



Shropshire Ornithological Society

Save our Curlews Campaign & Appeal

www.shropshirebirds.com/save-our-curlews/



Project Work Summary 2021

Work has been carried out in three Community Wildlife Group areas, Upper Clun, Clee Hill and Strettons. In April, the Community Wildlife Groups located the pairs in these areas.

Nest-finding started in early May, and a total of 16 were found. Three were predated within a day, before the planned electric fence to protect them could be erected, and the owners refused permission to fence another. A fifth was inside a rabbit-proof fence enclosing a tree nursery, and a nest-fence was considered unnecessary. The project target, finding four nests in each area, and fencing three, was exceeded.

The fences were effective - none of the clutches in them were wholly predated, but the one inside the tree nursery fence was. One clutch was incubated for the full term, but failed to hatch. Two clutches were abandoned close to the estimated hatch date. Five more eggs in three nests failed to hatch, although other eggs in the clutch did so. Twelve unhatched eggs were sent to Sheffield University for expert analysis, to ascertain the reasons for failure. There were no unfertilised eggs.

Twenty-four eggs in eight nests hatched, and all except two of the chicks were radio-tagged. Tracking the tagged chicks aims to show how they use the landscape, and what happens to them. Failure of chicks to survive and fledge is a major cause of the Curlew population decline, locally and nationally, and we need a better understanding of the reasons so we can develop effective conservation measures.

In the Upper Clun, a brood of three (one tagged and two not) all fledged, but none of the chicks in the other tagged broods did, and there is no evidence that any of the other pairs in the three areas produced fledged young. In Clee Hill three pairs produced chicks, which were closely monitored, but none fledged. There is no evidence that any untagged chicks in the Strettons area fledged either. Therefore 24-25 nests in the project areas with known outcome produced three fledged young. The project results are summarised in the table.

Project Area	Pairs Located	Nests Found	Nests Fenced	No. Eggs in Fenced Nests	Unhatched Eggs	Nests producing chicks	Chicks Hatched	Chicks Radio-tagged	Fledged Young
Clee Hill CWG	8 + 2*	6	4	16	12*	1	4	4	0
Strettons CWG	7 - 8	5	5	17	5	4	12	12	0
Upper Clun CWG	7	5	3	11	3	3	8	6	3
Total	24 - 25	16	12	44	20	8	24	22	3

* two fenced nests were just outside CWG area

* = includes four predated eggs

Only half the nests found produced any chicks. Only one of the tagged chicks survived for more than a few days. Almost all the 21 tagged chicks that died were predated (none were lost to agricultural activities), but a detailed analysis of the 2021 results has not been undertaken yet. Results from previous years indicate that most predation is carried out by foxes. There is increasing evidence, reproduced on the SOS website (www.shropshirebirds.com/index/bird-conservation/save-our-curlews/), that the food supply provided by the release of Pheasants for recreational shooting supports unnaturally high levels of predators and scavengers, particularly foxes, which in turn limits the breeding success of Curlews.

Seven other Community Wildlife Groups have been monitoring most of the remaining County Curlew population (about another 75 pairs). Most monitoring returns have been received, but the analysis has not started yet. However, no ad-hoc reports of fledged young have been received. Last year, it is believed that only one of the 100 or so pairs monitored produced any fledged young. The 2021 result is likely to be similar.

A full report will be prepared and published for each of the three areas, including an assessment of what happened to the chicks. The results will be sent to the South of England Curlew Forum, and the national Curlew Species Recovery Group, so the work will be an integral part of the case to Government for effective Curlew conservation measures.

SOS has contributed to the project costs from its own funds, and an appeal to members, Community Wildlife Group members and the general public also contributed. SOS gratefully acknowledges grants from the Stepping Stones project, via Strettons area Community Wildlife Group, with funding from the People's Postcode Lottery*, the Shropshire Hill AONB Conservation Fund*, British Birds Charitable Trust, Wader Quest, the Garreg Llwyd Windfarm Community Benefit Fund* and Stretton Focus Community Awards* (* = funding for specific project areas). This is a long-term project, which will continue in future years.

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