

Curlew Conservation in Ireland

National Parks & Wildlife Service



An Roinn
Cultúir, Oidhreachta agus Gaeltachta

Department of
Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht

Curlew on the island of Ireland

- Wintering and Breeding
- Red-listed as a breeding species (BoCCI)
- Ireland's only species on the IUCN red list
- Northern Ireland estimated 250 pairs
- Republic of Ireland estimated <150 pairs
- Decline of 96% since late 1980s in Republic of Ireland
- 34% decline in last 10 years
- **Population Viability Analysis – could be as low as 7 years remaining if no change**



96% population
decline



Why?

What can be done?

Curlew requirements

- Open landscape
- Mixed vegetation height
- Low Intensity of Management



High water table

- Soft ground for probing.
- Shallow pools rich in invertebrates, important for chick feeding.

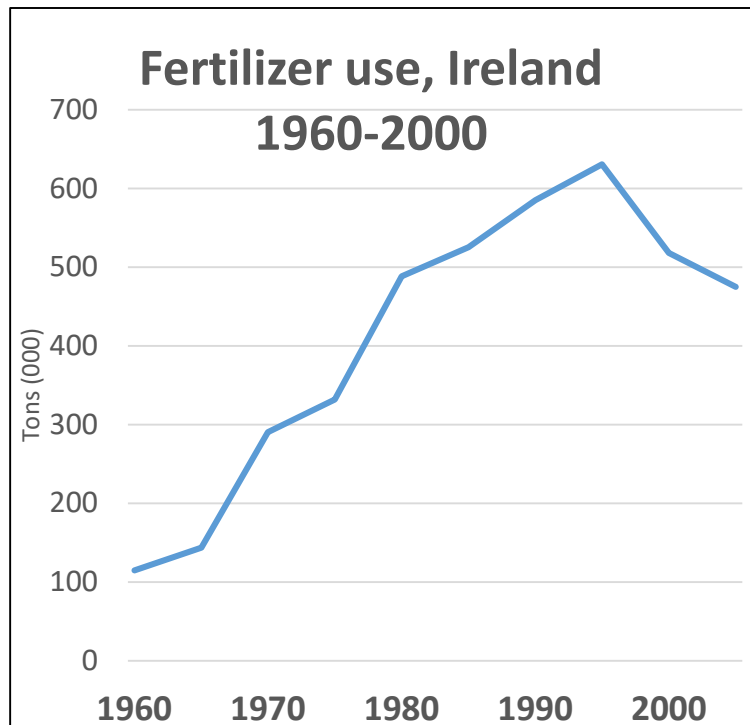






Agricultural Intensification

- Increased fertilisation and reseeded of grasslands



- Increased drainage and 'reclamation' or 'improvement'



Overgrazing & unmanaged burning of upland habitats



Land abandonment



Commercial large scale peat extraction



Commercial large scale peat extraction



Wind Development



Densities of curlew were significantly reduced at wind farms during construction; by the first year post-construction, no recovery was apparent

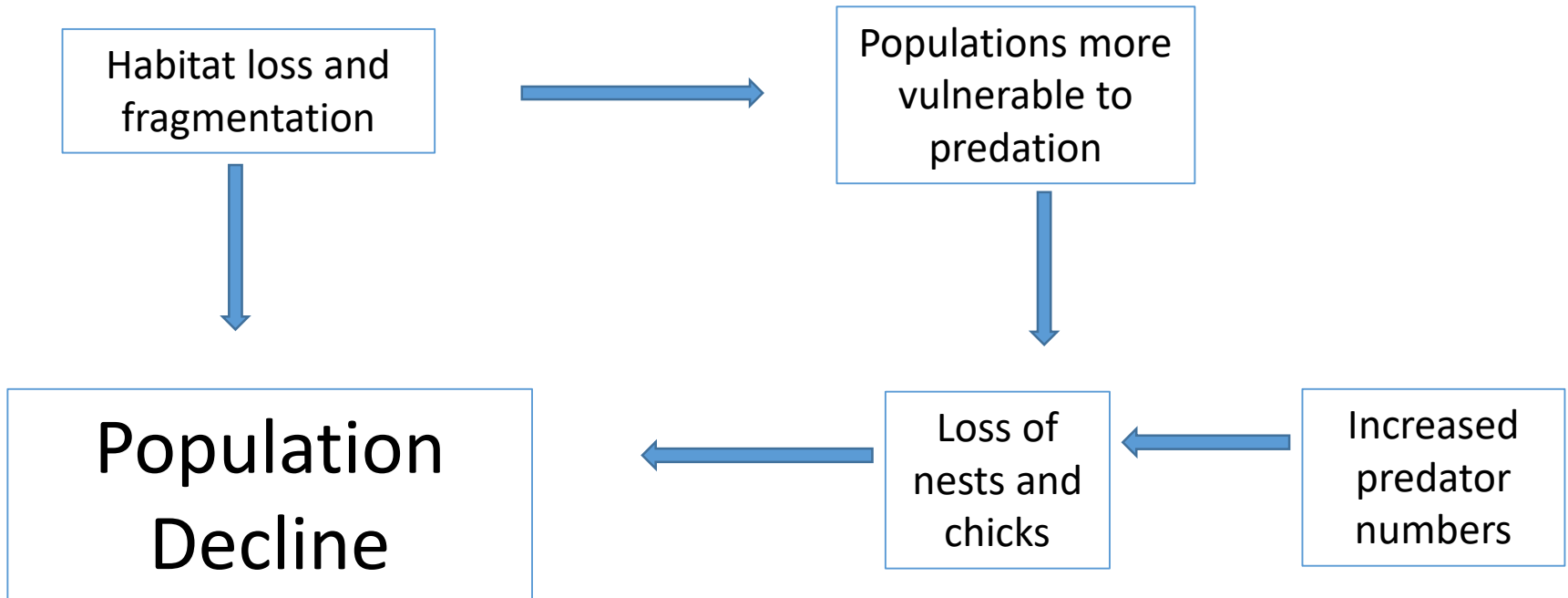
(Pearce-Higgins *et al.* 2012).

Commercial Afforestation



Commercial Afforestation







Curlew are finding it near impossible to rear young



Curlew are finding it near impossible to rear young

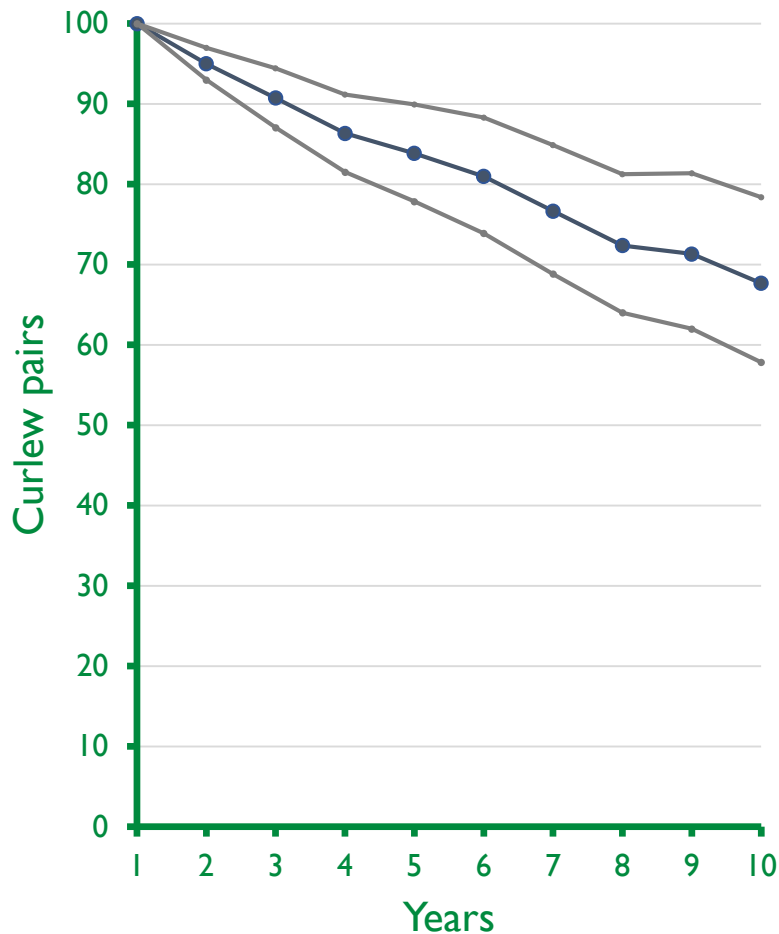


Curlew are finding it near impossible to rear young



Curlew are finding it near impossible to rear young

Effect of low productivity on the trend in curlew pairs



Modelling based on random sampling of curlew productivity values for plot-years without predator control in the GWCT's Upland Predation Experiment (Fletcher *et al.* 2010).

Average productivity (without predator control) was 0.32 chick/pair.

Irish productivity may be as low as 0.16, so there could be as little as 7 years remaining if chick rearing does not improve

Population recovery

Productivity required to get from 20 to 50 pairs in:

10 years = 1.29 chick/pair

20 years = 1.14 chick/pair

Legal Obligations and Commitments

Birds Directive

Habitats Directive

Birds and Natural Habitats Regulations

Wildlife Act

AEWA

Proactive efforts

GLAS (National Agri-Environment Scheme)

European Innovation Partnership

INTERREG

LEADER

NPWS Farm Plan Scheme

Interaction with Gun Clubs

Working with Turf Cutters

There is hope of stopping the loss and turning things around



Dr. David Scallan

Local Gun Club Grouse Project Flush with Breeding Curlew

The Ballydangan Bog Red Grouse Project was set up in 2009 to prevent the decline and, in the long-term, increase the numbers of Red Grouse on Ballydangan Bog, Co. Roscommon. The management includes habitat improvement (heather strimming), predator control, monitoring, disturbance control, public awareness and education.

The project was established by Moore Gun Club and Roscommon RGC following concerns that Red Grouse would become extinct on yet another midland raised bog. One of the main threats to raised bogs in the area is commercial peat extraction, however, Bord na Mona, the site owners, made a positive decision not to remove peat from Ballydangan Bog and some adjacent bogs.

Almost seven years on, annual surveys show that the project site now supports a healthy population of breeding and wintering Common Snipe, Lapwing and Mallard. Other important bird species that use the site include a Barn Owl, wintering Golden Plover, Whimbrel and wintering Hen Harrier. Hares have also become common on the project site. The Red Grouse population remains small, which is typical on raised bogs, but the project team has succeeded in preventing another local extinction.

Following reports of breeding Curlew on the project site, Bord na Mona commissioned a professional breeding Curlew survey in 2015. The survey showed



Curlew image by Niall Blake

that three pairs of Curlew were present on the site. At the time, this was very positive news for the project, particularly as breeding Curlew were recently added to the IUCN Red List of globally threatened species and to the Red List of Birds of Conservation Concern in Ireland, due to significant population and range contractions over the last 50 years.

Thanks to grant from the Heritage Council, the project was in a position to commission another professional breeding Curlew survey in 2016. The results of the survey showed that the project site hosted at least seven breeding pairs of Curlew – incredible news – making Ballydangan Bog one of the most important sites for breeding curlew in Ireland.

Dr. Alex Copland, BirdWatch Ireland, who undertook the survey stated: "The occurrence of at least seven pairs of breeding Curlew is very significant at a national level. With the Irish population estimated at around 150 breeding pairs, these sites hold almost 5% of the national population".

For the project team, this was an unexpected consequence of their Red Grouse management efforts. However, the presence of breeding Curlew on Ballydangan bog supports existing evidence from the UK, which recognises that Red Grouse management can help to maintain the numbers and range of some breeding waders. This evidence should be used to form an even stronger argument for funding and support to be directed into Red Grouse projects being managed by local community groups in Ireland.



The Project Team

Core elements for successful conservation initiatives at a local scale

Involvement

Support

Ownership

Appropriateness

Pride

Results

Celebrate –

The Curlew is a much loved bird in Ireland. It is the most referenced piece of natural heritage in Ireland's literary heritage



O curlew cry no more to the air,
Or only to the water in the West

WB Yeats



Curlews in Crisis Conference, Higginstown 04 November 2016
Focus on the severity of the situation for Curlew in Ireland the need for immediate action

Since Higginstown

- National Survey completed
- Task Force established
 - 4 group meetings to date, aim to conclude Q4 of 2018
- Immediate recommendations
 - Putting recommendations into action
- Curlew Conservation Programme
 - Doing
 - Learning by Doing
- GLAS / EIP Locally-led Agri-Environment Scheme
 - Partnership approach
- INTERREG
- Curlew LIFE – being considered



Farmers

Turf
Cutters

Task
Force

Ecologists

Nest
Protection

Policy
Makers

Ag
Advisors

Stakeholder Groups involved on Curlew Task Force.
Nominated individuals with experience in Curlew conservation are also involved.
Independent Chair: Alan Lauder

National Parks & Wildlife Service of the Department of Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht

Department of Agriculture, Food & the Marine (including agriculture sections and Forest Service)

Office of Public Works

Teagasc

Bord na Mona

BirdWatch Ireland

Royal Society for the Protection of Birds, Northern Ireland

Golden Eagle Trust

Irish Peatlands Conservation Council

Turf Cutters and Contractors Association

Irish Creamery and Milk Suppliers Association

Irish Cattle and Sheep Association

Irish Natura and Hill Farmers Association

Irish Farmers Association

Michael Martyn Agricultural Consultants

National University of Ireland, Dublin (UCD)

Sub-groups of the Curlew Task Force

Curlew Ecological
Requirements
and Research

Farming and Ag
Advisory

Curlew and
People

Forestry

Bogs

Predation and
Nest Protection

Synthesis

Timeline of Curlew Task Force progress



Curlew Conservation Programme



Curlew Conservation Programme



An Roinn
Cultúir, Oidhreachta agus Gaeltachta

Department of
Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht

Curlew Conservation Programme

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graph TD; A[Curlew Conservation Programme] --> B[Curlew Conservation Partnership (Local Action)]; A --> C[Research]; B <--> C;
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The diagram illustrates the structure of the Curlew Conservation Programme. At the top is a dark green box labeled 'Curlew Conservation Programme'. Two blue arrows point from this box to two separate blue boxes below it. The left blue box is labeled 'Curlew Conservation Partnership (Local Action)' and is associated with the label 'Doing' below it. The right blue box is labeled 'Research' and is associated with the label 'Learning by Doing' below it. A double-headed blue arrow connects the two blue boxes, indicating a reciprocal relationship between local action and research.

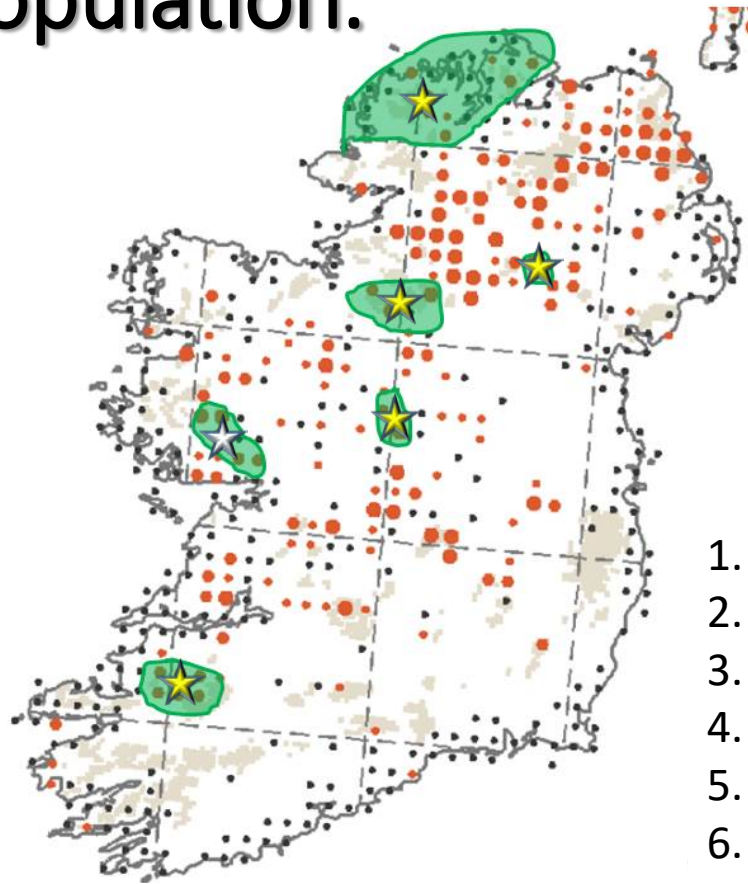
Curlew Conservation
Partnership
(Local Action)

‘Doing’

Research

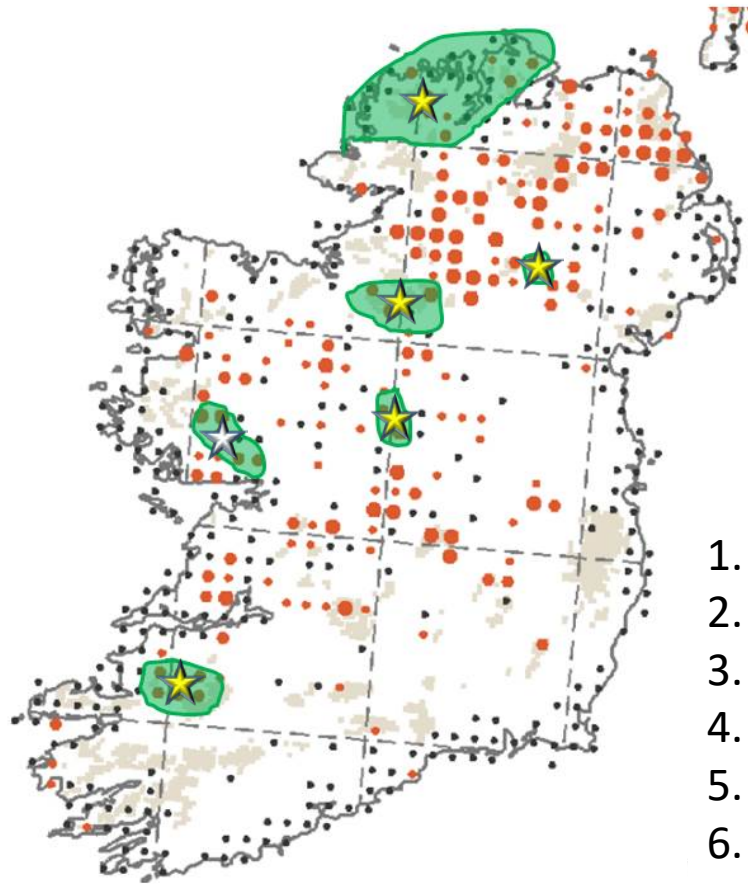
‘Learning by Doing’

Six core breeding areas included on pilot project, with limited resources. These areas account for c. 55% of the Irish Curlew breeding population.



1. Stacks Mountains
2. Lough Ree
3. North Roscommon/Leitrim
4. North Monaghan
5. Donegal
6. Lough Corrib

Local Teams, Local Action, Local Solutions



1. Stacks Mountains
2. Lough Ree
3. North Roscommon/Leitrim
4. North Monaghan
5. Donegal
6. Lough Corrib



Curlew Action Team (CAT) – pieces of the jigsaw

To work with landowners and NPWS for Curlew Conservation

Local Curlew Champion

The link between the project
and local community

Predator Control Officer

Nest protection
Legal control of
predators

Curlew Advisory Officer

Lead role
Finding nests
Engaging with
landowners, team,
NPWS

Curlew Research Officer

To determine
efficacy of efforts



Local Curlew Advisor (local lead role)



Curlew Advisory Officer (local lead role)

Category	Curlew Advisory Officer Focus
"Nest Finding"	Locating nests as accurately as possible without visiting nest (with predator control operative/landowner/NPWS Personnel/Curlew researcher) to enable conservation action
Nest Protection	Nests to be protected annually - advice on when and how fencing is appropriate Curlew Advisory Officer will be charged with securing agreement from the landowner to erect predator proof fencing
Advice on Curlew Conservation Measures	The Curlew Advisory Officer shall direct where measures are to be undertaken, using the budget available and with the consent of local landowners. The two main elements envisaged will be the erection of nest protection fences where appropriate and the enhancement of habitat through capital works. Formal (e.g. demonstration/best practice management events) and informal (one-to-one) training and guidance shall be given to landowners involved in the scheme.
Local Administration	<p>As regards administration, the Curlew Advisory Officer will :-</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -sign farmers up to the scheme; -draw up a simple management plan with participants; -record effort (in terms of actions and hours) and will certify that landowners have engaged to a requisite standard in order to draw down reimbursement. <p>The CAO will also engage with the Predator Control operator and will record their weekly effort and results.</p>
Ecological Recording	The Curlew Advisory Officer shall document in their region all locations where Curlew are feeding and nesting. This shall require appropriate survey design and techniques and use of standard recording forms. Relationships built locally with landowners and others (including Predator Control Operative, local Curlew Champion, NPWS personnel, etc.)
Interface with Curlew Researcher	The Curlew Advisory Officer shall provide all relevant information, including survey data to the Curlew Researcher, via the Agri-Ecology Unit of NPWS. The Curlew Advisory Officer shall be available to show the Curlew researcher any relevant locations on the ground, whether conservation efforts, nesting or foraging locations, etc. and to introduce the Curlew Researcher to local landowners involved with the Curlew Cooperation Scheme
Liaison with project manager/local advisor/NPWS personnel	The Curlew Advisory Officer will report to the project manager in Agri-Ecology Unit. Positive and proactive engagement with landowners, regional NPWS staff and other project operatives is a requirement of the post
Liaison with landowners and public	Explaining the purpose of the Curlew conservation efforts, gaining access to lands, being courteous and respectful, operating in a non-intrusive way and building a positive profile in the local area are all requirements of the post

Local Curlew Champion



Local Curlew Champion

Form close working relationships with project personnel (particularly the Curlew Advisory Officer) and landowners

Form a local Curlew discussion group (with at least one Curlew discussion group meeting in the month of May, where landowners can together meet with the Curlew Advisory Officer, local Curlew Champion and Curlew Nest Protection Officer and discuss various matters in relation to the efforts underway, with particular focus on delivering results for Curlew locally and passing on recommendations for wider roll-out of conservation efforts

Build a positive profile for the Curlew and the NPWS Curlew Conservation Programme among landowners and local community in the six regions

Improve the collaborative approach and efficacy of effort by the project and landowners

Bring issues and proposed solutions to attention at the earliest opportunity

Engrain an understanding among local landowners and community of the project and why it is of benefit to engage proactively for Curlew conservation efforts locally

Curlew in Crisis

The Curlew has suffered widespread declines across its European

range. Nowhere has this been more

severe than in Ireland where experts have estimated a 97% decline since the 1980's.

While we may see large numbers of Curlew along Irish coasts during the winter season the majority of these are overwintering. During a national Breeding Curlew Survey conducted in 2015-2016 it was discovered that there are only 124 pairs of Curlew breeding in Ireland!

If the Irish breeding population of Curlew continues to decline at its present rate, it is predicted that breeding Curlew will be lost within 5-10 years!! It's time to take action to help save this iconic species.

Curlew Action

The Curlew will be lost as a sight and a sound from this locality if action is not taken. The people who are best placed to take this action are the local people, especially landowners, farmers, turf cutters, gun club members and anyone who lives in the locality.

The Curlew Conservation Programme provides the support to local people and local Curlew to make a difference locally. Report Curlew to your local Curlew contact and they will talk to you about what can be done to help and what supports are in place.

Your Local Curlew contact is:

First Lastname
087 1234567

Actions to take if you believe you have seen or heard a Curlew

Five points to remember

1. You are most likely to see or hear a Curlew between April and June. Be careful not to disturb the bird(s).
2. Try to make sound recordings of calls e.g. the typical bubbling call or song.
3. Take detailed notes about Curlew behaviour and the habitat they are using e.g. rough pastures, wet grasslands, blanket bog, raised bog.
4. Take a GPS of the location and the date of your sighting. The website www.gridreference.ie is good for finding out the grid of a particular location.
5. Report sightings to your local Curlew contact.

Please note: We do not need records of overwintering flocks of Curlew.

Design and Layout by Katie Gerashty Conservation Officer
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www.ipcc.ie

Ireland's Breeding Curlew



*"O Curlew cry no more to the air,
Or only to the water in the West"*
W. B. Yeats



An Roinn Ealaíon, Oidhreachta,
Gnóthaí Réigiúnacha, Tuaithe agus Gaeltachta
Department of Arts, Heritage,
Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs





Nest Protection Officer

Predator Control

Nest Protection Fences

Nest Protection Officer

Category	Nest Protection Officer Focus
“Nest Finding”	Locating nests as accurately as possible without visiting nest (with predator control operative/landowner/NPWS Personnel/Curlew researcher) to enable conservation action
Predators within nesting areas	Advice to Curlew researcher on predator activity in nesting areas
Nest Protection	Nests to be protected annually – discussion with CAO / NPWS on when and how fencing is appropriate Curlew Advisory Officer will be charged with securing agreement from the landowner to erect predator proof fencing but Nest Protection Officer will be a key player also (needs to be trusted by landowners).
Legally trapping and humane dispatching of unprotected predators	The Predator Control Operative will be charged with controlling predators solely within 1km of known Curlew territories
Liaison with local gun clubs	It is likely that the Predator Control Operative will be a member of a local gun club. The Predator Control Operative will be charged with engaging and recording supplementary efforts of other gun club members and assume a “managers role” in relation to coordinating any predator control effort by others within 1km of known Curlew territories. The Predator Control Operative should ideally be a contact point between the project other gun club members in the area and encourage a responsible approach to predator control
Liaison with landowners and public	Explaining the purpose of the predator control efforts, gaining access to lands, being courteous and respectful, operating in a non-intrusive way and building a positive profile in the local area are all requirements of the post
Liaison with project manager/local advisor/NPWS personnel	The Predator Control Operative will report to the project manager in Agri-Ecology Unit. Positive and proactive engagement with landowners, regional NPWS staff and other project operatives is a requirement of the post



Curlew conservation on the ground

Surveys

Engagement with Landowners and Locals

Nest Protection Efforts

Habitat Enhancement Measures

Record Keeping





Overarching Points

- This project is vital
- The Curlew Conservation Programme is linked to the Curlew Task Force recommendations
- 2017 saw the first steps in climbing a big mountain
- Experience gained in 2017 – lessons taken forward
- Need to hold what we have; increase productivity in local extinction risk sites
- Curlew Research – vital to analyse efforts on the ground

Nest Finding

- Start surveys earlier (from March onwards)
- Allocate more time/emphasis on nest finding
- Emphasis more on dawn/dusk surveys and linking with locals (incl. farmers and gun clubs, etc.)
- Curlew Champions to also survey (enhanced role)
- Early identification and enlisting of (responsible and reliable) volunteers
- Curlew calls
- Novel methods to be considered (e.g. trained dogs, thermal imaging)

Nest Protection

- Lead Nest Protection Officer role to be considered
- Formal meetings with the gun clubs at earliest stages
- Synergies with local gun clubs need to be realised
- Start predator control at (mainly 2017) sites from December 2017 (further recommendations to be sought from Curlew Task Force)
- Increased / more focussed effort likely required in certain areas
- Dedicated meeting at outset between NPO and local NPWS
- Regular changing of the call birds
- Nest protection fences – need to be trialled “off season”

Public Engagement

- Local events
- Curlew posters and leaflets
- CATs to be proactive in local media
- Talking to as many landowners as possible with Curlew breeding/feeding sites
- Linking with pre-ordained farmer meetings (e.g. GLAS training and discussion groups through Teagasc)
- Demonstration sites/workshops to show farmers/public/ourselves

Improving Habitats

- Work on areas occupied in 2018, 2017, 2016/2015
- Early identification and engagement is key
- Need to realise synergies between CCP and GLAS
- 'Curlew Advisory' role on GLAS (where Curlew breed/feed)





Thank You

Department of Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht

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NPWS is a member of the UK and Ireland Curlew Action Group which brings together the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development Northern Ireland, Department of Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht Ireland, Joint Nature Conservation Committee, Natural England, Natural Resources Wales, Scottish Natural Heritage, BirdWatch Ireland, the British Trust for Ornithology, the Game and Wildlife Conservation Trust, the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds, and the Southern Curlew Forum to shape and drive a co-ordinated programme for curlew conservation and to support international obligations, including the African-Eurasian Waterbird Agreement and the EU Birds Directive. (Find out more at www.npws.ie).

