

Meet the Curlew Ambassador

It's World Curlew Day this week. A local volunteer tells Fiona Finch why she has stepped up to help Curlew Action.

By Fiona Finch

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As job descriptions go it is a little niche, but Jayne Ashe couldn't be more content with her recently acquired volunteer role - as a Curlew Ambassador.

The opportunity to stand up and get counting for the distinctive wading bird was one she could not let pass her by.

The day job for the former Clitheroe Grammar school pupil and biology with conservation graduate is as a Countryside Engagement Officer for the Pendle Hill Landscape Partnership in the Bowland AONB. (Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty).



Jayne Ashe, Curlew Ambassador

Her wider concern for the plight of the curlew, which is still a distinctive and regular visitor to the coast and Lancashire uplands, but is under serious threat elsewhere, meant she volunteered for Curlew Action, a national charity focused on curlew conservation.

Wednesday April 21 is World Curlew Day 2021, so chosen because April 21 is the date curlews, on average, lay their first eggs. It will be both an awareness raising and fundraising day.

Jayne said: “The curlew call is the first sound of spring for me. Curlews have very distinctive looks and are Europe’s largest wader. We are incredibly lucky to still have populations around Bowland,

North Yorkshire and into East Lancashire. In other parts of the country they've basically completely disappeared. They reckon over the past 20 years we've lost half of the British population for multiple reasons - that's nearly 120,000 birds. There's around 30,000 breeding pairs left in England."

The Eurasian curlew was placed on the IUCN (International Union for Conservation of Nature) Red List of Threatened species in 2015, due to population decline.



Part of the Curlew Action logo

It is those stark facts that makes Jayne highlight the need for greater awareness of the threats curlews face. She said: "I think lots of people may never have seen a curlew and that's sad or, round these parts where people are aware of curlews they are not aware how much they are in decline."

Changes in agriculture have contributed to that change said Jayne: "Because of changes in farming they've been driven more to the uplands because they are ground nesting birds..Traditionally curlews would over winter on the coast and then come inland to breed. In the south a lot of the lowlands have lost curlews completely."

Curlews act as a bioindicator, indicating the state of the ecosystem and Jayne said: "I think the birds are amazing creatures .The curlew call is incredibly evocative - for centuries everyone would have known that sound. Curlews have very distinctive looks and are Europe's largest wader. The curved beak is probably their most definable feature. Curlews try and come back to the same area - they might not necessarily nest in the same place."

She said curlews are also susceptible because each year they will lay just one clutch of up to four eggs and can fall prey to predators such as foxes and crows.



Curlew pictured in Bowland, Lancashire by Lesley Marklew

Jayne added: "There's a lot of work now looking at curlew recovery projects. Nationally there's a Curlew Recovery Partnership that Curlew Action is part of. The RSPB (Royal Society for the Protection of Birds) in Bowland are looking at doing some curlew conservation work with landowners."

In December the RSPB received £221,000 Green Recovery Challenge funding for a project to halt the decline of curlew in two priority landscapes in the north of England, the Forest of Bowland and the Geltsdale and Hadrian's Wall Corridor. This project will help 70 farms to restore 1050 hectares of land and improve the habitat condition for 310 breeding curlew pairs. The project will build resilience into the landscape to cope with the impact of climate change and economic uncertainty, support 50 volunteers to monitor curlews and work to enable community involvement from local villages.

Meanwhile with the aid of new technologies more work is being done to track curlew migrations and journeys. In winter it's known the British curlew population on the coast is boosted by curlews from northern and eastern Europe overwintering here.

Jayne's top tips to help conserve curlews during the nesting and fledgling period, which runs until around July 31, are: follow the Countryside Code, keep dogs on leads and cause minimal disturbance in ground nesting areas. She said: "Be aware what might be under your feet - curlews' nests are on the ground, but also lapwings' and skylarks' are. Particularly last summer there were fewer people around this area because of lockdowns. It might be they nest closer to paths (this year)."



Curlew chick photographed by Tim Melling

*Curlew Action was created following the publication of the book Curlew Moon written by Mary Colwell who walked across Ireland, Wales and England in a bid to learn more about curlews and highlight their plight. She began her journey on April 21, 2016

For more information see [here](#) or curlewaction.org



Curlew in flight photograph: Tim Melling