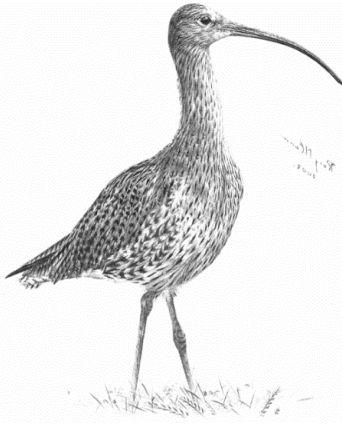


Upper Clun Community Wildlife Group Save our Curlews



Members of the Group were asked to look and listen out for Curlews in March and April, and send in reports. Articles in the Clun Chronicle also invited readers to send in records, and our “Wanted” posters, put up all over the area, also produced several records. Altogether we found 7 – 8 pairs this year.

We again worked with the Shropshire Ornithological Society (SOS) to find the nests of as many of these pairs as possible, and three were found and protected with an electric fence.

The fences protect the eggs from mammalian predators, but are less effective in keeping out avian predators, and two of these nests were predated, probably by Ravens and Crows (although foxes may have caused the Curlews to abandon the nest before the eggs were taken). All three eggs hatched in the third fenced nest, and the chicks were all fitted with radio-tags, but tracking showed that they were all predated within a few days of hatching.

Chicks also hatched from three other nests that were not found. Five chicks from three broods were found when they were about a week from fledging, two in each of two broods, and one in the third brood. Four of these were caught and colour-ringed. Each yellow ring has a unique pair of letters or numbers, so each bird can be individually identified if it is seen again later in life. Finding out where they winter, and where they return to breed, is vitally important for planning effective conservation measures.

There is some more good news this year. At least three, possibly all five, of these



Curlew chick caught and colour-ringed above Newcastle

chicks fledged. That includes the colour-ringed chick in the photo, which definitely did fledge.

The SOS project also worked in two other Community Wildlife Group areas. Three nests were found in each of them, and two nests in each produced chicks that were tagged. All 15 tagged chicks also died in these two areas within a few days of hatching.

Including the Upper Clun, altogether 18 chicks hatched,

three died of natural causes, and the other 15 were all predated. This is an even worse result than last year, when all except one of 21 tagged chicks were predated. Foxes are the main predator, but Buzzard and Carrion Crow, and perhaps Raven and Red Kite, also contributed. All these predators have one thing in common – their numbers are much higher than the naturally sustainable level because they feed on the 60 million gamebirds released each year into the British countryside for shooting, only one-third of which are actually shot. SOS has called for gamebird release to be limited to the number

that are actually shot. At the current rate of decline the Shropshire Curlew population will halve in 12 years, and virtually disappear in 25, so this action is urgent.

Thanks to Karen Mitchell for doing the Chronicle articles and putting up the "Wanted" posters; the several members who sent in regular reports about their local pairs throughout the season; Brian Angell for collating all the records and briefing the nest-finders on the locations of the various pairs, and monitoring some of the pairs with chicks; all the farmers and owners who gave permission to the project to look for Curlews on their land, erect fences, and track the radio-tagged chicks, and the people who made donations to the Save our Curlews Appeal, which financed the work. Martyn Owen, Tim Lewis and Tony Cross were contractors to the SOS project.

For more information, see the SOS website, www.shropshirebirds.com/save-our-curlews/

Leo Smith
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