



Call of the Curlew Workshop, Slimbridge, 2nd Feb 2017

- Viable breeding populations of Curlew still exist in Southern England, the main areas being in the New Forest, Salisbury Plain, Somerset Levels, Severn and Avon Vales, Upper Thames and Shropshire. Other remnant populations survive, notably on Dartmoor, in Herefordshire and Breckland. These Curlew hotspots are critical to maintaining the current range of the species and for their strong local, cultural connections.
- David Stroud, JNCC, made explicit statement with regard to our legal obligation as a signatory to the Birds Directive, and the Afro-Eurasian Waterbird Agreement Single Species Action Plan for Curlew. Specifically, the agreements require member states to take requisite, or special conservation measures to maintain [population] range and habitats, *to ensure their survival and reproduction in their area of distribution*. There is also clear requirement for member states to take account of the cultural significance of a species in establishing ecological objectives. Southern Curlew are vital to the whole UK strategy.
- There was unanimous agreement for urgent action to conserve breeding Curlew in southern England, to avoid the population crash experienced in Ireland (97% decline since 1980's). This action should comprise targeted research, conservation measures and public awareness activities
- Fragmentation and loss of habitat through changes in land use and farming practices are a major feature in the decline in Ireland and southern England. The dispersed nature of Curlew breeding populations requires landscape scale solutions, not just solutions limited to nature reserves. Curlew conservation goes hand in hand with conservation of other features of the landscape, including flower-rich hay meadows, butterflies and other invertebrates.
- Disturbance (by ramblers, joggers, dog-walkers) is potentially a major factor in causing nest failure in the south. New Forest work shows if people and dogs keep to existing paths, nesting birds may tolerate their presence. Awareness raising measures need to be incorporated in conservation implementation plans, e.g. signage

- Existing study, monitoring and protection efforts must be continued and strengthened where Curlew still breed. It is known that Curlew respond well to conservation measures. Understanding the reasons for poor productivity in the remaining populations is vital. **Financial support is required.**
- Research (RSPB, Game and Wildlife Conservation Trust) shows Curlew breeding success increases when predators are controlled or excluded during the breeding season. Lethal predator control should be localised and targeted around breeding sites. Predator exclusion (fencing around nests as carried out in Schleswig-Holstein, Germany) improves hatching success, despite the risk of disturbance, and should be investigated further. Natalie Meyer (NABU, Germany) stressed this is not a sustainable, long-term solution.
- It is imperative that solutions should be based within communities, including farmers, landowners and local people. There was general recognition that the Curlew, as a much-loved bird, provides unique outreach potential. Curlew have rich cultural connections, which can be re-discovered and re-invigorated. Wider public awareness needs to be increased. Specific Curlew conservation ideas emerged, e.g. establishing Curlew towns and villages near breeding areas, twinning between Curlew breeding and wintering grounds, finding local Curlew 'champions' to focus action.
- More targeted financial support should be provided for farmers who already have, or want to encourage back, breeding Curlew on their land.
- There was unanimous support for a forum / network / group to share knowledge and experience, and work for Curlew across southern England.

FORUM:

A Forum steering group has emerged by default to be Phil Sheldrake, Mike Smart, Geoff Hilton and Mary Colwell. However, we will be instigating a wider group to take forward further action for Curlew across southern England to facilitate knowledge and experience sharing

We will send out more details in further communications, the next one at the end of February,