

Curlew *Numenius arquatus*

STATUS

Common large wader of the western uplands, less common but widespread at lower altitudes
National Amber List (RSPB 1996)
Annex 1 of the Birds Directive



WHAT IS THE CURLEW ?

The curlew is a large wader with a distinctive, long, down-curved beak. Curlews breed on the open fell and in-by fields of the uplands where their characteristic display flight and haunting calls makes them a very noticeable part of the fauna. The main winter habitats are mud flats and areas of sand at low tide, but also include rocky pools, saltmarshes, coastal and some inland pastures.

Curlew feed on a variety of soil invertebrates including earthworms and leather-jackets. The chicks are also fed on invertebrates, of which flies form a major part.

WHERE ARE THEY FOUND IN THE UK?

Breeding curlew in the UK show a very northerly and westerly distribution with their strongholds in the Pennines, southern uplands of Scotland, Tayside, Grampians, Caithness, Orkney and Shetland. The highest densities occur in Orkney where they can reach up to 55 pairs per km². Curlew show marked preferences for unimproved habitats with densities increasing from 2 pairs per km² on arable and dry pasture in Scotland to 19 pairs per km² on raised bogs in the north Pennines. Population estimates suggest that the British population is 57,000 pairs.

WHY IS THE CURLEW OF CONSERVATION IMPORTANCE ?

During the mid twentieth century breeding curlews spread into lowland agricultural areas but this expansion in range had stopped by the latter half of the century with local declines in western Scotland, the Midlands, Pembrokeshire, Devon and Dorset. The breeding population of curlew in the British Isles represents 35% of the European population.

Some British curlews winter in Ireland, the remainder are joined by birds from across Europe. Over half of the European population winters in the British Isles.

HOW HEALTHY ARE THE LOCAL POPULATIONS OF THE CURLEW?

Overall the breeding population of curlews is believed to be stable.

THE CURLEW IN THE DURHAM AREA

HOW MUCH DO WE KNOW ABOUT THE CURLEW IN THE DURHAM AREA ?

The breeding distribution of the curlew is well

known, as a result of survey work for the 'Summer Atlas of Breeding Birds in Durham'. The principle winter gatherings are also well documented, with a number of these being regularly monitored.

WHERE HAS IT BEEN FOUND IN THE DURHAM AREA ?

Curlews breed in the upland areas of the Durham Dales. There is a smaller but significant population of curlew which breeds rather unsuccessfully, on lowland farmland and pastures. They winter on lowland farmland and suitable coastal sites within the Plan area mainly favouring estuaries, although there is an increasing trend to inland overwintering in a number of areas.

CURLEWS ARE AT RISK FROM:

Loss of suitable breeding habitat.

Drainage of in-by pasture and moorlands, causing loss of food supplies.

Predation of nest/chicks—mainly by stoats and gulls on unkept estates.

Recreational disturbance – curlews react very quickly to humans and dogs, which can lead to chilling or predation of eggs or chicks.

Loss of wintering areas including development and pollution of coastal areas.

CURLEWS BENEFIT FROM:

Grip blocking on moorlands.

Development of management plans for in-by pasture.

Use of seasonal footpaths.

Development of estuary management plans.

Reduced egg/chick predation on kept estates.

IMPORTANT HABITATS FOR THE CURLEW:

<i>Upland heathland and blanket bog</i>	*
<i>Upland hay meadows</i>	*
<i>Upland acid grasslands</i>	*
<i>Lowland permanent pasture and semi improved grassland</i>	
<i>Saltmarsh</i>	***
<i>Mudflat</i>	***

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OTHER SPECIES ACTION PLANS COVERING ISSUES RELEVANT TO THE CURLEW:

<i>Black grouse</i>	**	<i>Merlin</i>	*
<i>Skylark</i>	**	<i>Brown hare</i>	**
<i>Lapwing</i>	*		
<i>Golden plover</i>	*		

N.B ** indicates action plan produced in 1998
 * indicates action plan produced in 2000
 *** indicates action plan to be produced in 2001

CURLEW AND THE LAW

The curlew is protected under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981.

TARGETS FOR THE CONSERVATION OF CURLEW IN THE DURHAM AREA:

	DATE
<i>Target 1 Maintain the distribution and enhance the breeding population of curlew.</i>	ONGOING
<i>Target 2 Protect and maintain the wintering and passage populations of curlew</i>	ONGOING
<i>Target 3 Monitor both breeding and wintering numbers of curlew every 5 years.</i>	2004

CURLEW ACTIONS

ACTION	DATE	POSSIBLE PARTNERS	MEETS TARGET NO.
<u>POLICY AND LEGISLATION</u>			
1. Seek opportunities to extend the Arable Stewardship Scheme to the Plan area.	2004	MAFF, RSPB, EN	1, 2
2. Seek opportunities to extend the Organic Aid Scheme.	2004	MAFF, RSPB, EN	1, 2
<u>SITE MANAGEMENT</u>			
3. Seek opportunities to increase amount of in-bye pasture in grazing management plans within the ESA.	2002	MAFF, FWAG, RSPB, DBAP	1, 2
4. Identify demonstration site as an example of best practice.	2004	DBAP, FWAG, RSPB	1, 2
5. Promote the conversion of arable to permanent pasture.	ONGOING	MAFF, FWAG, RSPB, DBAP	1, 2
6. Promote the raising of the water table in appropriate pastures.	ONGOING	MAFF, FWAG, RSPB, DBAP	1, 2
7. Seek opportunities to increase uptake of Countryside Stewardship and Organic Aid Scheme.	ONGOING	MAFF, FWAG, RSPB, DBAP	1, 2
<u>RESEARCH AND MONITORING</u>			
8. Include monitoring for curlew in both lowland farmland and upland in-bye monitoring.	2004	DBC, RSPB, DBAP, DUBSG	3
9. Undertake surveys of curlew distribution and numbers.	2003	DUBSG, DBC	3
<u>ADVISORY</u>			
10. Work through the Agriculture and Biodiversity Advisory Group to provide information on positive management for farmland birds.	ONGOING	FWAG, ABAG, DBAP	1, 2, 3
11. Support RSPB's 'Working with Waders' initiative.	ONGOING	RSPB, DBAP	1, 3
12. Provide training and advice for agri-environment project officers.	2004	RSPB, FWAG, DBAP	1, 2, 3
<u>COMMUNICATIONS AND PUBLICITY</u>			
13. Raise awareness of the decline in farmland birds and possible solutions.	ONGOING	DBAP, RSPB, DBC	1, 2, 3