

Curlew Country

Working to help the recovery of the Eurasian Curlew.

Issue 1 : Autumn 2017

A Shropshire and Welsh Marches based project taking action to save the local curlew population; leading the way in UK curlew recovery outside moorland and upland reserve areas.



What is Curlew Country?

This small dynamic project has monitored causes of curlew nest failure and implemented measures to help curlew nests survive. Working closely with farming partners it also benefits from the support of the wider community, including volunteer led citizen science and fundraising efforts. Its focus is to save waders at a local landscape scale, but it has become increasingly recognised for its contributions to lowland curlew work at a national and international level.

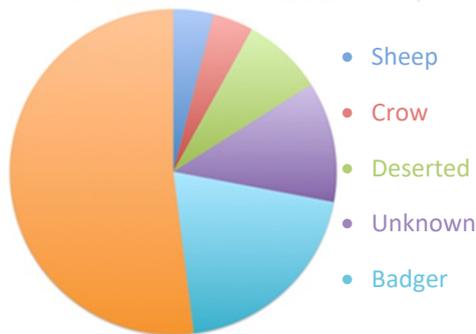


30 chicks hatched in 2017,
with 6-9 young fledged successfully

www.curlewcountry.org

How did Curlew Country chicks successfully fledge in 3 years?

Causes of Nest failure at Egg Stage
2015 & 2016 combined



Following two years of monitoring to discover the causes of nesting failure, among the local population of around 35 breeding pairs, interventions to help nest survival are starting to be implemented. This year 30 chicks hatched from nests monitored in the project area. Between 1 and 3 fledged from nests with 5 chicks fledging from eggs incubated under licence. During 2015 and 2016, nest monitoring of over 30 nests with cameras and data loggers revealed that most curlew nests were being predated at egg stage, mainly by foxes with fewer nests predated by badgers. In each of these years chicks hatched from only 3 nests and none of them survived to fledging.

One of our national partners, the Game and Wildlife Conservation Trust, put us in touch with a project in Germany which had conducted trials using temporary electric fencing to protect curlew nests. This has been used with other ground nesting birds, but usually those which nest in groups or colonies, not territorial nesters like curlew. In 2016, the only 3 nests that survived beyond egg stage were those where electric fencing was used (a UK mainland first). This year we have put fences up around as many nests as possible and trialled lethal fox control in two areas. The results are encouraging and demonstrate that the interventions are starting to work.



Our fantastic farming and land managing partners



Farming partners watching curlew chicks with radio tags

We work in partnership with farmers. The original project design was to work with farmers to improve habitat for curlew and help them get into agri-environment schemes. When we started this consultation we listened to farmers' concerns that the original project would not work and co-designed a new project. Aimed at trying to discover what problems with nesting success the local curlew were really facing, the Curlew Country project was born.

We have formed a farmers' steering group and recognise the need to work closely with them. Only healthy farm businesses can support wildlife, and we need to be aware of the relentless pressure on our local farmers to produce ever cheaper food. We aim to support our farmers and land managers so they in turn can support the wildlife that we all value in our landscape.

And wider Community Support...

It is not just farmers who appreciate waders. 97% of the local community who responded to consultations voted for a curlew based project to form part of the Stiperstones and Corndon Hill Country Landscape Partnership Scheme. Arts projects throughout Shropshire and the Welsh Marches have helped to raise awareness of the plight of curlew, and have inspired local people to set up funding initiatives. Community Wildlife Groups continue their independent adult curlew surveying work, gathering valuable data on the population levels and helping to determine the location of their territories.



For over a decade community wildlife group members have been out on footpaths surveying curlew numbers during the breeding season, following the British Trust for Ornithology methodology. These dedicated volunteers discovered that the local population had fallen dramatically during this period. Their findings were in line with national figures, that show a 50% fall in Eurasian curlew numbers across England within 25 years. This sadly reflects the international picture, although curlew are faring better in managed moorland and upland reserves.



Local, National, International...

There are small, and hopeful, signs that the actions of the project could lead to a reversal in the decline of our local curlew population. Curlew Country's success soon attracted attention at a national level as it emerged as the most comprehensive and action based curlew project in the UK, outside upland reserves and moorland. Amanda Perkins, Project Manager, and Tony Cross, Project Ornithologist, have recently presented to the International Wader Study Group conference, Curlew Workshop in Prague. Curlew Country is proud to be one of a handful of active and wide-ranging projects working at an international level.

We have just been asked to contribute to briefing notes for both Richard Benyon, MP, who is bringing a motion in a curlew debate in parliament, and for Therese Coffey, MP, Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for the Environment.



Courtesy of Astrid Kant, Netherlands



What will Curlew Country be doing next?

We need to help more chicks survive. Knowing the fate of the chicks that don't survive is crucial, so that we can intervene to help them. We also need to get a better idea of what is going to help breeding curlew thrive in our landscape in the longer term. During the next phase of the project we will:

- Modify our interventions to maximise their effect.
- Boost chick numbers – We have received a licence to incubate eggs and we are taking expert advice from scientists experienced in this field and acting as volunteers.
- Use GPS tags to discover more about curlew use of habitat and what is needed to sustain them in the future.
- Analyse data gathered by the Farm Business Management Consultant; working with farmers in the project to discover what it really costs to support breeding curlew, so that this can be fed back into agri-environment policy.
- Support our farmers so that they can support our curlew.
- Continue to work with national and international partners to feed into, and learn from, the wider effort to save Eurasian Curlew from becoming extinct.



Curlew Cam allowed us to follow the live progress of one of our local nests—if you missed it there are some highlights on our website!

Support our Curlew Country Appeal!



Donate online at www.curlewcountry.org

Or send a cheque payable to 'Ground-nesting Birds Recovery Group' to
Curlew Country, Rigmoroak, Pennerley, Minsterley, Shropshire,

SY5 ONE

For more information about the Curlew Country project, please contact curlewcountry@gwct.org.uk

We are extremely grateful to all who have helped to fund the project and in particular to our major donors; The Jean Jackson Trust and Natural England Bequest Fund, Natural Resources Wales, The British Trust for Ornithology and Wader Quest.

