



# Curlew Action



June newsletter 2023

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*Female Curlew in Finland.*

## Curlew Action European trips

In May and June, Curlew Action undertook two fact-finding missions to two European countries: Finland and the Netherlands; to understand how Curlews are faring in these countries, how they are being impacted by land use, predators and how these lessons can be useful for Curlews in the UK.



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The first trip was to Finland in May to focus on the relationship between Curlews, forests and predators, accompanied by Patrick Laurie (Working for Waders, Scotland) and Barry O'Donoghue (National Parks and Wildlife Service, Ireland). Why Finland? Comparisons have been made between the UK and Finnish Curlew populations, in particular, that Curlews can coexist with wild woodlands. With forestry expanding in the UK, we need to understand this relationship, as well as the impact of the loss of breeding habitat.

Finland is 1.4 times larger than the UK, with more than 75% of its land area forested and a similar Curlew population size to the UK: between 45-60,000 pairs. However, 90% of the Finnish Curlews nest on farmland, and those that do nest on the peatland and forest mires are thinly spread. There are also lower densities of meso-predators in some areas of Finland, such as raptors, corvids, Foxes and Badgers, in part due to the long, hard winters and to hunting pressures.

Combined with published studies, we conclude that Curlews can only persist in close proximity to trees when meso-predators are sufficiently low for breeding pairs to be productive.

More details on this trip to Finland can be found on our blog:

- [Day 1](#)
- [Day 2](#)
- [Day 3](#)
- [Day 4](#)
- [Summary](#)

We are grateful to Mikko Alhainen, Noora Huusari, Alicia Jarma, David Jarrett, Tarja and Martti Kettunen, Harri Kontkanen, Nina Mikander, and Tero Mustonen and Kaisu Mustonen for hosting and/or providing data and information during and after our visit. Finally, we are grateful to all Curlew Action supporters for providing funding to enable this fact-finding trip.



The second trip was to the Netherlands in early June, accompanied by Rebecca Pringle from Natural England. In the Netherlands, ground-nesting waders including Black-tailed Godwit, Lapwing, Redshank, Ruff and Curlew are grouped together as “meadow birds”. Whilst Curlews do nest on Dutch nature reserves, unexpectedly they are also found in the intensive farming landscape of the North-East which has large fields of dairy cows and monoculture arable crops such as sugar beet, potatoes and maize.

Farmers who have nests on their land are paid to leave the area uncut, and for leaving unmown strips, for the chicks. Also, a network of volunteers and paid coordinators erect fences and protect the chicks when mowing does take place, every 33 days. There is also some predator control. Despite this there are still high losses and Curlews are not at a sustainable level.



A highlight of the trip was joining in with the tracking of tagged chicks to be measured, weighed and released.

We were also thrilled to come across Curlew-branded cheese – an organic gouda launched in 2008 and sold all over the country. The farmers who produce the milk are recognised (by BirdLife standards) as being bird-friendly and receive a higher milk price in addition to agri-environment schemes.

There are two blog posts with more detail available on our website:

- [Day 1](#)
- [Summary](#)

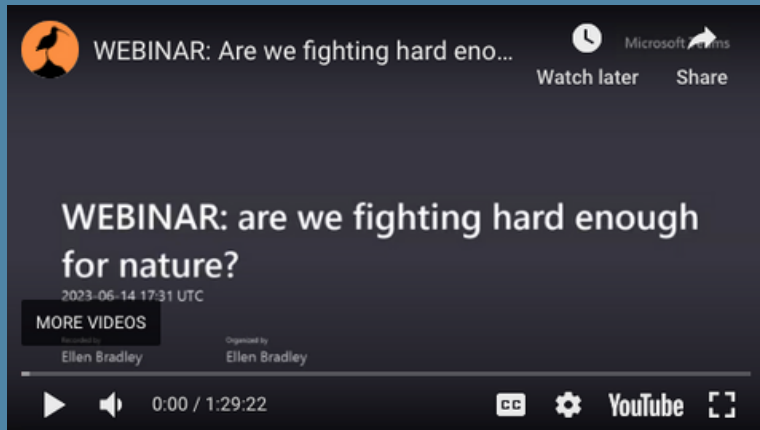
Mary, Mike and Rebecca would like to thank everyone for their generous hospitality and for taking time to show them around, provide information and arrange access to sites. And to Curlew Action supporters for this trip's funding.

## Webinar series

Curlew Action ran two webinars in June. Our first one covered the importance of meadows to Curlews and other wildlife. There are different types of meadows depending on the soil types, which influences both the floral and faunal species found there. The number of diverse meadows has reduced drastically over the past few decades, with 97% of grasslands containing 10 or fewer flowering plants.



Curlews sometimes use meadows, with the grasses and flowering plants providing cover to nest in and to raise their chicks. However, meadow-nesting Curlews can face a range of threats, including predation, spring flooding, and the early cutting of hay. [Watch the recording.](#)



The second webinar was a spirited debate on whether we are fighting hard enough for nature, what is and isn't working well in UK conservation, and what more can be done. Whilst the topic isn't specifically about Curlews, as the chair Russ said, "the topic is one that we wrangle with quite a lot at Curlew Action."

After an introduction from each of the panellists, there was a Q&A session, including how we can use our emotions to campaign for change, what gives the panellists hope, and what we can do in the future. [Watch the recording.](#)

We will be taking a summer break from webinars, and will return on Wednesday 13th September for a webinar on migrating Curlews. This will be followed by a webinar on Wednesday 18th October looking at the coastlines and Curlews. [Sign up for your free tickets to these webinars.](#)

## Podcasts

In early June, director Mary appeared on a [live recording of the Reasons to be Cheerful podcast](#) hosted by Ed Miliband and Geoff Lloyd, to discuss the current state of climate education, and the Natural History GCSE.

We recently updated the [podcasts section](#) on the Curlew Action website, to highlight the podcasts that Mary and Roger have appeared as guests on. Plus, we have collated all of BBC Radio 4's Tweet of the Day programmes that celebrate Curlews.



## Fieldworker's notes

Mike Smart is Curlew Action's in-house Curlew expert, and is heavily involved in Curlew conservation in his home area of Gloucestershire. To keep us all up to date, Mike produces a circular of his Curlew observations which we have summarised below:

“The pace of things in the Curlew world of the Severn and Avon Vales has really hotted up in the last couple of weeks. Practically all the nests found have now hatched, and our count of nests found has now reached 27.

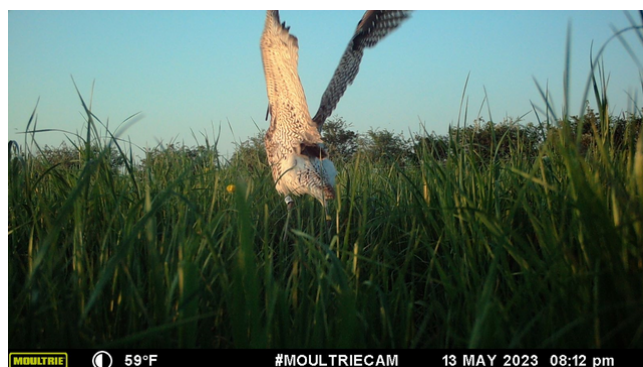
Sadly, a large number of these nests failed at the egg stage, principally because the parents abandoned the nest (sometimes because of flooding) or because of predation. Among the clutches that did hatch, there have been heavy losses too, with at present only six still seeming to have chicks. Whether all six of these broods will actually reach the flying stage is a very doubtful matter.

We have collected as much data as possible on the reasons for these nesting failures, thanks to use of data loggers and cameras close to the nests, and by sending predated eggs to be examined for traces of predator DNA. At the end of the season, we should be able to give a better explanation of the reason for these failures: we think at present that crows (Jackdaws, Carrion Crows and especially Ravens) are the main culprits.

We are very pleased to report that, of the chicks “head-started” (raised from eggs in an incubator and released when full grown) at Slimbridge in 2019, at least five have appeared in the Severn and Avon Vales this year, and at least four have tried to breed.

Our principal concern at present is to monitor as closely as possible the progress of each brood and, where possible, to catch and ring large chicks with numbered white leg flags that can be read in the field. As yet, we do not have a single fledged chick, though some are very close to fledging. The chicks may wander a long way from the original nesting site in search of food, often passing considerable obstacles like deep ditches or thick hedges.

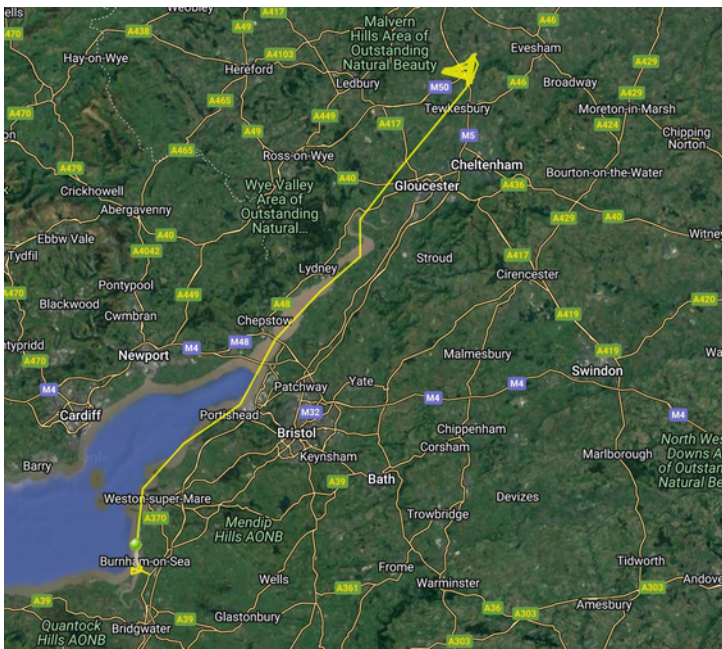
The male and female share incubation duties, but the female usually stays around for only about two of the four or five weeks it takes the chick to reach the flying stage; Father has the job of looking after the juniors for the last few weeks, and a very difficult job it can be: we have found two chicks from the same brood in quite separate fields, while all Father can do is warn them by his alarm calls of approaching danger.



*Head-started Curlew ring 47 photographed by a nest camera as it left its nest.*



*A nearly fledged Severn and Avon Vale Curlew chick (Photo by Dan Gornall).*



**Movement of a satellite-tagged Curlew from the Severn and Avon Vales, already on his holidays by 19 June.**

The satellite tags which we put onto adults earlier in the season allow us to see their movements when their nesting attempt is over. They do not necessarily move off immediately to the coast: some adults hang around in the general area where they bred, perhaps gathering at communal evening roosts round small pools, but may wander around a little; others move off rapidly to the estuary at Slimbridge or further southwest, but may then return to the breeding area. Without the tags we would not have known the details of these wanderings.

We would like to express our thanks to the many farmers and landowners who have consulted us about dates for cutting hay, and who have made special efforts to avoid damaging any nests or young in their hayfields. Without the current agricultural practices of late hay cuts, Curlews and other ground-nesting birds could not survive in the Vales.”

## Engaging schools

Mid June saw the Curlew Action team in Yorkshire working with local volunteers from the Clapham Curlew Cluster. Two primary schools were taken to visit Hill Top Farm, a traditional farm in Malham in the Yorkshire Dales, run by Curlew Action ambassador, Leigh Weston. The students took note of Curlew habitat and although sadly no Curlews were seen, they had a great time identifying other wildlife and crossing it off their nature bingo sheets! Each class followed up in the classroom by creating Curlew posters, writing Curlew poems and producing Curlew artwork using everything they had learned at Hill Top Farm.



"Hearing students proudly shout that they had found Red Clover or Yellow Rattle and crossing it off their nature bingo sheets was a real delight. They all kept me on my toes with Curlew questions and produced some wonderful posters and artwork following their field trip. A huge thank you to Sarah Smith and the Clapham Curlew Cluster for all their work in pulling this together."

- Ellen, Curlew Action



## Fundraising

Curlew Action simply wouldn't exist were it not for the many who choose to donate or get involved in other ways. As a way of recognising your involvement we recently created an [Impact Review](#) which highlights how donations have been able to directly help support our core activities of Curlew conservation as well as education and awareness raising. For such a small charity we certainly punch well above our weight and its thanks to the generosity of Trusts and Foundations, individual and corporate giving, that this has been possible.

Please do take a look at how we've turned your funds into action. Our "[Support Us](#)" page is also full of great resources to support you to fundraise. Please feel free to make contact, share your experiences or wish to get more involved, we'd love to hear from you!

## Merchandise spotlight

As well as selling a range of merchandise directly on on the [Curlew Action shop](#), we also have a number of [partnering shops](#) who donate a percentage of profits from specific products to Curlew Action.

One such shop is [A Blackbird Sang...](#) Established in 2016, A Blackbird Sang... is a small art & design studio run by Genny Early and Tony Davis in Oxfordshire. They make two Curlew-themed products - a [Key Hook](#) (£12.95) and a [Silhouette Garden Sculpture](#) (£29.00) - and donate 10% of proceeds from these pieces to Curlew Action.



“As active conservationists, we are delighted to be working with Curlew Action to raise awareness of the plight of the Curlew, with 10% of the proceeds of our Curlew artwork being donated to Curlew Action to support its ongoing work.”

## Project Manager – Curlew Connections Project Wales

The [Game and Wildlife Conservation Trust](#) is recruiting for a proven project manager to lead the Wales Curlew Connections – Cysylltu Gylfinir Cymru project for the 2.5 duration of the project. The Project Manager will be an ambassador for Welsh Curlew, driving forward the project, linking with the Curlew Wales - Gylfinir Cymru Partnership and pursuing objectives set within the Wales Action Plan for the Recovery of Curlew.

The deadline for applications is 21st July 2023. More information on the role and how to apply is available on the advert:

[in English](#); [in Welsh](#).



## Coming up



**Sustaining Forest Life**

**GLOBAL BIRDFAIR**  
Conserving Nature Worldwide

**14, 15 & 16 July 2023**  
**Rutland Showground**  
**Oakham**

[www.globalbirdfair.org](http://www.globalbirdfair.org)

**BirdLife**  
Black-breasted Puffleg



Curlew Action will be attending the popular Global Birdfair at the Rutland Showground in Oakham, 14th - 16th July, thanks to sponsorship from Leica. We will have a stand where we will be raising awareness of the charity and of Curlews, and selling merchandise. Do come and say hello!

In addition, Mary Colwell will be giving three talks at Birdfair. On the Curlew Lecture Stage, she will be discussing Curlews at 11.30am on Friday and at 12.30pm on Saturday. Also on Friday, she will be in conversation with author and naturalist Nick Acheson about her book 'The Gathering Place' on the Turnstone Author Stage.

We are thrilled to announce that the renowned wildlife illustrator Richard Allen has donated the original Curlew artwork from the 'Birds of the Western Palearctic' to Curlew Action. Attendees at the Global Birdfair will have the chance to win this stunning piece by entering the free giveaway at our stand.



**SPURN**  
**MIGRATION FESTIVAL**  
8-10 SEPTEMBER 2023

VISIT EAST YORKSHIRE

Sponsored by SWAROVSKI OPTIK

**SPURN Migration Festival 2023**



Blackbird: Jonnie Fisk

For the first time, we will also be at the Spurn Migration Festival, also known as MigFest, in Yorkshire. Run by the Spurn Bird Observatory and the British Trust for Ornithology, this weekend of walks, talks, workshops and more will take place between 8th-10th September.