

# Curlews in the Severn and Avon Vales

Report on a breeding survey in 2016;  
suggestions on future action

# Severn and Avon Vales: overview

- Main themes

- In the Severn and Avon Vales too, a genuinely iconic species
- Enormous site fidelity
- 2016 breeding survey found about 35 pairs, six pairs known to have fledged young, at least two more probably did so
- Breeding sites in ancient hay meadows
- Problems: habitat loss, predation, disturbance, early hay-cutting
- Solutions - new approach urgently needed:
  - more and better monitoring;
  - priority for conservation of known nesting fields, in ancient hay meadows;
  - predator control;
  - late hay cuts (after 25 July) in nesting fields;
  - recognition of role of traditional farmers;
  - public awareness among local communities.



# Colour ringing on the Severn estuary





# Blue Blue White at home in Yorkshire





# Blue White White sightings

## An example of re-sightings of one individual

31.05.94 Embsay Moor, North Yorkshire 53.59N 01.59W (ringed as pullus)  
26.09.10 Severn estuary, caught in cannon-netting session  
02.08.11 Guscar Rocks, Severn estuary  
30.09.11 Guscar Rocks  
03.06.12 Low Bishopside, Pateley Bridge, North Yorks, 54.05N 01.45W  
14.09.12 Guscar Rocks  
19.09.12 Guscar Rocks  
03.09.13 Guscar Rocks  
18.09.13 Guscar Rocks  
24.06.14 Low Bishopside, Pateley Bridge, North Yorks, 54.05N 01.45W.  
09.09.14 Guscar Rocks  
18.03.16 Low Bishopside



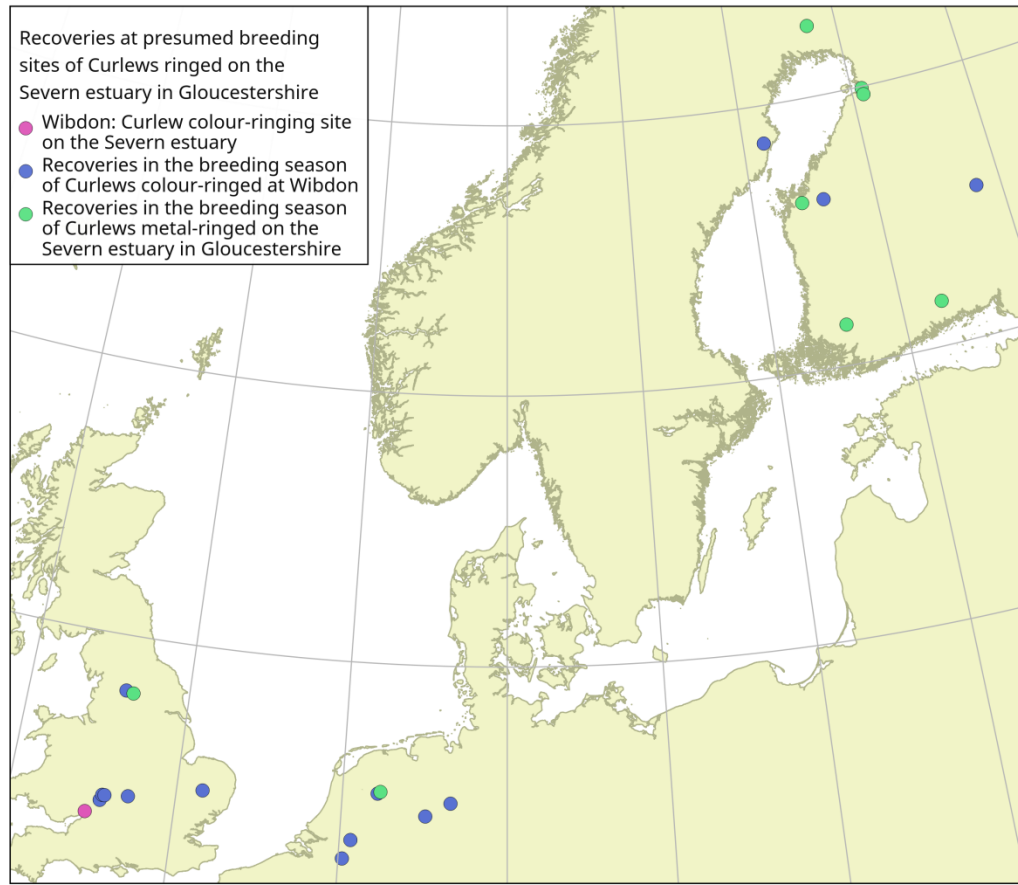
# How rings should look in future







# Breeding areas of Curlews ringed on the Severn estuary





# Upham Meadow, Twyning

## Lammas meadow, SSSI







# Ashleworth Ham

## Gloucestershire Wildlife Trust reserve



# Meadow Buttercup and Foxtail; plus Water Dropwort







# Great Burnet

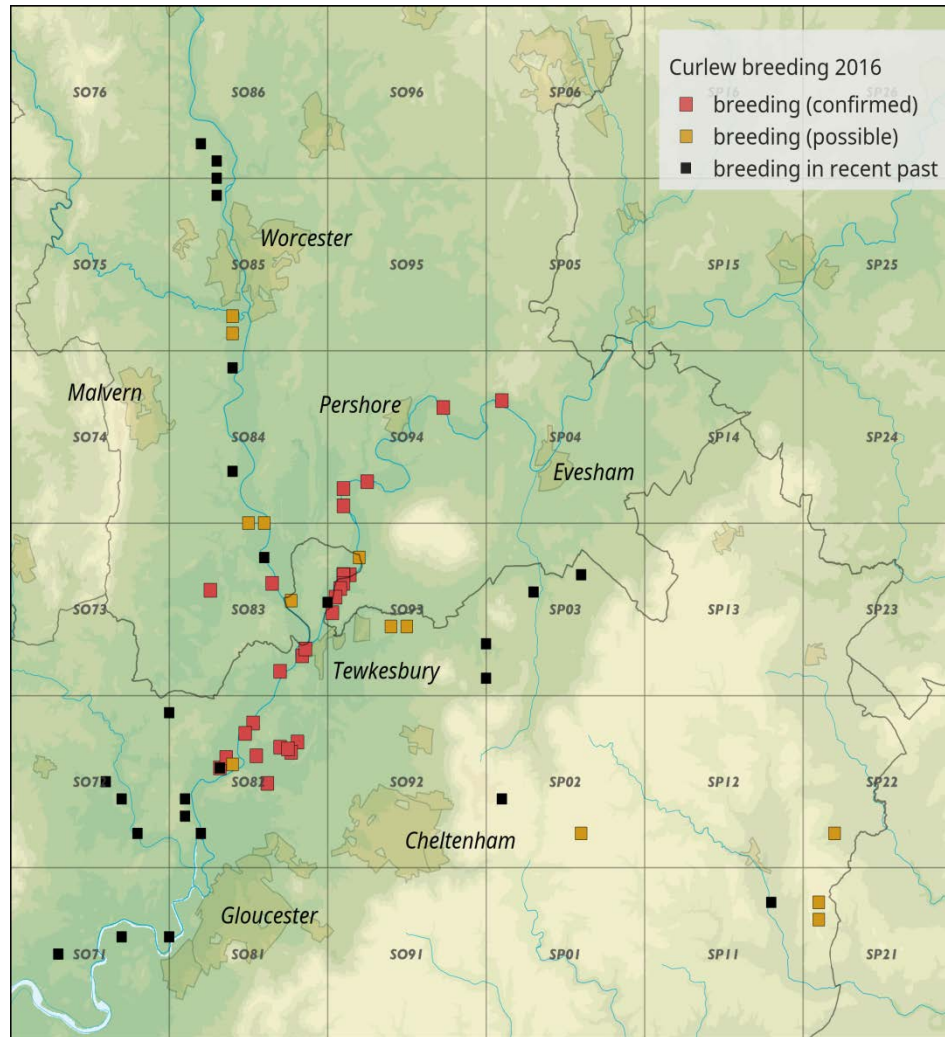


# Surveys of breeding Curlews in the Severn and Avon Vales

- Comprehensive surveys of breeding waders in the Severn and Avon Vales found 24 pairs of Curlews in 1982, 20 pairs in 1995 and 34 pairs in 2002 (RSPB/WWT survey and BTO 'Breeding waders of wet meadows' survey).
- Surveys of breeding Curlews (and other waders) have been carried out in the Severn and Avon Vales most years since 2002, more intensively in 2016.
- Nesting sites on the Cotswolds were also surveyed in 2016 by the North Cotswold Ornithological Society.
- In the 2016 survey, the surveyors were exclusively unpaid volunteers: particular thanks to Juliet Bailey, Les Brown, Mervyn Greening, Andy Jayne, Gordon Kirk, Dave Pearce, Graham Smith, and Rob Prudden for their contribution.



# Results of the 2016 survey



# Solutions

- Curlews are doing better (just!!) than the other three traditional breeding waders of the Severn and Avon Vales – Snipe (last drumming bird in 2003), Redshank (nearly gone), Lapwing (going fast).
- Extensive (expensive!) efforts have been made to protect these species in the last 25 years, with very limited success.
- Severe risk that breeding waders will only survive on strict nature reserves.
- We are re-introducing Cranes to the southwest; can we link this to efforts to conserve existing breeding waders?
- So, new strategy needed.

# New strategy

- Large scale conservation areas, wherever possible with control of water regimes.
- The same individual Curlews return year after year to the same breeding field: conserve existing breeding pairs by pin-pointing the exact fields where they nest (30-35 in number).
- Agro-environmental schemes should reward farmers who maintain these fields and/or who cut their hay late (i.e. not from 15 June, but from 25 July); and should give better recognition for traditional farming practices, e.g. Lammas Meadows.
- Control of predators, by trapping, or by electric fencing.
- More and better monitoring: better registers of the best hay meadows; support (at least travel expenses) for volunteer observers who record the breeding birds; repeat breeding survey in 2017 (looking more closely at botany, and extended to Herefordshire, where there is much similar habitat).
- Control of disturbance: where possible, limit access in summer; where footpaths exist, encourage visitors to respect them, with dogs on leads.
- Celebrate Curlews as a familiar and much loved aspect of the summer in riverside meadows.
- Curlew cities – Gloucester and Worcester; Curlew towns – Tewkesbury, Upton on Severn, Pershore; Curlew villages – Twyning, Kemerton, Bredon.
- Celebration of breeding waders, hay meadows and eels in historic buildings: Gloucester and Worcester cathedrals, Tewkesbury and Pershore Abbeys.

Thanks for your attention and action  
from a young Curlew

