

4.3 Curlew

4.3.1 Current Status

The Eurasian Curlew (*Numenius arquata*) is a UK Biodiversity Action Plan priority species listed on the Annex II/2 of the European Birds Directive, the Amber list of birds of conservation concern (BOCC) and the IUCN 2015 Red list. The UK breeding population, now at 68,000 (28% of the European population) decreased by 59% in the UK over the period 1980-2010 with a 38% decline over the period 1999-2010 (IUCN 2015¹). In Europe as a whole the species is in decline.

There is no data on local trends, but in 1990 Ratcliffe¹⁹ estimated that over 5,000 pairs of Curlew had been lost across the Southern Uplands to afforestation alone, whilst recent research has shown that curlews decline and have poorer breeding success on moorland close to woodlands²⁰.

4.3.2 Ecology and Habitat Requirements

Curlew, the largest European wading bird, utilises different habitats throughout the year. Curlew is a ground nesting bird, and during the nesting season from April through to July, need rough tussocky, not too dense vegetation, and can be found in heathlands, purple moor grass grasslands, bogs, fens and rush pastures and on agricultural grasslands with suitable vegetation structure. The diet of a curlew during the breeding season consists almost entirely of worms and insects. The winter season is spent in flocks in coastal regions on mudflats, saltmarshes and coastal grasslands and feed on insects as well as crustaceans and molluscs. They are typically solitary outside the breeding season but can form large flocks.

4.3.3 Concerns

- Loss of suitable breeding and over-wintering habitat such as moorland, to afforestation and intensive agriculture
- Predation at nesting and chick rearing stage

4.3.4 Conservation Objectives

- To improve knowledge of current breeding population size through increased surveying and recording.
- Maintain and enhance the breeding curlew population in the Transition zone through provision of advice and encouragement to join SRDP.
- Improve management and protection at breeding and over wintering sites.
- Establish numbers and distribution of breeding curlew through surveys.

¹⁹ Bird Life of Mountain and Upland (Cambridge University Press, 1991 ISBN 0-521-33123-4)

²⁰ Douglas *et al.*, 2014. Upland land use predicts population decline in a globally near- threatened wader. Journal of Applied. Ecology, 51, 194–203.

4.3.5 Management

In addition to the habitat management measures detailed for the relevant habitats described in Section 3.4, curlew require specific management to safeguard and enhance its population.

The recommended management actions to support a stable population of curlew are:

- Predator control, including corvids and foxes. Funding opportunities for some areas of the Biosphere through SRDP.
- Reduction of grazing in selected areas to retain cover and prevent trampling in the breeding season (levels of 0.35-1LU/ha help reduce trampling of nests²¹).
- Retain patches of taller vegetation for nesting when cutting rushes.
- Later cut for silage/hay (delay until July) to ensure provision of cover during the breeding season.
- Cutting silage/hay in a bird friendly manner by avoiding cutting during the nesting period (April – July) and cutting in a way which leaves some areas of taller vegetation for refuge.

4.3.6 Example Projects

- In recognition of the global importance of the UK's curlew population and its current decline, the RSPB has launched a curlew recovery project. The Society manages Barclye, part of Wood of Cree Reserve, in an effort to maintain breeding curlew and, along with black grouse, the species is a focus for targeted advice in upper Nithsdale and parts of east Ayrshire, which still hold significant populations. The RSPB also have a trial management project underway on and around their reserve at Airds Moss.
- SNH site condition monitoring and specific studies such as the Monitoring of Moorland Fringe biodiversity report (2014)²² and British Trust for Ornithology (BTO) volunteer breeding bird surveys.
- The Nith and Lugar Water Catchment Improvement Project²³ aimed at linking important, but fragmented, habitats at an opencast coal mining site near New Cumnock, to create an integrated habitat network by restoring land on an opencast coal mining site near New Cumnock to wet grassland. This created a habitat for breeding wading birds such as lapwing, snipe, curlew, redshank and oystercatcher and included water vole surveys.

²¹ Green, R.E. (1986) The management of lowland wet grasslands for breeding waders. Unpublished report. RSPB, Sandy, UK

²² Scottish Natural Heritage Commissioned Report No. 456. Monitoring of moorland fringe biodiversity: the bird communities of the interface between conifer plantations and moorland in the Galloway Forest Park and their relationships with moorland fringe habitats (2014).

http://www.snh.org.uk/pdfs/publications/commissioned_reports/456.pdf

²³ <http://www.centuralscotlandgreennetwork.org/delivering/project-archive/nith-and-lugar-water-catchment-improvement>

4.3.7 Opportunities

- The current Scottish Rural Development Programme Agri-Environment and Climate Scheme (SRDP AECS) provides funding to farmers to reduce harvesting to a single cut for silage/hay after August 1st in order to prevent loss of cover for curlew and other ground nesting bird species during the chick rearing period.
- Open habitat mapping by Forestry Commission Scotland could be used to target some areas for open habitat restoration and condition improvement.
- Creation and extension of open upland habitat networks through changes in forestry management in the Galloway Forest Park.
- Encourage predator control and late cutting of hay/silage in key breeding areas.

4.3.8 Further Information

BirdLife International 2012. *Numenius arquata*. The IUCN Red List of Threatened Species. Version 2015.2. Available at www.iucnredlist.org

Bird Life International Species Fact Sheet. Available at:
<http://www.birdlife.org/datazone/speciesfactsheet.php?id=3012>

RSPB Advice for Farmers and curlew advisory sheet available to download at:
<http://www.rspb.org.uk/forprofessionals/farming/advice/details.aspx?id=203886>