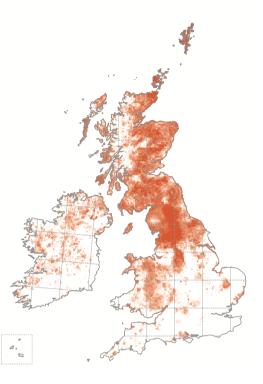


LAND MANAGEMENT FOR WILDLIFE

CURLEW (Numenius arquata)



Breeding abundance map reproduced from Balmer et al 2013 Bird Atlas with permission from British Trust for Ornithology.



UK farmland is very important for breeding Curlew, with the UK hosting around a quarter of the world population. Unfortunately, over recent decades numbers have been declining everywhere – many regions have lost more than half their Curlews. Declines have been driven by changes in land use, leading to greater predation of eggs and chicks, particularly by foxes.

Curlews generally breed in open moorland, rough pasture and meadows – habitats that provide cover and camouflage alongside plenty of insect food. The ongoing support of farmers is essential if curlews are to remain part of the farmed landscape.

WHAT DO CURLEW NEED?

Tall vegetation for nesting from April to July. Curlew nest on the ground in a scrape lined with dry grass. Like other waders, curlew favour flat or gently sloping ground where there is good visibility surrounding the nesting site. They particularly favour areas with a mix of vegetation heights and where there is vegetation typical of damp habitats, such as sedges and rush.

Soil and surface insects during the breeding season.

Curlews eat all sorts of invertebrates picked from the surface or found by probing soft ground. Adults feed on earthworms, leatherjackets, beetles, spiders, caterpillars; chicks generally feed on surface insects.

ANNUAL LIFECYCLE

ANNOAL LII ECTCLE												
	J	F	М	Α	М	J	J	Α	S	0	N	D
Adults return to breeding areas												
Nesting and chick rearing												
Adults and juveniles head to coastal wintering grounds												
European birds arrive into UK coastal areas												

HOW CAN I ENCOURAGE CURLEW?

NESTING HABITAT

MOORLAND

- Manage moorland to retain a variety of habitats, including rough grassland, heathland, peatland wet flushes, patches of bracken etc.
- Burning should be avoided on deep peat.
- Rotational cutting and burning of dwarf shrub heath can help provide a more diverse structure including shorter vegetation preferred for nesting.

MEADOWS

- The taller vegetation of fields shut up for hay or silage is attractive to nesting curlew. They favour unimproved meadows where vegetation is less dense, though more agriculturally improved fields may be used. Curlews generally begin nesting between mid-April to mid-May, so are attracted to meadows that have some vegetation cover at this time. Curlews need around a month to incubate their eggs, with chicks fledging around 5-6 weeks after hatching. Chicks can be drawn away to cover by their parents relatively soon after hatching.
- If cutting cannot be delayed until chicks have hatched, leave as large an area as possible uncut around the nest, but this may attract the attention of predators. Where chicks have hatched, consider leaving any damp areas uncut as chicks are most likely to be using these. Leaving an uncut margin at the field edge will help maintain some cover. Mowing from the centre outwards may help move chicks to field margins.

PASTURE

Livestock grazing at appropriate levels is essential to providing the curlew's requirement for a mosaic of tall and short vegetation. Cattle are often preferred, but grazing management has the biggest influence on vegetation structure. If possible avoid grazing or

- graze lightly when the birds are nesting as this is when the birds are most vulnerable to disturbance from stock (e.g. trampling).
- Rushy pasture may be favoured for nesting, but waders avoid very dense stands of rush. Carry out management where rushes become dense over more than half the field.

MECHANICAL OPERATIONS

 Grassland management practices such as harrowing, rolling and weed topping have the potential to be destructive during the breeding season, so need to be avoided or carried out with extreme care.

TREE COVER

 Curlews like an open aspect so avoid planting trees close to areas used by nesting curlews.

FEEDING HABITAT

MOORLAND

 Restoring wet ground by blocking drainage grips will improve feeding habitat for curlew.

MEADOWS AND PASTURE

- Areas of wet ground, even if small, are important insect-rich feeding areas for chicks. Consider creating shallow pools and re-profiling ditches
- Enclosed farmland is important for foraging curlew.
 The application of farmyard manure, liming and maintaining good soil structure can boost the availability of worms and other soil life on farmland, in turn benefiting feeding curlew.
- Traditionally managed grasslands are important feeding sites for Curlews. The greater diversity of grasses, herbs and flowering plants provide more insect food for chicks and adults to feed on.

KEY POINTS

- Extensively graze breeding areas to provide taller vegetation
- Timing of cutting and other machinery operations is critical and should not be carried out during the breeding season
- · Provide damp ground or small, shallow pools as feeding areas for chicks
- In some areas predator control may be required to helping curlew populations

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