New Forest Curlew Survey 2016

The valley mires and wet heathlands of the New Forest support a regionally important Curlew population, thought to number 100-130 pairs based upon recent surveys.

However, there are concerns that the current population level is actually much lower, and that predators and recreational disturbance are leading to reduced productivity.
New Forest Curlew Survey 2016: Introduction

- Four main objectives:

1. **To search for and map Curlew territories and nests in known breeding habitats in the New Forest**

1. **To monitor discovered nests as frequently as possible through the breeding season to assess productivity and, where possible, cause of any breeding failure**

1. **To record pressures on nesting birds, e.g. predators, recreational disturbance, to assess potential impacts on productivity.**

1. **To ring adults and pulli (with colour rings) to investigate site fidelity and movements during the incubation and inter-breeding periods**

- Data on other ground-nesting waders (Lapwing, Snipe, Redshank) will also be collected during the survey

- Results will be provided to NF managers to support recreational management strategy and other conservation measures

- Co-ordinators / stakeholders include WNF, HOS, FC, NF-NPA, NE, BTO, RSPB
New Forest Curlew Survey 2016: Methods

Experienced volunteer surveyors were each allocated one of 15 survey areas covering up to 10 km² (and totalling 86 km²), which are known ‘hotspots’ for breeding Curlews based on previous surveys and recent casual records provided to HOS.
New Forest Curlew Survey 2016: Territory mapping

- A total of 40 territories were located from mid-March onwards, which is just one-third of the 2014 HLS survey total of 117 territories (130 in 1994 and 100 in 2004)

- Resurvey of all 31 core squares covered in the 1994 and 2004 surveys also supports a significant reduction from 44 (1994) to 33 (1996) and now 10

- Data are internally consistent, so even accounting for a few missed pairs, it is thought unlikely that the current NF Curlew population exceeds 50 pairs

Photos: Andy Page (FC)
Area 2 (Holm Hill/South Weirs) 8 km²

3 Curlew territories (1 nest); 4 Lapwing territories, 5 Snipe territories
New Forest Curlew Survey 2016: Nest finding

- A total of 19 nests were found from 24 April onwards, equating to about half the mapped territories; several nests clearly failed at the egg stage

- Observations of birds with chicks were made at just four sites, and a further four nests were located where hatching was thought to have occurred
New Forest Curlew Survey 2016: Pressures

• Observers were also asked to record pressures, preferably during one-hour effort-corrected counts

• A wide range of pressures were recorded, with those disturbing incubating Curlews including avian predators (Buzzards, Peregrines, Carrion Crows) and recreational disturbance (mostly dog-walkers and runners/walkers off the path)
New Forest Curlew Survey 2016: Ringing

- The ringing team attempted to capture adult Curlews at two communal roosts early in the season, but were unsuccessful despite some near misses; ringing of pulli was postponed to 2017 to ensure licenses and permissions could be secured.

- Colour-ring observations included an adult Curlew at a site in the north of the NF in April that had been ringed at Weston Shore, Southampton Water on 29 Oct 2011.
New Forest Curlew Survey: Plans for 2017 and beyond

• Repeat territory mapping to further define current NF population size and trend

• Quantify productivity and nest failure through visual observation and temp loggers

• Colour-ringing and GPS tracking to assess site fidelity, dispersal and wintering

• Engagement with NPA and FC to reduce recreational pressures, e.g. signage

• Introduction of citizen science to increase public engagement and ‘ownership’