

Curlew Action

Newsletter August 2021

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Curlew Catch-up

- Save the date: Sat 23rd April 2022! If you love curlews, you're going to love what we've got planned for our first ever in person event. Watch this space...
- We have several exciting announcements coming in the next month, including fantastic new products which will make perfect Christmas gifts - keep your eyes peeled!
- Have you got an idea for a project or event you think would benefit the people and curlews where you live and around the UK? Why not let us know?
- Success at Portishead Saltmarsh Day, Mary Colwell delivers a wonderful talk at Portishead to raise awareness around the importance of curlews and salt marshes

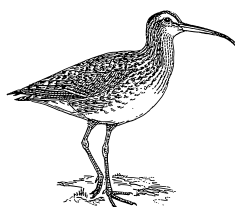


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Curlews from the cab of a tractor

by Mike Smart

You get to go to some funny places when you are trying to monitor and conserve Curlews!



For a number of years now, I have helped the Wildfowl and Wetlands Trust and the Worcester Curlew Group observe the small group of Curlews (perhaps 30-35 pairs) breeding in traditional hay meadows along the Severn and Avon rivers. The support of the farming and land-owning community is crucial since Curlews nest hidden in the long grass on their land, so the date at which they cut their hay can govern the survival of the chicks.

This year, conditions along the Avon were unusually bad for nesting Curlews (and indeed hay-making farmers). An unusually cold April slowed grass growth to delay Curlew nesting, whilst May was wet enough that many nests were washed out, and late June to early July, the usual hay-making period, was too damp to bring the hay in. Most nesting Curlews gave up early but one site still had active adults, whose behaviour (aggressive chasing of crows, extravagant barking alarm calls in the air, flying round and round, then landing close to the observer) suggested they had chicks in the long grass. Three farmers were waiting to take hay from this area, all of whom were fortunately very sympathetic to the Curlews and anxious for the young to fledge.

Finally, on the afternoon of 12 July, a large, frightening tractor arrived mounted with three mowers capable of cutting 40 acres in a couple of hours - incredibly dangerous for Curlew chicks. The driver let me sit in the cab with him, where there were tremendous views, but no sign of the Curlews. Staying on afterwards, I was delighted to find the nearly full-grown chick in the next uncut field together with its father (mum departs early for the coast, leaving dad to watch over the chick's first flight). We went back the next day to mark the chick with engraved leg-rings so we could follow its movements, but as we approached, it flew away - a success story! Sadly, it was probably one of only three to fledge along the Avon this year.



Giving the curlew a headstart

Several projects around the UK have released headstarted curlew chicks in recent months, providing a real boost to local curlew populations. Headstarting is the process of artificially raising newborn endangered animals (such as curlews) in captivity, massively increasing their chance of surviving their first months, and then releasing them into the wild. Whilst this isn't an instant fix for population decline - it doesn't deal with the systemic issues affecting curlews such as predation and changing farming practices - it is a way of making sure that curlews remain in the area long enough for us to work on these problems. For instance, Curlew Country in Shropshire began headstarting after observing successful fledging from local nests dwindling to almost zero, and in the last few years have managed to release over 90 chicks. It's not as easy as all that, however: the hugely complex process of headstarting requires large amounts of time and resources, and the dedication and skill of volunteers from dawn until long after dusk. To get an idea of this, take a look at Madeleine Powell's fantastic blog over on the Curlew Country website [link], and for more information on how to help fund this vital work, click here.



Photo Credit: A Bicheno www.curlewcountry.org



A Splendid Seminar

We were honoured and thrilled to see so many of you at our first ever online seminar, which went off without a hitch and raised some excellent funds for UK Youth for Nature's curlew mural in Manchester. The talk featured an all-star cast, with Mary Colwell and David Gray both speaking passionately about the importance of curlews and the role which Curlew Action plays through its conservation and outreach work; Merlyn Driver charmed us with tales of growing up in Orkney, without electricity and surrounded by the beauty of nature, music and curlews; and Elli Rivers gave us a fascinating and moving insight into the dangers facing the curlews she works with in the New Forest. Finally, Talia Goldman from UK Youth for Nature spoke with enthusiasm about the wonderful work they are doing to get people and governments engaged in the need for biodiversity and protection for nature. You can find out more about the mural [here](#).



UK YOUTH
FOR NATURE

"UK Youth for Nature is the UK's leading youth-led network calling on the politicians & governments of the UK to take urgent action and tackle the loss of nature. We are commissioning a series of murals in cities and towns throughout the UK that speak to individuals throughout all four nations. Driven by the power of the visual arts, these murals will highlight species and habitats, directly relevant to where they are painted, that are in decline."

Their Manchester mural will feature: Eurasian Curlew, Brown Banded Carder Bee, Large heath butterfly, Sphagnum Moss and Sundews (*Drosera anglica*, *D.intermedia*).

The design for the mural



More ways you can help save curlews

If you, or somebody you know, is currently writing or amending a will and would like to do something wonderful for the curlew, consider leaving Curlew Action a gift, ensuring you create a legacy of protecting one of nature's most beautiful and fragile creatures. To learn more, visit our [legacies page](#).

Alternatively, if your business offers support for charities, whether through sponsorship, matched funding, or perhaps through its goods and services, we would love to hear about it. These partnerships can work incredibly well for both Curlew Action and your company, so if you share our goals of looking after the curlew and communicating the importance of conservation to a wider audience, have a look at our [business partnerships page](#) here.