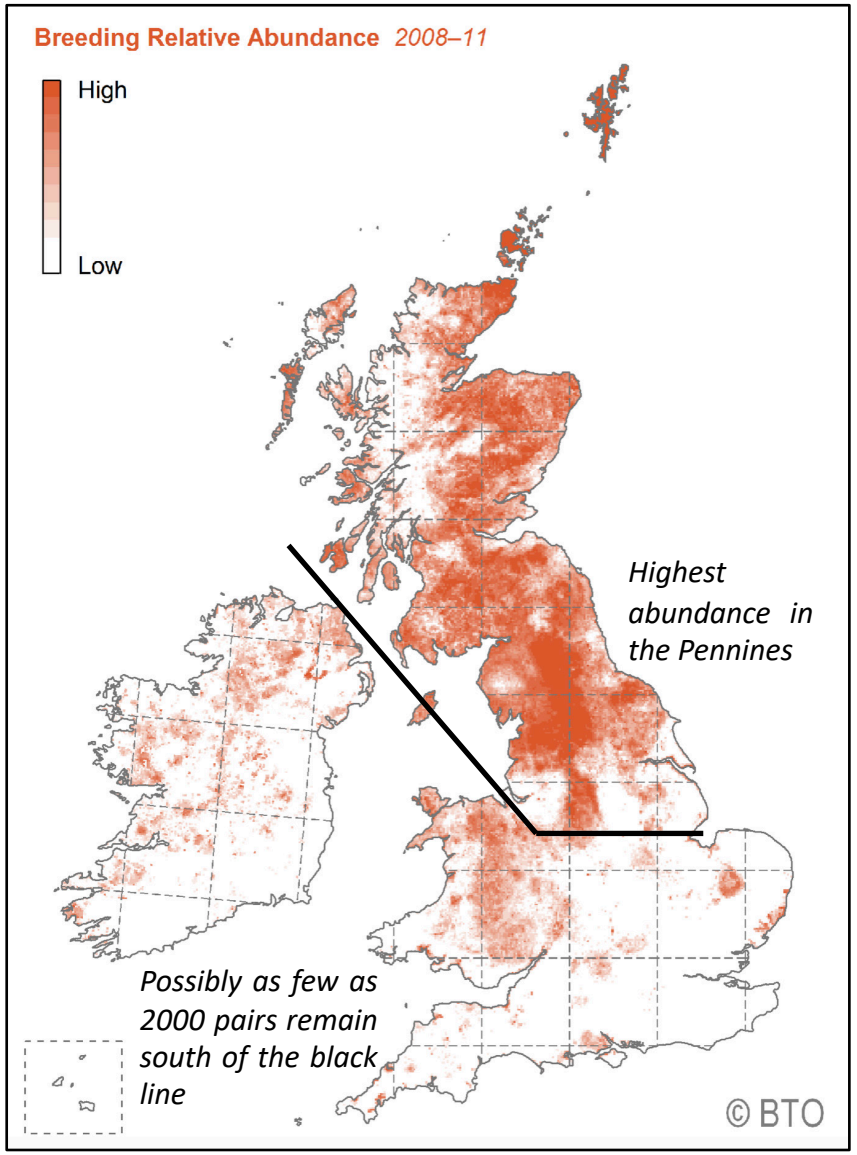
Photo: Tom Streeter

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!

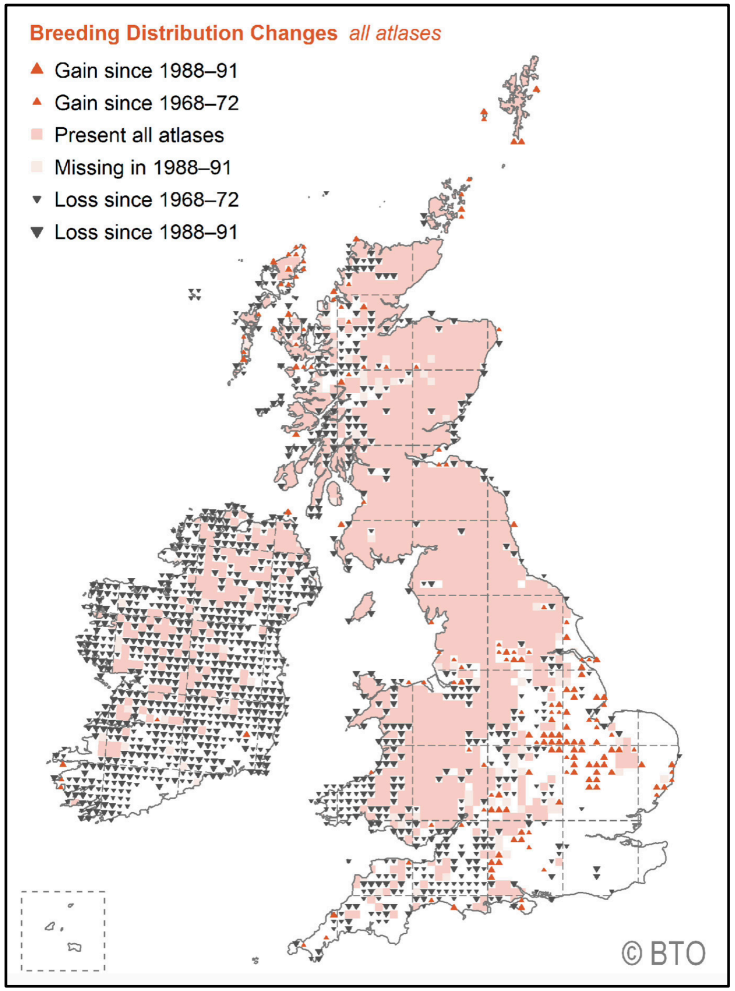
The Eurasian Curlew: Distribution and status (1)

- 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

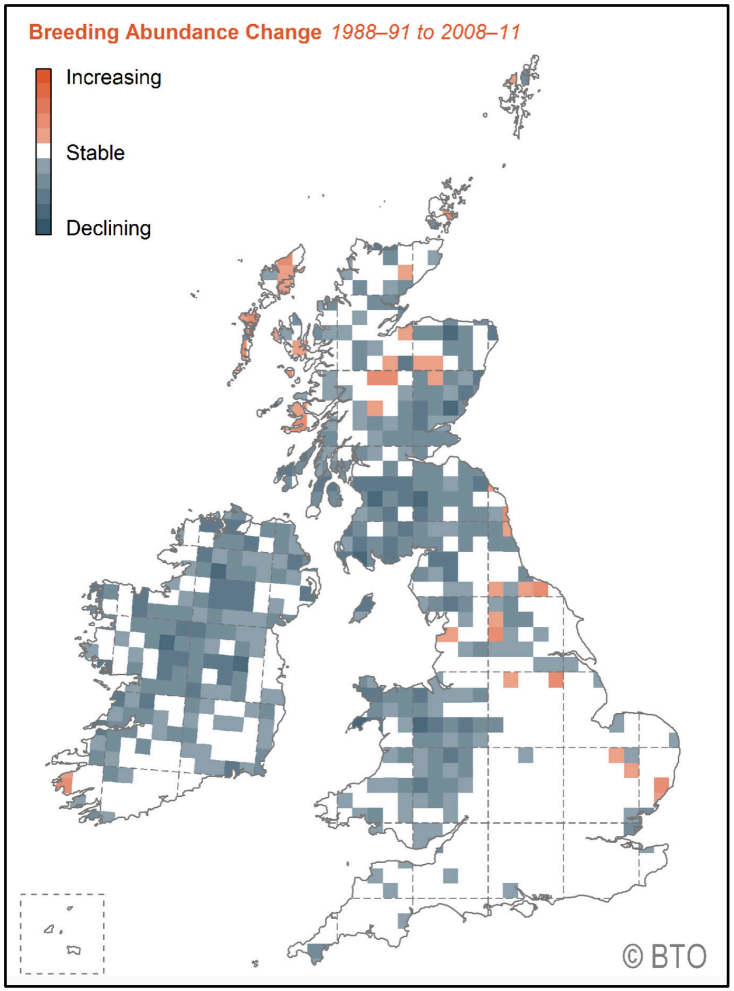


The Eurasian Curlew: Distribution and status (2)

CURLEW RECOVERY PARTNERSHIP ENGLAND



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*

The Curlew Recovery Partnership: Steering Group

CRP Steering Group comprises nine organisations that represent a wide range of interests in Curlew conservation

Chair
Mary Colwell

Manager
Prof Russell Wynn

The Curlew Recovery Partnership: Engagement

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Curlew: Urgent work needed to save 'loved' endangered bird

By Steve Mather
BBC News

15 March

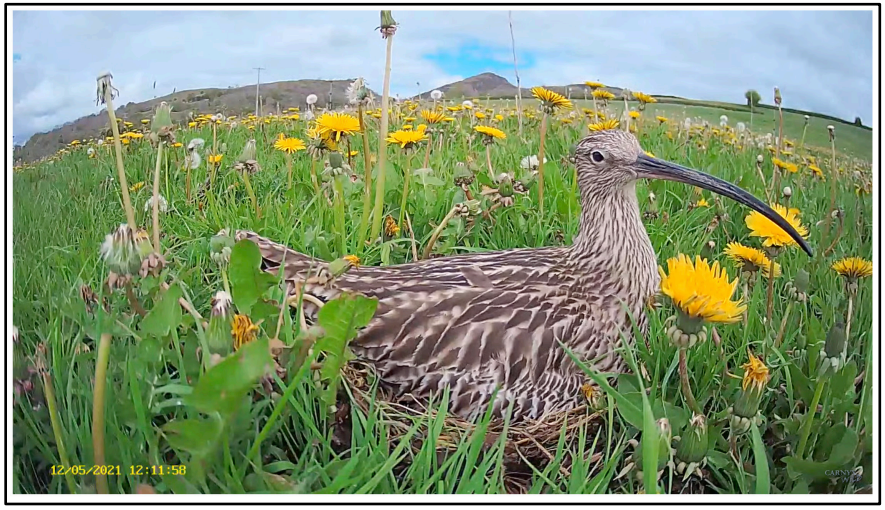
TOM STREETER

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.

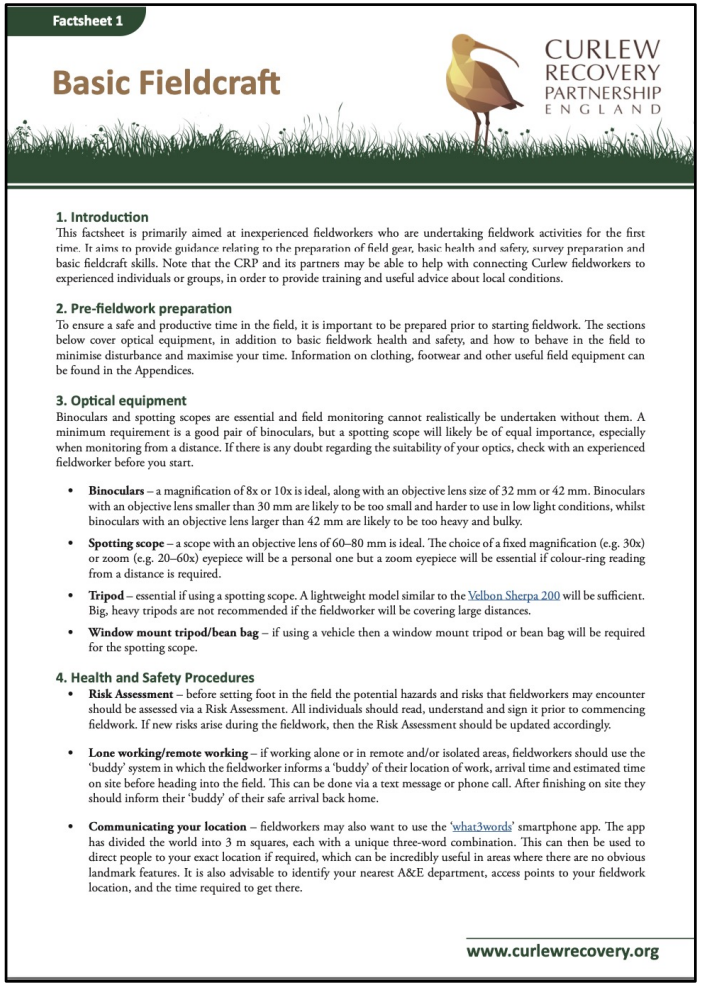
Farming practices, predators and loss of habitat have led to a huge drop in breeding pairs and chicks being born.

- CRP 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 Curlew Recovery Partnership: Resources

CRP Fieldworker Toolkit



Factsheet 1

Basic Fieldcraft

CURLEW RECOVERY PARTNERSHIP ENGLAND

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

To ensure a safe and productive time in the field, it is important to be prepared prior to starting fieldwork. The sections below cover optical equipment, in addition to basic fieldwork health and safety, and how to behave in the field to minimise disturbance and maximise your time. Information on clothing, footwear and other useful field equipment can be found in the Appendices.

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. If there is any doubt regarding the suitability of your optics, check with an experienced fieldworker before you start.

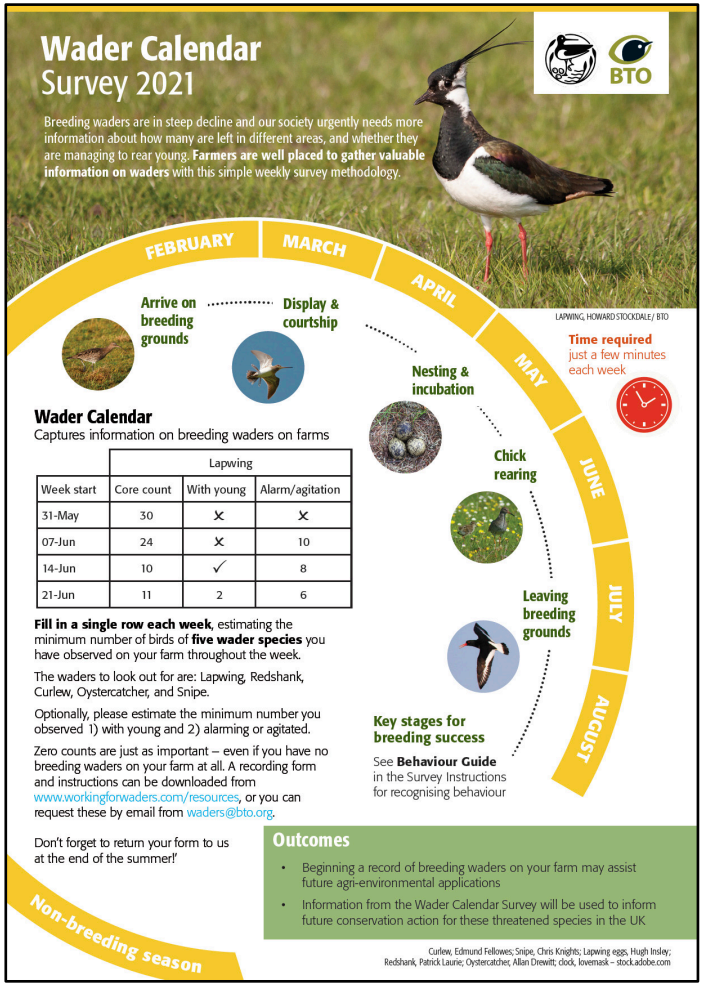
- **Binoculars** – a magnification of 8x or 10x is ideal, along with an objective lens size of 32 mm or 42 mm. Binoculars with an objective lens smaller than 30 mm are likely to be too small and harder to use in low light conditions, whilst binoculars with an objective lens larger than 42 mm are likely 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 zoom (e.g. 20–60x) eyepiece 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 Velbon Sherpa 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. If new risks arise during the fieldwork, then the Risk Assessment should be updated accordingly.
- **Lone working/remote 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 3 m 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

BTO

Breeding waders are in steep decline and our society urgently needs more information about how many are left in different areas, and whether they are managing to rear young. **Farmers are well placed to gather valuable information on waders** with this simple weekly survey methodology.

LAPWING, HOWARD STOCKDALE/ BTO

FEBRUARY MARCH APRIL MAY JUNE JULY AUGUST

Arrive on breeding grounds

Display & courtship

Nesting & incubation

Chick rearing

Leaving breeding grounds

Time required
just a few minutes each week

Wader Calendar
Captures information on breeding waders on farms

	Lapwing		
Week start	Core count	With young	Alarm/agitation
31-May	30	✗	✗
07-Jun	24	✗	10
14-Jun	10	✓	8
21-Jun	11	2	6

Fill in a single row each week, estimating the minimum number of birds of **five wader species** you have observed on your farm throughout the week.

The waders to look out for are: Lapwing, Redshank, Curlew, Oystercatcher, and Snipe.

Optionally, please estimate the minimum number you observed 1) with young and 2) alarming 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.workingforwaders.com/resources, or you can request these by email from waders@bto.org.

Don't forget to return your form to us at the end of the summer!'

Key stages for breeding success

See **Behaviour Guide** in the Survey Instructions for recognising behaviour

Outcomes

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

Non-breeding season

Curlew, Edmund Fellowes; Snipe, Chris Knights; Lapwing eggs, Hugh Insley; Redshank, Patrick Laurie; Oystercatcher, Allan Drewitt; clock, lovemask – stock.adobe.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