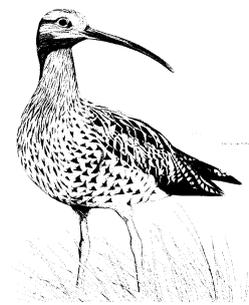




THE UPPER ONNY WILDLIFE GROUP

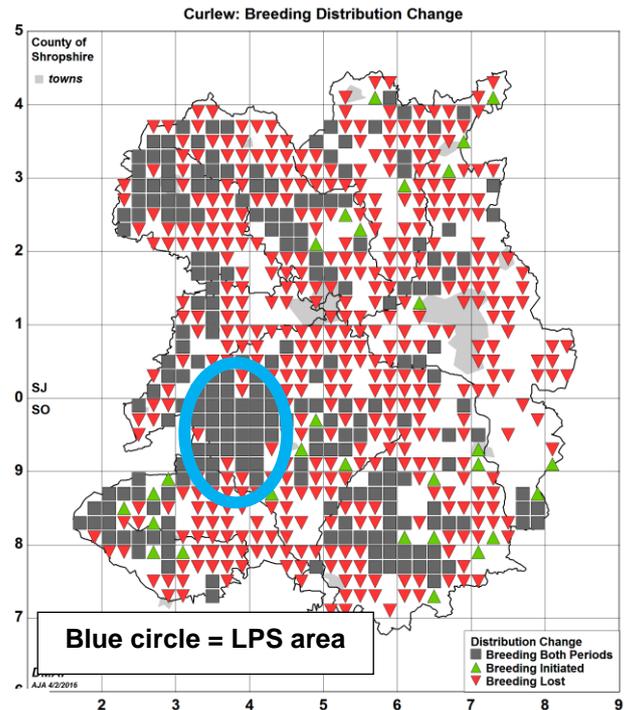
www.ShropsCWGs.org.uk



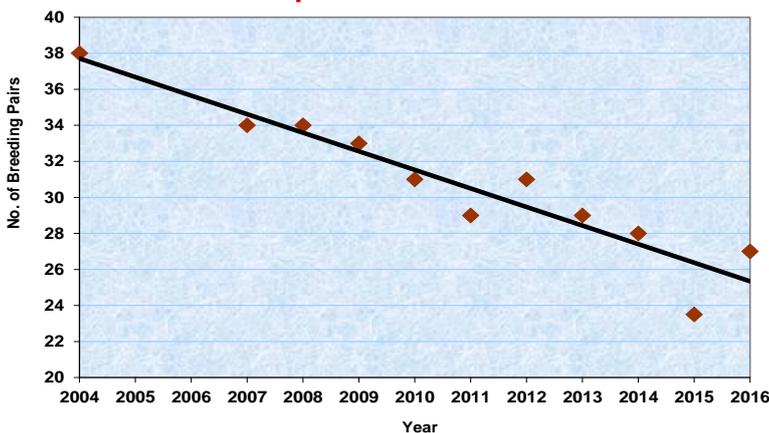
UOWG Curlew Nest Monitoring Project Appeal 2017 and into the future

Breeding Bird Atlases were carried out in 1985-90, and in 2008-13. The change in Curlew distribution over less than 25 years is shown in the map opposite, to be published in the forthcoming *Birds of Shropshire*. It will be seen that there is a reduction of 62% in tetrads with breeding evidence (downward red triangles), and Curlews have disappeared from many parts of the County. In 1990 the population was estimated at 700 pairs, but the estimate of 160 pairs in 2010 represents a catastrophic 77% decline in only 20 years.

The Upper Onny Wildlife Group (UOWG) has been monitoring a local Curlew population since 2004. Even in the County stronghold, it has declined by almost one-third (29%) in only 13 years. The chart shows the decline.



Decline in the Upper Onny area Curlew Population 2004 - 16



This evidence was used to justify including a Curlew Recovery Project in the Heritage Lottery funded Stiperstones-Corndon Landscape Partnership Scheme (LPS), the county Curlew stronghold, shown on the map.

The LPS Project started late in 2013, and has taken a comprehensive approach, engaging local farmers and landowners, as well as the local community.

Conditions vary from year to year. In 2015, 12 nests were found, and 9 were predated. All were in grass crops grown for hay or silage. In addition, three fields were silaged before the nests believed to be in them could be found. Three nests hatched chicks, but all except two survived for less than a week. Those two moved quickly out of the long grass where the nest was, onto short grass (cattle pasture). It is likely that chicks move back to long grass when they become too big to hide from predators on the pasture, but evidence is needed to establish whether this belief is correct or not. The cold dry spring in 2015 delayed nesting, and may have changed the behaviour of predators, or increased the vulnerability of the Curlews.

Adding 2016, the LPS Project has monitored over 30 curlew nests closely during the past two breeding seasons to discover the reason that curlew are failing to breed successfully. Over that time only 3 nests managed to get beyond egg stage each year. During the 2016 season the three nests that successfully hatched chicks were surrounded by protective electric fencing. No chicks or eggs survived from the nests monitored and the major cause of failure was predation. Foxes were found to be the main predator.

Monitoring by Community Wildlife Groups (CWGs) across the whole of the LPS area found an estimated 45 – 50 breeding pairs in 2016, over 25% of the County population, but found no evidence of any fledged young.

The evidence to date does not support either the current agri-environment payments to farmers, or any specific potential changes. Nest protection measures are therefore being trialed, and further research is needed for a realistic evidence-based action plan to reverse the decline. The LPS project will continue to gather as much additional hard evidence as possible until it finishes in March 2018. Further information can be found on the LPS website, www.stiperstonesandcorndon.co.uk/curlewcountry/

The National Picture

Curlew was added to the *Red List of Birds of Conservation Concern* in 2015, as a result of a 62% decline in the UK breeding population since 1969. The decline was 48% over the much shorter period 1995-2014.

British Birds, the prestigious monthly magazine for keen birdwatchers, published the case for Curlew to be considered the highest bird conservation priority in the UK, as our country has an estimated 28% of the European population, and 19-27% of the world population. (BB, November 2015).

BTO, RSPB and Game and Wildlife Conservation Trust (GCWT) have initiated their own funding appeals and / or grant applications for research into the causes of decline.

Saving Curlews in Shropshire

The research priorities of the national organisations do not include Shropshire, or the breeding habitat that Curlews use here. RSPB is concentrating on six areas elsewhere in the Country which they have identified as priorities, but they are loaning some cameras and providing advice which is a very welcome contribution to the LPS project. Elsewhere, the BTO wants to establish the extent and reasons for decline by analysing its long term datasets, Atlas data and ringing data, the latter mainly from wintering areas. However, Curlews colour-ringed in March in 2015 and March 2016 at Dolydd Hafren, a Montgomery Wildlife Trust Reserve on the River Severn near Welshpool, have been found breeding here.

While this national research will help to inform recovery work in Shropshire, additional work here is very important in optimising our ability to help the local population recover. Here, the primary breeding habitat is cropped farm grassland producing winter food for stock, which is different from the open moorland or upland damp pasture utilized in the national strongholds, and which will be the main subject of other research.

Shropshire Wildlife Trust (SWT) is planning to launch a County-wide Curlew Recovery Project in the summer of 2017, and arrangements are being discussed. UOWG is involved in these discussions, and the planning.

In practice it is likely that only Shropshire people will fund Curlew conservation work in the County. Upper Onny Wildlife Group has launched an appeal for donations from members of conservation organisations and the general public, to help pay for the nest monitoring and protection after the LPS ends in March 2018. Shropshire Ornithological Society (SOS) circulated the UOWG appeal to all their members in March 2016, with an endorsement encouraging them to contribute individually, and is doing so again in March 2017.

UOWG Appeal

The UOWG appeal was launched in February 2016, and seeks donations by CWG members and other members of the public to fund Curlew nest finding and protection, and monitoring chick survival. Funds raised will only be spent on such work

The LPS finishes in March 2018, and UOWG and partners in the LPS Project are already discussing a legacy / successor project. Nest finding, monitoring and protection has to be the highest priority for the foreseeable future, as this is necessary to advise landowners of the parts of fields that agricultural operations and grazing should avoid, to fence nests against predators, to radio tag chicks to find out more about their movements, feeding patterns and vulnerability, and to assess the effectiveness of any predator control measures, changes in land management, or new agri-environment schemes which might be introduced when the EU farm payments system is replaced. Without knowing the outcomes of as many nests as possible, the effect of any conservation measures can only be guessed at.

It will take at least 5-10 years to halt and then reverse the decline of Curlews, so the UOWG Appeal is inviting donors to complete Bank Standing Orders to last for several years. Payments can be made annually or monthly. In many cases, a small payment each month will add up to more than a larger amount paid annually. For example, if say 200 people each pay £5 - £10 per month (equivalent to only 2-3 pints of beer or a bottle of wine), that will cover the annual cost of the nest monitoring and protection in the Upper Onny and surrounding area..

In addition to the contributions already received, *British Birds*, the prestigious monthly magazine for keen bird watchers since 1907, has donated £1500 to the appeal, and the National Trust (Carding Mill Valley and the Long Mynd) has agreed to actively promote it to its local members and volunteers, and visitors to Carding Mill valley. SWT has also agreed to support the appeal and distribute it to SWT members in their next mailing in early summer 2017. Consideration will be given to how this local Appeal fits into the County-wide initiative

The Appeal may raise differing amounts each year, and funds may be raised from other sources, so the fund will be managed to ensure the appropriate level of nest monitoring for as many years as possible. UOWG has set up an Appeal Committee to do this. Terms of Reference and membership are on the website.

If you donate, please ensure our Treasurer, Janet Poynton, jan.56poynton@outlook.com has your email address, so we can keep you informed of action and progress.

**The UOWG Appeal letter is enclosed,
and individuals and organisations are requested to make
a donation, preferably by a Bank Standing Order, and pass on the Appeal
letter to anyone else who wants to help save the Curlew from
local extinction.**

Leo Smith
February 2017