

Save our Curlews in the Strettons area 2021



Community Wildlife Group members located 9-10 pairs of Curlews in the area in April, including two new pairs, one near Enchmarsh and the other near Stanton Long. It appears that two pairs, present in 2018 and 2019, have been lost.

The Shropshire Ornithological Society (SOS) *Save our Curlews* nest-finding and protection project started work this year in the Strettons area, and exceeded expectations by finding and fencing five of these nests. The fences worked very well (none of the nests were

predated), but one nest was abandoned shortly before the three eggs hatched, and three more of the total of 17 protected eggs did not hatch. Eleven chicks in four broods hatched and were radio-tagged, so they could be tracked to find out how they use the landscape, and what happens to them. Chicks usually leave the nest within a couple of days of hatching, and are on the ground for 5-6 weeks before they can fly. They are vulnerable for the whole of this period. 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. This happened in our area too: unfortunately, all 11 chicks were predated within a few days of hatching.

You can read more about what has been done on the SOS website www.shropshirebirds.com/save-our-curlews/. This describes the results in detail, our future plans, and the overwhelming evidence that predation by foxes and other predators is the main cause of Curlew's continuing decline. It is clear that the annual release of millions of pheasants for shooting, only a third of which are actually shot, results in an over-abundant food supply which maintains the numbers of the Curlew's main predators well above naturally sustainable levels.

Almost all the landowners we approached were pleased to have Curlews on their land, supported our efforts to protect them, and gave permission for us to look for, and fence, the nests. We are grateful for their support.

The project is expensive, and has been funded by Shropshire Ornithological Society (SOS), the Strettons area Curlew Appeal (featured in Focus articles earlier in the year), and several grants, including a substantial one from the Stepping Stones project. We particularly say thank you to the *Stretton Focus Community Award Scheme* for a large grant.

The Community Wildlife Group and SOS will repeat the project in the area for at least the next two years, to see if the 2021 results are typical or unusual, so we can draw firm conclusions. Focus readers are invited to donate to the appeal, please.

You can find more information about local Curlews, including how to join our survey to monitor the whole local population in 2022, and how to make donations to the Appeal and where to send them, on our website www.shropscwgs.org.uk/strettons-area-wildlife-group/ or contact Leo Smith (01694 720296, leo@leosmith.org.uk)