

# Status of the Curlew in Wales

**Builth Wells 24 January 2018**

## Biographies of speakers and session chairs

### Session One: Setting the Scene

Chair: David Rees

Dave Rees is an independent ecologist based in Co Cork, Ireland. He is a member of the Irish Government's Curlew Taskforce. In the summer of 2017, he was employed as the Curlew Advisory Officer for the Stacks Mountains in Co Kerry, on contract to the National Parks and Wildlife Service. In a former life, he worked for RSPB for 20 years, and was the first Site Manager for the Malltraeth Marsh reserve on Anglesey. In 2015 and 2016, he was employed as the RSPB's North Wales Moors Officer, taking a lead role in the Welsh element of the RSPB's Curlew trial as well as overseeing Mary Colwell's trip to Wales as part of her 500 mile walk to raise awareness of the plight of the Curlew.

Mary Colwell: Welcome and Introduction

Mary Colwell is a writer and producer of TV, radio and internet programmes, specialising in the areas of natural history and religion. Her first book, *John Muir – The Man Who Saved America's Wild Places*, was published in 2014. Her second book, *Curlew Moon*, about her 500-mile walk to raise awareness about the decline of Curlews, is out in April.

Iolo Williams: The importance of Curlews in Wales

Iolo Williams worked as Species Officer for the RSPB in Wales for 15 years before leaving to pursue a career in the media. He now presents wildlife programmes for TV and radio and writes for several magazines.

Patrick Lindley: The national picture and status of Curlew in Wales

Patrick Lindley is a Senior Ornithologist for Natural Resources Wales. As an undergraduate student, a fascination with avian ecological studies and bird recovery initiatives rapidly turned to a career with the RSPB managing a species recovery programme involving iconic upland species such as Black Grouse, Lapwing and Curlew. A career in zoology started at University of Wales, Aberystwyth and progressed to the University of York with a NERC studentship. This led to academic and conservation opportunities in Scotland, Sweden, Canada, and Morocco and led to 20 years of ornithological work on rapidly declining species. The last five years have focused on a wide-ranging remit with Natural Resources Wales as an ornithologist covering birds of terrestrial and marine environments. Patrick has maintained his affinity with reversing population declines whilst developing an interest in seabird ecology and of the effects of wet renewable energy devices on populations.

Patrick is married, has two sons, not yet fledged, and a dog. and enjoys walking in remote mountainous areas in the UK and Europe, painting and snorkelling.

#### Phil Stocker: Sheep farmer perspective

Phil joined the National Sheep Association as Chief Executive in 2011, after 15 years leading the Soil Associations support work for its organic farmer and grower members. Phil started his career in a practical way and has 25 years of livestock and arable farming under his belt. He has managed several large sheep flocks including Cambridge ewes, pedigree Lleys, Mules, and draft Beulah Speckles. Sheep farming allowed Phil and his wife to start their own share farming enterprises where they developed direct box sales alongside more conventional routes to market. In his role with the NSA he is committed to the Association being recognised as the focal point for UK grassroots sheep farming issues. Looking outwards he is passionate that sheep be properly recognised for the holistic role they play in uplands and lowlands, and keen that sheep farming finds a way to maintain much of its tradition and culture while making technical advances to meet the challenges and opportunities of the future.

#### David Smith and Fiona Walker: RSPB Curlew trial management project (north Wales)

David Smith: Currently works as a Senior Conservation Officer for RSPB on the North Wales Moors 'Futurescapes' project. Started my career with the RSPB in the 1990's, working on reserves and then the Black Grouse Recovery Project in Wales, before moving on to the Countryside Council for Wales in 2001, to work on the Tir Gofal agri-environment scheme for a number of years. Conservation Officer posts with CCW and then Natural Resources Wales followed, working on the Berwyn SSSI initially before a senior role in the Meirionnydd District Team, the return to the RSPB being made in March 2017.

Fiona Walker: I started off working for RSPB surveying waders in Shetland, after which I briefly worked for the Seabirds at Sea Team in NCC, then went on to work for CCW for 20 years on the Berwyn, and then the Meirionnydd coast where I was a Senior Conservation Officer. I did a stint as a self-employed consultant working for the Farming and Wildlife Advisory Group as a farm adviser. I have also worked as a field teacher and an adviser for the LIFE Blanket Bog Project. At present I'm a conservation officer for RSPB working on their Farm Advisory Focus Area on the Migneint.

#### Rachel Taylor: Tagging breeding Curlew

I take a lead in developing BTO's scientific profile in Wales, developing regionally appropriate projects and in managing local projects in the Principality. I have had a long interest in understanding the links between anthropogenic landscape management, landscape structure and avian community structure. Historically, this included a range of projects on forest certification, tropical agroforestry and dryland development in South and Central America, and work on biophysical indicators of body condition in forest birds. Most recently I have been using detailed individual tracking techniques to investigate breeding birds' use of complex agricultural landscapes. Since 2002 I have been an active bird ringer and member of three wader ringing and monitoring groups. I am interested in the applications of wader data for fisheries and estuary monitoring through movement and survival analysis; the relationships between wader flock social structure, body condition and environmental variability.

#### Tony Cross: Update on nest monitoring Curlew Country, Shropshire and Welsh Marches

I have lived and worked on birds in Wales since 1982 when I first volunteered for the Red Kite nest protection scheme as a student at Aberystwyth University. Since becoming a self-employed ornithological consultant in 1986 my main focus has been on many iconic 'Welsh' species such as the Red Kite, Chough, Raven and Dipper but also on some other surprising species for which Wales is equally important like Nightjar and Hawfinch. Having grown up and honed my ringing and nest-finding

skills in South Shropshire though, it was great, in 2015, to get the chance to work for Curlew Country back in my old stomping grounds. I remember there being many more Curlews there back in the early 1980's but it was still a major achievement to find a nest or ring any young. When I was a 17-year-old ringing trainee we once caught a Curlew that was older than I was! That thought had a lasting impact on me, knowing the history that some of these amazing birds must rack up during their extended lives. Most of the species I have worked on previously have had stable or improving conservation status, so it is a real concern to be working on a species whose 'problems' seem, on the face of it, almost insurmountable. I just hope that the current conservation focus is successful and that my grandchildren get to experience and appreciate that haunting song as we all have.

## Session Two: Curlew Conservation

Chair: Rachel Taylor

Andrew Hoodless: Does predator control work for waders?

Andrew is Head of Wetland Research at the Game & Wildlife Conservation Trust. His primary research interests are wader ecology and migration, wetland management and predation of ground-nesting birds. He has studied waders on upland heaths and lowland farms and currently manages projects evaluating the effectiveness of agri-environment schemes for breeding waders on wet grassland and for Lapwings on arable land. He also manages an EU-funded LIFE project involving tracking of foxes to assess potential solutions for reducing predator impacts on waders. He has studied the Woodcock for over 20 years, with current work focused on understanding population processes and ensuring that shooting of this migratory species is sustainable.

Steve Redpath: Predator control, waders and conflict

Steve grew up in central Pembrokeshire, where he spent his childhood birding and playing cricket. He went to Leeds University to study ecology and has spent many years working in the uplands studying the relationship between Red Grouse and Hen Harriers and the effect of grazing on upland systems. He now holds a chair in Conservation Science at the University of Aberdeen and his research primarily focuses on conflicts in conservation. He works with colleagues across the world to understand these complex issues and seek effective solutions.

Barry McMahon: Curlew, people and recovery action in Ireland

Barry John McMahon carried out a B.Ag.Sc and PhD at University College Dublin, Ireland. After completing a post-doctoral research position examining the interaction between agriculture and biodiversity he was appointed a Lecturer in Wildlife Conservation & Zoonotic Epidemiology in the UCD School of Agriculture & Food in 2011. His current research focuses on diseases, including antimicrobial resistance, that are reservoired in or disseminated by wild birds and mammals. In addition, Dr McMahon continues to explore the interactions between agriculture and biodiversity, particularly the ground-nesting bird management. Overall, the theme of Dr McMahon's research relates to the One Health initiative particularly the interaction between biodiversity and ecosystem health.

Barry O'Donoghue: Update Ireland Curlew Task Force

Dr Barry O'Donoghue is Head of Agri-Ecology with the National Parks & Wildlife Service. Part of the extensive responsibilities of this Unit includes Curlew conservation - a daunting task when one considers the breeding population in Ireland has declined by 96% since the late 1980s. Since coming into this role a few years ago, Barry has helped established the Curlew Task Force, bringing together various stakeholders to progress policy for Curlews and he has established the Curlew Conservation Programme which entails action at the coal face, as well as an intensive research project on the species. This Programme involves a large number of dedicated personnel working through key periods of the year to deliver a better environment for Curlew.

Geoff Hilton: Update Curlew Forum

Geoff is the Head of Conservation Science at the Wildfowl & Wetlands Trust. He developed a passion for wetland wildlife in general, and Curlews in particular, during a childhood growing up in the Severn Vale. His career with wetland birds started at WWT Slimbridge in the early 1990s, which was followed

by a PhD in Glasgow. He then worked for 10 years in the International Research team at RSPB, including a two-year stint living in Portugal. During that time his research was focused particularly on island conservation and the problems caused by invasive species. However, he maintained a sideline investigating the global disappearance of the Slender-billed Curlew. Returning to WWT Slimbridge in 2009, he established the Research Unit, which has grown to 12 staff, researching the problems faced by Bewick's Swans, Cranes and Madagascar Pochard, among others. Amid the growing concern about Curlew declines, Geoff has joined the Southern Curlew Forum and the UK & Ireland Curlew Action Group. Since 2012, WWT has pioneered the use of headstarting to support conservation of threatened waders, first with Spoon-billed Sandpipers in Russia, then with Black-tailed Godwits in the UK. When not working, Geoff operates a taxi service for sport-obsessed teenage offspring, and maintains an ageing VW camper and springer spaniel.

### **Session Three: Learning from Experience to Deliver Success**

Joint Chairs: Patrick Lindley and Barry O'Donoghue