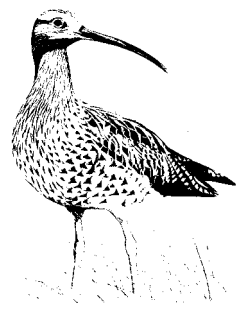




THE UPPER ONNY WILDLIFE GROUP



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Please Conserve our Curlews

Curlews are an important part of our local landscape, but they are slowly heading for extinction here because of poor breeding success. Adults live for many years, so the decline is slow, but not enough young birds fledge to replace the older ones as they eventually die off.

Most Curlews nest on farmland, so the help of farmers is vital if this decline is to be reversed. Many farmers regret the loss of Curlews, and the Upper Onny Wildlife Group wants to work with them to try to reverse the decline in our area.

Curlews nest on the ground, and usually start laying eggs towards the end of April. They take around 4 weeks to hatch, and another 5 - 6 weeks before the chicks are able to fly, from late June onwards. Pairs will re-lay if they lose their first clutch, so many chicks can't fly until mid July.

In this area, our survey work has found that Curlews usually nest in fields with damp patches, which are used for growing grass to make hay or silage. Research by the RSPB and Defra has shown that a few simple changes in managing such fields can dramatically increase breeding success.



Nesting Time

Curlews usually return to their breeding area in March, but egg laying is usually delayed if stock are present on the chosen nest field. If it isn't, trampling of nests is a risk.

Nests are destroyed if rolling or harrowing occurs after eggs are laid. Occasionally, some farmers find nests and mark their location, so they can avoid them later. Unfortunately, an obvious marker placed close to nests, or a small part of a field which is treated differently from the rest, attracts inquisitive predators. It's not possible to pick up the eggs, and replace them – Curlews are very sensitive to disturbance, so they will desert such nests, and, also, it's illegal.

Farmers can help by:

- *Removing stock by mid - late April from fields that will remain uncut until late June or July*
- *Leaving stock for as long as possible on fields that will be cut earlier, to encourage Curlews to nest elsewhere*
- *Completing rolling, harrowing and any other field preparation by mid - late April, or as soon as possible thereafter.*
- *Retaining or restoring damp areas*
- *Leaving any found nest undisturbed, and leaving as large a part of the field as possible in the same condition, so the location of the nest is not advertised to potential predators.*

Grass Cutting Time

Chicks feed mostly in the wetter areas of a field, and stay in deep cover. Many chicks are killed when the grass is cut, perhaps only a few days before they are able to fly to safety. Farming has become much more efficient, so fields are often cut earlier than they used to be, and modern machines complete the job in a day or two, rather than taking several days or weeks. Fewer chicks escape now. This is one of the main reasons for the decline in breeding success.

Mowing fields from the outside inwards rounds up the chicks into the centre of the field. When the last cut is made there is nowhere for them to escape, and they are killed.

Farmers can help by:

- *Mowing from the centre of the field outwards, or from side to side, rather than from the outside inwards*
- *Delaying grass cutting as late as possible, preferably into mid July*
- *Leaving the wetter areas uncut*



Longer Term Action

Curlews nest in the same places year after year, so the best way of helping them is by planning to avoid agricultural operations in suitable fields in known nesting areas between early April and mid July.

In future years, farmers can help by:

- *Making hay, not silage, in suitable fields in known nesting areas*

Financial Help

Farmers can get additional funding from Natural England for action to help Curlews. Those in the ESA can still get a "Hay Meadow Supplement" for fields used for hay which is not cut until mid July, and a "Wet Area Supplement" for creating new damp patches. The Environmental Stewardship Higher Level Scheme includes similar provisions, and options to reward farmers for managing fields to benefit wading birds such as Curlews.

Farmers can get more information and advice from Dave Cragg at Natural England at Attingham Park, telephone 01743 282030

Official Support

This initiative by the Upper Onny Wildlife Group, and the advice to farmers given in this leaflet, is endorsed and supported by:-



More Information

Further information can be provided on behalf of the Upper Onny Wildlife Group by

Leo Smith 01588 638577

Further advice and information on this and other ways of managing your farm for wildlife can be obtained from Shropshire Farming & Wildlife Advisory Group 01939 262150

RSPB information leaflets can be obtained from Leo Smith, and they, together with other advice, can be found at

www.rspb.org.uk/farming