

## CURLEWS IN CRISIS

Draft Actions identified jointly as part of a stakeholder workshop –

4<sup>th</sup> November 2016<sup>1</sup>

There has been a 97% decline of curlew in Ireland since the 1980s, with a current estimate of 122 breeding pairs across the country and low productivity rates. An estimated 78% range contraction has also occurred. (For further details see National breeding Curlew Survey by the National Parks & Wildlife Service).

To share knowledge on the status, threats, drivers and trends of curlews in Ireland, a workshop was held in Higginstown (Co. Westmeath, Ireland) on 4<sup>th</sup> November 2016 with a range of over 80 stakeholders from Government, conservation organisations, forestry organisations, non-governmental organisations, farming, energy production, and academia.

Following a range of talks from speakers from representatives of the National Parks & Wildlife Service, BirdWatch Ireland, RSPB, British Trust for Ornithology, the Department for Agriculture, Food and the Marine, and Bord na Móna, workshop participants were asked to address the following questions:

- What actions need to be implemented?
- When should they take place?
- Which organisations/groups/sectors should implement them, and how?

The actions identified during the workshop are listed below, in order of short, medium and long terms actions. These actions represent suggestions from participants, and are not prioritised.

### Short-term actions for curlew conservation in Ireland

The workshop participants identified a number of short-term actions – understood here as actions that could be carried out within the year. These include the need to:

- Set up a **Task Force for Curlew**. This Task Force will be responsible for coordinating future action for the conservation of curlew and will consist of key national stakeholders. This action was supported in plenary by workshop participants. Alan Lauder (Independent Ecologist) and Barry O'Donoghue (NPWS) will meet in November 2016 to coordinate this Task Force.
- **Communicate curlew location** to NPWS regional and local staff and advisers to allow direct contact with farmers who have curlew on their land.

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<sup>1</sup> The draft actions were compiled by Juliette Young (CEH Edinburgh) and Barry McMahon (UCD).

- Encourage NPWS local staff and advisers to make farmers who have curlew on their land aware and encourage uptake of Green, Low-carbon, Agri-environmental Scheme (**GLAS**) **Tranche 3 by 15<sup>th</sup> December 2016**  
<https://www.agriculture.gov.ie/farmerschemespayments/glas/glastranche3/> and  
<https://www.agriculture.gov.ie/media/migration/farmingschemesandpayments/glas/tranche3/GLAS3Specification031116.pdf> (see page 18 for Breeding Wader and Curlew specification).
- Develop a **concise information sheet** aimed at farmers in clear, jargon-free language. This information sheet should contain information on the urgency of the conservation status of curlews, what habitat curlew need, where curlew occur, and what farmers can do to either continue to support curlew on their land or encourage curlew recovery, e.g. by not degrading suitable habitat where birds are not found breeding.
- Encourage interactive and positive **communication with farmers** on the curlew conservation status and possible approaches to curb curlew loss that farmers can help with through: articles in the media (e.g. Farming Journals), interaction with farmers' union and agricultural advisers, information sheets (see above) and targeted, specific and well-timed events (including participation of government representatives).
- Raise awareness of curlew situation and encourage partnership working with Turf Cutters and Contractors Association (TCCA), and Irish Farmers Association (IFA), on curlew conservation.
- Carry out **targeted and systematic predator control** where curlew are present, for example developing model carried out in Ballydangan Red Grouse project.
  - o Employ a full time predator control official with good experience. This will enable preparation and timelier predator control plus providing a degree of training and education.
  - o Get more operatives on the ground.
  - o Establish the areas where sustained effort will deliver results, be realistic.
  - o Make sure predator control is part of GLAS and other schemes.
  - o Consider the use of the DOC trap (lethal) on Islands or situations where bycatch of protected species can be ruled out.
  - o Review the health of stock (curlews). Look at clutch size, food availability.
  - o Check tick abundance.
  - o Check sheep/hare for Louping ill.
  - o Monitor actual breeding/fledging success.
  - o Engage with pro-active farmers, providing training in humane corvid control.
  - o Use multi-catch crow cages all year to reduce corvid population.
  - o Use predator fencing where appropriate.
  - o Remove trees/ scrub where possible.
  - o Reduce disturbance.
  - o Obtain license to remove protected species if necessary.
  - o Talk to the Grouse and Grey Partridge projects.
  - o Get the best available kit and lots of it, to streamline predator control.

### Medium-term actions for curlew conservation in Ireland

The workshop participants identified a number of medium-term actions – understood here as actions that could be carried out within 2-5 years. These include the need to:

- Develop a **curlew recovery management plan** (based on international curlew plan<sup>2</sup>) and potentially also **site-based management plans**
- Develop **locally-led schemes** promoting engagement with all relevant stakeholders (farmers, other landowners, turf-cutters etc).
- To enforce **existing conservation and domestic turf cutting laws**
- Encourage **habitat creation** for curlew
- Encourage **public support and engagement** in curlew conservation. For example, labelling Bord Na Mona peat bags with curlews. This could be an opportunity to explain the curlew situation, raise awareness of the problems and promote the fact that curlew conservation is supported.
- Create and train **specialist curlew advisers** or ‘champions’ on the ground who can engage with farmers, other landowners and local communities to promote curlew conservation.
- Examine options for reconnecting the curlew with Irish heritage and folklore, re-establishing the curlew as part of Ireland's history.

### Long-term actions for curlew conservation in Ireland

The workshop participants identified a number of medium-term actions – understood here as actions that could be carried out 5 years on. These include the need to:

- Examine **climate and carbon storage policy** to support conservation of bogs - for example encouraging carbon storage to be focussed on bogs, not forests.
- Develop long-term **agri-environment policy** where production focus is balanced with public good and other values (e.g. conservation of biodiversity). This could include landscape scale management to encourage fledged curlew to come back to their original habitat.
- Develop **government policies specifically aimed at protecting curlew sites** from land drainage and forestry.
- Examine **peat extraction techniques** on privately owned bogs to identify sustainable ways of combining functioning peat habitat and peat harvesting.
- Examine **potential for alternative fuel sources** to cutting turf, e.g. providing conifer forestry patches to landowners.
- Encourage **research on curlew population dynamics** at site level, including examining the drivers of curlew loss between hatching and fledging.

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<sup>2</sup> <http://www.unep-aewa.org/en/species/numenius-arquata-0>