

**BIOGRAPHIES 'CALL OF THE CURLEW' WORKSHOP,  
at Wildfowl and Wetlands Trust, Slimbridge, Feb 2nd, 2017.**

**Geoff Hilton:** I am the Wildfowl and Wetlands Trust's Chief Scientist. I manage a team that supports WWT's conservation programme by researching the problems faced by wetland wildlife, and then finding solutions. I developed a passion for wetland wildlife in general, and curlews in particular during a childhood growing up in the Severn Vale.

My career with wetland birds started in a portakabin at Slimbridge in the early 1990s, following which I temporarily became a seabird fan while studying for a PhD in Glasgow. I then worked for 10 years in the International Research team at RSPB, including a two-year stint living in Portugal; during this time my research was focused particularly on island conservation and the problems caused by invasive species. However, I maintained a sideline investigating the disappearance of the slender-billed curlew. Returning to WWT Slimbridge in 2009, I established the Research Unit, and have provided scientific support to conservation projects on cranes, common scoter, Greenland white-fronted goose, and spoon-billed sandpiper, among others. When not working, I operate a taxi service for sport-obsessed teenage offspring, and maintain an ageing VW camper and springer spaniel.

**Phil Sheldrake** is the RSPB Conservation Officer for Wiltshire & Gloucestershire. Twenty years ago, a love of wildlife eventually brought about a career change, Phil swapped the classroom for the great outdoors, and started wardening on reserves in Wales with the Society.

After moving to Wiltshire to undertake a self build project, he managed the Wessex Stone-curlew Recovery Project through a milestone period when the population again numbered over 100 pairs. He now leads the Wiltshire Chalk Country Landscape programme whilst looking to develop other project work across the two counties and managing planning casework! Outside of work is about getting away from it all in his old VW campervan, finding wild places abroad to see wildlife, or staying at home DIY-ing having completed another self build last year.

**Mary Colwell** is a freelance producer and writer specialising in natural history. She has made numerous documentaries at the BBC for both radio and TV, is a feature writer for The Tablet and other publications. After going freelance she worked with major religions and the conservation movement, helping to set up two international conferences in Windsor Castle and Assisi. In 2014 she wrote a book on John Muir, produced four landmark series for Radio 4 and then walked 500 miles across the British Isles to raise awareness about the decline of curlew numbers. Mary is now writing a book on curlews and her walk for Harper Collins.

**Mike Smart:** I have been bird-watching in Gloucestershire since the age of ten. I lived for ten years in Tunisia and Iran, still bird-watching, and retain an interest in the birds of North Africa.

From 1974 to 1990 I worked at Slimbridge for the International Waterfowl Research Bureau (now Wetlands International), then worked at the secretariat of the Ramsar Convention at IUCN Headquarters in Switzerland. Since returning to Gloucestershire, I have maintained my involvement in local wetland and waterbird issues, as BTO Regional Representative, Chairman of the Gloucestershire Naturalists' Society, and a trustee of the Gloucestershire Wildlife Trust.

**Sam Franks** is a BTO Research Ecologist in the Population Ecology & Modelling Team. After many years in Arctic North America researching shorebirds and their breeding ecology, she now has the opportunity to apply her passion for waders in the UK, and is leading on multiple aspects of BTO's work on curlew. She is keen to discover more about how our changing environment is influencing bird populations and to work on ways to reduce the negative effects of these changes on birds, especially waders. In her spare time, she is an enthusiastic wader ringer with the Wash Wader Ringing Group.

**Sarah Sanders:** Sarah manages the curlew recovery programme at the RSPB which includes co-ordinating and supporting colleagues from across the organisation to improve the conservation prospects for this species. She has been with the RSPB since 2003 working previously in the international directorate providing support to BirdLife partners in Africa and Asia and managing the UK Overseas Territories Programme. Her interest is working with people and partners from the UK and around the world to save nature.

**Natalie Meyer:** I was born in 1985 in Hamburg, north Germany. Since I can remember I was passionate for birds, nature and its protection. For that reason I studied biology at the Christian-Albrechts University in Kiel and wrote my diploma thesis about migrating waders in the German wadden sea. Since 2012, right after finishing my thesis, I started working for the Micheal-Otto-Institut in NABU in Bergenhusen, north Germany. I made my bird ringing license at the islands Greifswalder Oie and Helgoland, followed by a six month internship in Cuba 2012/2013. Since 2013 I am the leader of a project which aims to design a protection plan for Eurasian Curlews breeding in intensively used grassland in Schleswig-Holstein, Germany. We aim to investigate demographic parameters, habitat usage, breeding successes, population ecology and protections measures against agricultural destruction and predation (via electrical fencing).

**Kirsty Brannan** started patch birding in her early teens. After graduating and dabbling in environmental science with CEH and GWCT, she joined the RSPB Midlands team in 2001. She now leads on agricultural issues in the region as Senior Conservation Officer. To date Kirsty has worked with over 600 farmers, setting them up to help wildlife such as farmland birds and breeding waders across over 91,000 hectares of countryside. She can regularly be found in fields and ditches across the Upper Thames river valleys in Oxfordshire or the Isle of Axholme in north Nottinghamshire, which are priority areas for providing farmer support and bird monitoring. Kirsty is also the facilitator for the newly-formed Upper Thames Farmers' Conservation Group.

**Alan Lauder** is an independent ornithologist and nature conservationist based in Wicklow. Alan's career spans 30 years from his native Scotland through England & Wales and most recently in Ireland. His career includes roles in Scottish Natural Heritage, BTO, RSPB and Birdwatch Ireland all with active involvement in wetland and upland conservation.

He has particular experience in the management of large-scale nature reserves and has advised on site management in a number of European countries. He has contributed to a diverse range of publications including as a chapter author in the Bird Atlas, as a species author for Birds of Scotland and in scientific papers and articles. He has served on many committees including the board of the NBDC, the Irish Raptor Study Group Committee and as chair of the Scottish Birds Records Committee. Personal interests include birding and bird ringing, many outdoor activities and a busy family. He continues to serve on the board of the Bird Observatory on his beloved Isle of May. Alan was closely involved in the early development of efforts for curlew conservation as part of the team at BWI.

**Harry Paget-Wilkes:** Since leaving full time education I have worked almost exclusively for the RSPB and in much of that time (22 years) I have lived and worked in the Somerset Levels and Moors. It is in this landscape that I have learnt and developed my Nature Conservation knowledge and skills, having completed my education in the unrelated field of economics.

I have undertaken various roles on the RSPB reserves and have been part of the team delivering new and exciting projects such as the development of our Ham Wall and Greylake Reserves. I am currently and have been for the last 12 years, the site manager for the West Sedgemoor, Greylake and Swell Woods reserves.

Over my time in the SL&Ms I have developed an extensive knowledge of the management requirements of, and practical implementation required for, breeding waders, damp meadow communities and general floodplain grassland biodiversity. I also spent 2 years on secondment with English Nature advising land owners and farmers in Raised Water Level Environmental Stewardship Schemes.

I am lucky to be raising my kids in this amazing landscape and hope to help protect and enhance the nature of the SL&Ms for a long time to come.

**Simon Lester** has been a professional gamekeeper for more than 40 years. Beginning his career on lowland reared bird shoots, he was most recently head keeper of Holkham Estate in North Norfolk for seven years and, for the previous eight years, head keeper at the Langholm Moor Demonstration Project in Dumfriesshire. Long committed to the health & wellbeing of the countryside and all wildlife, Simon is keen to find a workable solution to the current conservation conflicts.

**Dr Barry O'Donoghue** is head of Agri-Ecology at the National Parks & Wildlife Service, Ireland. This an extremely busy and wide-ranging role which is constantly evolving as farming and the landscape evolves. Barry works at a research and policy level and has been central to advocating and informing proactive measures for biodiversity under Ireland's Rural Development Programme, liaising closely with colleagues in NWPS and counterparts in the Department of Agriculture. Barry hails from a farming background in the Stack's Mountains of County Kerry, one of the most important areas for curlew in Ireland, yet as with most landscapes for curlew, this is ever diminishing. Barry has Bachelor and Masters degrees on Agri-environmental Science and a PhD on the hen harrier. One of Barry's key interests is working with and supporting landowners to manage habitats in a way that delivers for biodiversity, the landowners and the public.

**Russell Wynn** has lived in the New Forest for over 15 years and is a former editor of the Hampshire Bird Report and Chair of The Seabird Group of UK and Ireland. He has previous experience of designing and delivering wildlife surveys and citizen science programmes, e.g. *SeaWatch SW*, has published numerous ornithological papers in scientific journals and has undertaken survey work for agencies such as Natural England.

Russell has found two new bird species for Hampshire within the New Forest (Stilt Sandpiper and Rustic Bunting), and is probably the only person to have seen the iconic trio of Blue Whale, Black-browed Albatross and White-tailed Eagle in England! He is a marine scientist based at the National Oceanography Centre in Southampton, has a part-secondment with Defra in London, and is an Honorary Professor of Ocean and Earth Science at University of Southampton.

**Tony Cross:** Whilst at Aberystwyth University completing a BSc Hons in Environmental Science I volunteered as a Red Kite warden and my prowess as a tree-climber (whilst ringing raven chicks) was not lost on the chief Welsh ornithologist for the Nature Conservancy Council, Peter Davis. On obtaining my degree I walked straight into a short-term contract monitoring Ravens and then became Peter's field assistant on Red Kites for several years. When core funding for kite monitoring was withdrawn by NCC and RSPB in 1994 I was instrumental in forming the Welsh Kite Trust to continue this work and headed the charity for nearly 20 years.

During this time WKT worked in collaboration with the Golden Eagle Trust and the RSPB to re-establish viable breeding populations of Red Kites in both Northern Ireland and the Republic. I am a keen bird-ringer and currently an elected member of the BTO's RIN committee. As well as Red Kite I have worked on various other long-running ringing and monitoring projects (most still running) on local species including Dipper, Hawfinch, Nightjar, Raven and Chough. I started working on Curlew for the Stiperstones and Corndon Hill LPS in April 2015.

"My name is **Richard Hanby**. My family have farmed at Apperley for about 5 generations. We are beef farmers with a small amount of Arable. About 2/3 of the farm floods most winters. We make hay and graze most of the Coombe Hill Nature Reserve, owned by the Gloucestershire Wildlife Trust. One of the joys of early spring is the sound of the first curlew calling and setting up its territory. This is usually about 11th March. The number of these birds has declined over the years, now there might be only about 4 or 5 pairs in the Coombe Hill Canal valley. The last nest I saw was found by Mike Smart, 2-3 years ago. The pair laid but the eggs were most likely predated upon before they hatched.

Modern farming methods do not help, 100 years ago, a man with a scythe cut 1 acre a day. Now, using mowing machines we can cut 100 acres. If the Curlew has its eggs unpredated long enough to hatch and escapes the mow and rears the chicks to fledgling stage, it is very lucky. The last half grown bird I saw was being chased by a buzzard. I doubt that it escaped. The fox, badger, crows, magpies and seagulls and farm machinery all take their toll. It is a very lucky bird that lives long enough to come back and breed in a few years time."

**David Stroud** is Senior Ornithologist with the UK's Joint Nature Conservation Committee, and is responsible for providing JNCC's ornithological advice to government, the statutory conservation agencies and others. He also helps manage many of UK bird monitoring programmes including the Breeding Bird Survey, Wetland Bird Survey, and Rare Breeding Birds Panel. He has co-ordinated three national reviews of the UK network of SPAs classified under the EU Birds Directive.

David is involved with many international conservation flora, including the Ramsar's Scientific and Technical Review Panel, Wetlands International, the EU Birds Directive's Ornithological Committee, various Working Groups related to the Convention on Migratory Species, and the African-Eurasian Waterbird Agreement's Technical Committee (formerly as Chair). He also has a long-standing involvement with the International Wader Study Group.

Among David's personal ornithological interests are the assessment of population status and trends of waders in Africa and western Eurasia; the long-term, population study of Greenland White-fronted Geese; and developing a better understanding of the historical and current distribution and trends of Spotted Crakes in the UK – a wetland species that is slipping away with even less attention than Curlew...!

**Amanda Perkins** trained as a land agent and qualified as a rural practice surveyor. Her work has been mainly in cultural and natural heritage for the National Trust and MAFF. This involved 'estate management' combined with project and staff management over a range of different properties from Hampshire to Merseyside. While bringing up her son she worked for private clients submitting and managing agri-environment schemes and ran a small un-related business. She is now Countryside Officer for the Stiperstones and Corndon Hill Country Landscape Partnership (LPS) Scheme.

The LPS started in the autumn of 2013. It is principally Heritage Lottery Scheme funded and supported also by local partners. Shropshire Hills AONB is the lead partner.

The Curlew Country project originally formed part of the LPS aiming to raise awareness of the plight of ground-nesting birds within the LPS area generally and give farmers and advice on how to manage their land more appropriately for nesting waders. Following initial experiences and discussions with farmers and land managers, the project was re-designed to discover the causes of local curlew nest failure and intervene with appropriate measures where possible.

**Peter Holmes:** I started out in my career choice as a post-doc in Medical Entomology at the Liverpool School of Tropical Medicine but budget cuts in the early 80s recession led me to join the Nature Conservancy Council, leading a survey team of the invertebrates of Welsh peatlands, the start of a 30 career in NCC and its successors. For 13 years I was Conservation Officer for Worcestershire, where I was responsible for the notification of 45 SSSIs, mostly neutral grasslands. Whilst in that role I became convinced a new approach was needed to flood management, with the emphasis shifting to natural catchment management. I was a principal instigator in the late 90s of the formation of what is now called Wetlands West, a large association of statutory bodies, NGOs and others, which aims to restore multi-functional floodplains for biodiversity, flood risk mitigation and economic benefits. I chaired the association for 6-7 years. There are many successes from this, but much more could be done.

Since before the start of Natural England I have been team leader for the Gloucestershire team, where I have continued to look towards partnership working as the way to deliver landscape-scale outcomes, in the water environment and elsewhere.

**Richard Archer:** Richard is the RSPB's Conservation Officer for the Somerset Levels & the Severn Estuary. He has worked for the RSPB for 21 years, including stints in North Yorkshire & Humberside and Dorset. Wetland conservation has formed a large part of his work over the years and he has particularly enjoyed time surveying breeding waders, including moorland curlew on the North York Moors and lowland curlew on the Somerset Levels.

In his current role, he is part of the RSPB's Somerset Levels Futurescapes Team which manages 650 ha of lowland wetland grassland at West Sedgemoor and Greylake and works with partners to promote the conservation of the Level's internationally important wintering waterbird assemblage, its breeding waders and other wetland wildlife. Richard leads the RSPB's off-reserves conservation work on the Levels, including the coordination of an annual breeding wader survey. He has also been part of the Great Crane Project team with RSPB, WWT and Pensthorpe Trust colleagues since 2006. Richard saw his first curlew on a YOC trip on the Tamar Estuary in 1976 and his first breeding curlew on Dartmoor in the early 1980s. As a Devonian, he is very disappointed that curlews are virtually extinct as a breeding species in his home county, and hopes that together we may be able to do more to protect the dwindling curlew populations in other parts of south and west England.