

Curlew Country

The Shropshire and Welsh Marches based UK lowland curlew recovery project

Issue 2: Spring 2018



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 help 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.

For more information on what the project has achieved to date, visit our website.



www.curlewcountry.org

A new phase for Curlew Country



2018 sees several changes for Curlew Country, with exciting new interventions to trial in the coming season. Back in March, Curlew Country's host organisation, the Stiperstones and Corndon Hill Country Landscape Partnership Scheme (LPS), reached the end of its five-year lifespan. The Scheme offered Curlew Country a fantastic starting platform, enabling the vital collection of nesting data, and the first trials of innovative intervention methods. This led to the first chicks fledging in the area for several years, a

great achievement for lowland curlew. Curlew Country and its team are extremely grateful to the LPS team, as well as the hosting organisation, Shropshire Hills Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty Partnership.

The project is based on strong partnerships with farmers, landowners and conservation organisations to get the best result for local curlews. This spring has seen Curlew Country move to its new hosting organisation, the Game & Wildlife Conservation Trust (GWCT). Their support and expertise will help the project to continue to grow and improve and make a real difference in UK curlew recovery.

For more information about GWCT, visit their website: www.gwct.org.uk



Courtesy of Billy Clapham Photography

Future Funding

Saturday the 21st April 2018 marked the first World Curlew Day, and the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) announced the award of new funding for Curlew Country. This will allow the project to embark upon a new phase of its ground breaking work to turn around the dramatic decline in this iconic species.

Natural England, The Whitley Animal Protection Trust, The Shropshire Hills AONB Partnership Conservation Fund, and Pimhill Barn are also providing vital funding, but much more still needs to be done to win the race against time to save curlew.

Project manager, Amanda Perkins, had this to say on the successful bid: "Through its generosity, the HLF is helping to support a long-term need to revive the fortunes of Britain's largest and much-adored wader."

This funding will be used to continue with nest protection, predator control, trialling rearing chicks, as well as offering training and advice to farmers, land managers, volunteers and other curlew groups. It will also start a programme of surveying on-farm wildlife that the recently formed 'Farmers Steering Group' wishes to implement.

Another new initiative will be the trial of habitat management for curlew, in conjunction with research, to discover if products from a different form of management can replace some loss of income for farmers supporting curlew.



2018 Breeding Season

The 2018 breeding season is (finally) on its way. Reports are coming in of curlew sightings in and around the Shropshire Hills and Welsh Marches. Farmers in particular have been keen to tell us when and where they've been seeing curlew on their land, and want to know how to help their pairs survive.

Project ornithologist, Tony Cross, is back to continue his important work, locating and protecting nests. This year sees an additional task for the team, with a licence granted to incubate eggs and rear chicks. We hope that by boosting the population in this way, we will gain some time in which to address other issues facing curlew.

So if you see or hear a curlew, while going about your day, you can easily send us the information via our online bird form, www.curlewcountry.org/birdform.



Look out for arts events such as The Case For Curlew and Curlew Conversations. This season we also have film student, Billy Clapham, working with the project to create a short film called Keeper of the Call. Ben Osborne will continue his great work filming the project.

Be sure to keep up-to-date with the project via our social media, and look out for the return of CurlewCam this season! **Follow us on facebook, @CurlewCountryPage, and twitter, @CurlewCountry.**

Do's and Don'ts for Bird Observers

As a conservation project, the safety and wellbeing of the birds we work with is of the utmost importance. To help ensure disturbance to nesting curlew is kept to a minimum, here are some useful rules for birders and volunteers.

- If you see the birds while out and about keep well away, observing from a safe distance.
- Don't enter a field looking for a nest—if you suspect there may be a nest nearby let a specialist know (like us!).
- Don't prolong your visit (avoid staying in the same area for more than 15 mins if curlew are present). The birds may not make it obvious you are near a nest, and your presence may prevent them returning, leaving eggs to get cold.
- Don't repeatedly visit the same spot, this could cause unnecessary disturbance.
- If you see a curlew driving away other birds—let us know ASAP!



Key Achievements Since 2014

Curlew Country has been a groundbreaking project, and has some great achievements to its name, all since 2014. Here we will look back at some of the highlights and best successes:

- We've worked with over **60 farmers and land managers** to design a project which they felt passionate about supporting. This has also led to the formation of a **farmers steering group**.
- Field ornithologists carried out **two years of close nest monitoring** to establish the cause of breeding failure. This led to 2 main discoveries—no chicks fledged from over 30 nests in 2015 or 2016, and that predation is the most urgent problem facing these birds locally.
- We were the first project in the UK to **protect nests with temporary electric fencing**, based on the research of German based project, NABU. Combined with two trial areas of lethal fox control, 2017 saw **chicks successfully fledging** in the area for the first time in 3 years.



- Set up a **Project Advisory Group** of local and national technical experts.
- The project raised over **£90,000** to support the first phase of curlew recovery.
- Through the expertise gathered from a farm business management consultant, we established the **true cost to farmers of supporting breeding waders** on their land. These findings were fed back to local and national policy makers.
- **Colour ringed over 100 migratory curlew** to better understand their winter and summer habits, as well as satellite tagging two adult curlew, named Dolly and Fran.
- Set up an **online wader recording system**, to provide a simple and effective means of reporting casual wader sightings.
- Liaised with local **Community Wildlife Group members** who continue to monitor populations of adult curlew through volunteer surveys.
- The project was cited as an example of **'best practice'** at an All Party Parliamentary Group, and briefed both the Minister and MP who called for a **parliamentary debate** on curlew. The RSPB, BTO, WWT and the Curlew Forum have all visited the project to find out more about its work for lowland curlew.
- Offered **training** to conservation volunteers, land managers and fox control contractors to aim to ensure best practice. Produced a training **film in collaboration with the BTO** on curlew breeding behaviour, to assist other curlew recovery projects.
- Run arts activities including **sculpture and writing workshops**, and the formation of a **choir** with specially composed music, culminating in a major outdoor event.
- Obtained the first **licence to incubate curlew eggs** in the UK and successfully reared 6 chicks to fledging stage.
- Installed the first UK **curlew nest web-camera**, allowing footage to be streamed live, attracting interest from across the UK and from Europe.



What is Headstarting?

Headstarting is a method used to help boost the population of species that have suffered from severe declines, often as a last-ditch attempt to prevent them from disappearing completely. It has been pioneered by the Wildfowl and Wetlands Trust (WWT), who have used it to help species such as the spoon-billed sandpiper.

It involves specialists collecting eggs from wild nests, to be incubated, hatched and reared in captivity and then releasing them at fledging age back into the wild. This method of intervention protects the eggs and chicks during their most vulnerable stages, giving the fledglings the best possible chance of surviving.

Curlew Country gained the first UK licence to incubate curlew eggs and rear chicks in 2017, trialling on a small scale and resulted in 6 chicks being released at fledging stage. This year the project has once again been granted a licence to incubate eggs and rear chicks, and will be doing so on a larger scale to boost the population.

Although not a long term solution to the problems that influence curlew population decline, we hope that this increase in fledglings will buy us time to address other far reaching issues of habitat and predation.

Stay tuned on our website for updates throughout the season, and you can read about the work on the Spoon-billed sandpiper at www.saving-spoon-billed-sandpiper.com



Volunteers and Training

The new phase of the project has led to Curlew Country engaging a number of new volunteers carrying out a range of duties from helping to find breeding territories and nests, to nest protection, predation control and helping with administration.

Volunteers helping with nest monitoring have been offered specialist training with the team over a period of time and have already played an important part in helping to find territorial birds and nests.

We would like to say a huge thank you to everyone who gives up their time to help the project.

Curlew Observation Film

In partnership with the British Trust for Ornithology (BTO), Curlew Country has produced a film made by local camera man, Ben Osborne. The film highlights what to look for when observing breeding curlew and is helping new curlew initiatives across the UK.



The Value of Colour Rings



Over 100 migrating curlew have now been fitted with colour rings by field ornithologist, Tony Cross. These curlew are caught on their way to and from their overwintering grounds, at stopover point Dolydd Hafren. Colour rings are a valuable way to identify individual birds, and the reports of colour rings can provide information about their movements and lifespans.

The ringing scheme has been in place for well over 100 years, with it's aim to find out more about birds movements. The colour rings can be fitted in a unique combination, but more frequently they are engraved with a sequence of numbers or letters. Ringers try hard to avoid duplication (although this can sometimes happen with migratory birds in different countries), but will also attach a unique metal ring that can be read

on recapture.

Colour ringing does still require an observer to get a good view or photograph of the bird, in order to read the two letter code. In curlew, the rings sit above the knee joint on the leg, meaning they are fairly conspicuous if standing in short grass.

If you see a colour ringed curlew, whether you can read the code or not, please report the sighting to Tony Cross at:

tonycross@virgin.net

Curlew Country helps to fund this work.



By Royal Invitation

During the LPS years, national interest in the comprehensive and trail-blazing work of the Curlew Country project has grown. Advice, presentations and talks are now being requested all over the country and even internationally.

Most recently Amanda Perkins, project manager, was asked to give a presentation on curlew recovery alongside the RSPB and an upland grouse moor manager to a group of 40 people invited by HRH The Prince of Wales to a curlew summit on Dartmoor.

The summit aimed to find solutions and agree on the best course of action to save curlew now.

If you would like more details about the project visit our website or contact us via:

curlewcountry@gwct.org.uk



Start of the 2018 Season in Pictures



Volunteer Tim helped locate a nest on his first trip out



A bird flying through its territory while out nest finding



A curlew sneaking away from a nest silently through the grass



The second nest found with the help of volunteer Dave



The first nest found this season—with a full clutch!



A curlew in flight as it leaves the nest site

We would love to see your art or pictures of or inspired by curlew— share them with us on our social media pages or e-mail them to us directly at curlewcountry@gwct.org.uk. Don't forget, you can record your casual sightings of curlew via our online bird form, available at www.curlewcountry.org/birdform

Celebrating World Curlew Day

The 21st April 2018 marked the first World Curlew Day, and offered an opportunity for organisations and communities to join together to support this species in trouble. The date was chosen for a traditional Welsh folk tale, that identifies the first curlew conservationist, St Bueno. The story goes that while sailing off the coast he dropped his prayer book into the sea. Luckily, a passing curlew took pity on him, scooping up the book and taking it to the shore to dry. Grateful to the bird, the Saint granted it special protection, which is why their nests today are so difficult to find.

Curlew Champion, Mary Colwell, was pivotal in getting the day recognized and was interviewed on Radio 4's Today programme. Project manager, Amanda Perkins, and some farming partners were interviewed by BBC Radio Shropshire on the day, and in the following week.



The Case for Curlew

Visitors to the Bog Visitor Centre were able to enjoy an interactive art exhibit, The Case for Curlew, which will be out and about again soon. A reminiscences project is also ongoing, collecting memories from local communities of waders within the landscape. Look out for more event details on our website. Take a look at the **#worldcurlewday** on social media to see what other people have been doing to celebrate and raise awareness.

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 or to get involved, please contact Amanda Perkins:

E-mail: CurlewCountry@gwct.org.uk or phone: 01743 296100

We are extremely grateful to all who have helped to fund the project and in particular to our major donors; The Heritage Lottery Fund, Natural England, The Whitley Animal Protection Trust, and Pimhill Barn.

