

Curlew Country

The Shropshire and Welsh Marches based curlew recovery project



Exciting early signs on the impact of Headstarting

Encouragingly, we are seeing that some of our headstarted birds are coming back to breed in our area and pairing with wild birds that are known to us, which have lost one member of the pair. While it is still too early to tell what impact this will have at the population level, we have seen a small increase in active breeding territories in the Upper Onny catchment area. While our modelling suggests that headstarting alone will not be enough to save curlews, it remains a vital part of the overall strategy, which must also work towards natural nesting success and improving the extent and quality of habitat available.

There were eight confirmed headstarted individuals breeding in our area this year, with three more whose territories were not identified. Two additional records outside of the immediate project area (Brown Clee Hill and Bewdley) suggest that there are likely to be more headstarted individuals whose breeding sites have not yet been found. While this may seem like a small number, we have seen that some birds can take 3 or 4 years to come back and breed, and we expect that more will return in years to come. Each returning headstarted bird is helping to improve our understanding of how curlews find their way home to breed. One new bird (released in 2022) returned to the area at the end of the 2024 breeding season after having been spotted earlier in the Salisbury area, and was seen intermingling with other wild curlews in a pre-migratory feeding flock. We believe that 1 in 8 birds breeding in the Curlew Country project area are now headstarted birds.



2024 Season Update

In 2024 Curlew Country took a break from headstarting to monitor the population to examine natural breeding success as part of a national initiative known as the Curlew Solutions Trial. Curlew Country was one of five organisations taking part across the country. Curlew Country was the traditional lowland farm region and others represented upland, lowland river valley and arable areas. Partners include The British Trust for Ornithology, The Curlew Recovery Partnership, Upper Thames and the Wildfowl and Wetlands Trust. The monitoring exercise was similar to work carried out by Curlew Country in 2015 – 2017. It was interesting to see how much activities including new agri-environment schemes had affected the fortunes of our breeding curlew. We deployed temporary electric fencing on sixteen of the seventeen nests found. Similarly to our findings in 2015 and 2016 no chicks survived to fledging. Fox was the most common predator of nests in all areas. Although temporary electric fencing helped mitigate against terrestrial predators in most cases, some fence breaches by fox, badger and stoat were recorded, as well as carrion crow making up a significant proportion of nest predation incidents. Overall, fenced nests were considerably more likely to hatch chicks than unfenced nests and the protection offered from accidental disturbance by agricultural activities and livestock also improved prospects.



While no chicks are thought to have survived to fledge in our area, some broods survived longer than others. The conditions where chicks survived longest were found in farmland with a mixture of short and tall vegetation. This could be provided at the field-level using controlled cattle grazing to create a range of grass sward heights, with a long sward left un-grazed around the nest while the birds were incubating, or by having a mosaic of different grassland management types occurring side-by-side (e.g. hay/silage fields adjacent to grazed land) to provide a choice of feeding sites for chicks at different developmental stages. The increased mobility of older chicks (>2-3 weeks) created problems for farmers and fieldworkers alike. When broods crossed into fields and ownerships where agricultural operations were being carried out, the need for a reactive payment scheme for farmer crop sacrifice to enable

Curlew Cam

Curlew Cam returned this year to captivate many viewers around the world. The first egg hatched on 20th May and two more chicks emerged over the next couple of days, before leaving the last unhatched egg behind. The adult male paired with an unringed female in the Shelfe area. It was his first breeding record since being ringed at a pre-breeding season roost and he exceeded expectations in keeping his brood going for four weeks after hatching.



Scan to view the highlights



Returning Birds



4H was released in 2019 and was seen back in Shropshire for the first time in 2023. He gave us his first breeding record in 2024 when seen copulating with an unringed bird near the Stiperstones. Special thanks to Jenni Wheeler for her fab photo of him on his new breeding grounds (top right).



UJ was also released in 2019 and returned to Shropshire in 2021. He has been seen overwintering on the Hayle estuary, Cornwall. This year he gave us his third breeding record and raised his chicks to three weeks old before sadly losing the brood.

Volunteering Opportunities

The Curlew Country core team is small. It relies on the help of a wonderful team of local volunteers to achieve its ambitious conservation aims. There are lots of ways for you to get involved, including opportunities to help with breeding curlew and predator surveys, caring for our chicks, helping to build and maintain our chick rearing pens and helping with admin, fundraising and events.

If you are interested in volunteering opportunities with Curlew Country, please contact us via e-mail; curlewcountry@gwct.org.uk, or phone; 07458147161.

We will be hosting a volunteer event on **5th March 2025**. All are welcome to come along and learn more.

Despite the hard work of our ornithologists and volunteers, there remains a real risk that our local population will become functionally extinct within decades. We need your help to stop this from happening!



Urgent Curlew Appeal

After ten years of working towards local curlew recovery we have experience of what is working and what isn't. Curlew Country is part of the Steering Groups of national partnerships in England and Wales and has taken part in and keeps up to date with research on both sides of the border. It has a plan for management of the local Curlew crisis, but without secure funding in place it is in the difficult position of having to choose which of the interventions it uses on a year-to-year basis, knowing that the suite of recognised interventions will be essential to recovery. Curlew Country needs funding to continue its holistic pioneering work in headstarting, supporting farmers who support Curlews, strategic predation impact mitigation, habitat creation and maintenance, and post chick release monitoring.

So much will be lost without your help:

Scan to visit our webpage @
www.curlewcountry.org



- A nationally important curlew population
- The goodwill and faith of farming partners and other local supporters
- The opportunities that curlew discussions have unlocked to deliver wider environmental benefits on farms
- The inspirational work of the small cost-effective project team of staff and dedicated volunteers
- A call which enthralls all who hear it in our landscape.
- A new, successful, pragmatic and trail-blazing approach to lowland curlew recovery
- A species much embedded in the culture and much loved by the local community.

Donate online via www.curlewcountry.org/donate

Curlew Country is hosted by the Game & Wildlife Conservation Trust. Curlew Country funds are ring-fenced for Curlew Country purposes only. Please make cheques payable to the Game & Wildlife Conservation Trust and send them to

Diary Dates

Volunteers Meeting — Wednesday 5th March 2025 @ the Natural England Office—6 30 pm: A chance for Curlew Country to thank its wonderful volunteers with snacks and refreshments, discuss plans for the season and the volunteering opportunities available.

Farmers Meeting — Monday 17th March 2025 @ The Crown, Wentnor—6:30pm: We look forward to catching up with all the brilliant farmers who work with us to help save Curlew on their land.

General Public Meetings — 21st & 22nd March 2025 @ Norbury Village Hall—10 am to 12 pm: Come and find out what the future holds for our local, but nationally significant, lowland curlew hotspot population.

For more information about the Curlew Country project or to get involved, please contact:

E-mail: CurlewCountry@gwct.org.uk or phone: 07458 147161

