



Curlew Country

Grasslands for Curlew

Summary report

of work undertaken by Curlew Country

as a result of AONB Conservation Grant Funding

Spring 2022

The project aims to support one of Curlew Country's prime objectives, to halt the decline of the local but nationally significant Curlew, *Numenius arquata*, population.

Successful management for Curlew will deliver a number of other environmental outcomes through its long-term aim of improving on-farm habitat to increase its suitability to support breeding curlews.

Originally the plan was to implement a series of trials to establish the cost of habitat management, including mowing regimes, that increase sward height diversity. This provides a better food source for curlew chicks and should create greater protection from some predators. Using smaller, slower grass harvesting equipment may allow curlew chicks the opportunity to move out of the way of harvesting operations.

Untimely Covid 19 infections within the small Curlew Country team resulted in staff being reallocated to the rearing of Curlew chicks (Headstarting). This was concurrent with the planned delivery of the fieldwork element of the Grasslands for Curlew project, which subsequently had to be curtailed.

Additionally, the intention to deliver elements of the project in partnership with the Marches Meadow Group (MMG) did not come to pass. The MMG machinery was unavailable as it was committed to their contractors, who had no free capacity during the harvesting season due to increased uptake of their services from the flourishing MMG membership.

The project was therefore adapted to undertake habitat improvements within a known Curlew breeding territory.

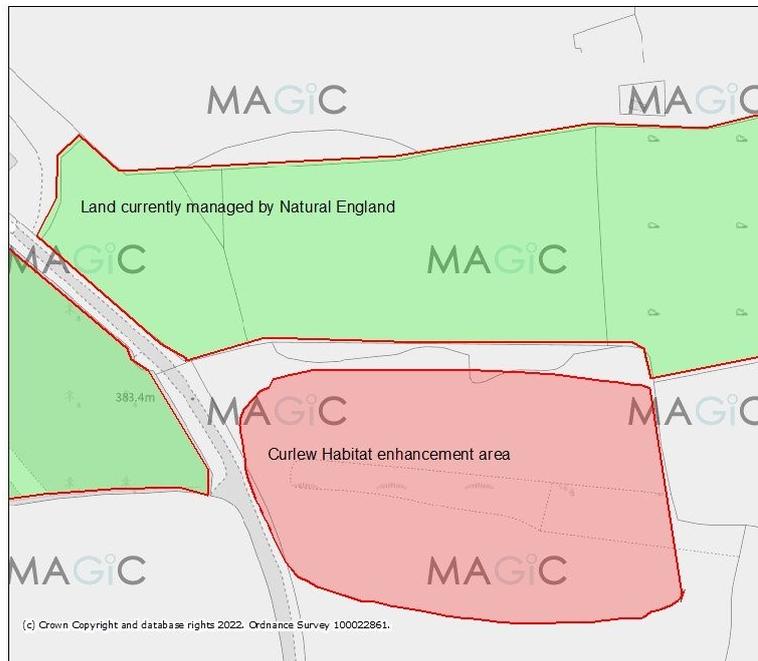
A number of potential sites were scoped out and following negotiations with the landowner and grazing tenant one was selected.

The site was situated in a semi-improved grassland, with an open, ephemeral, stream containing a series of shallow pools along its length. These pools have damp margins and remain soft even during summer, showing potential as an adult Curlew foraging site. The stream had become shaded out by encroaching Western Gorse, *Ulex europaeus*, see Picture 1. To the eastern boundary of the site the open water was completely shrouded.

There were also two added advantages to selecting this site, it is in the intersection of two regular Curlew nesting territories and is adjacent to the Stiperstones NNR and other well-managed MMG grasslands, see Map 1.

Map 1 Site Location

MAGiC Grassland for Curlew enhancement area



The plan was to clear the area of gorse, treating the cut stumps with a suitable herbicide to limit regrowth and then reseeded the bare ground with meadow seed to increase floristic diversity. This diversity should then encourage a suite of insects, including pollinators, which form the diet of Curlew chicks.

Marches Wood & Land, a local contracting business, were engaged to undertake the practical gorse clearance work. The cut Gorse arisings were burnt in areas identified as having little floristic value and where risk of ash entering the stream was minimal.

Picture 2 shows the site after the initial clearance and Picture 3 shows one of the 'uncovered' pools

Picture 1 The site prior to habitat enhancement works



Picture 2 After gorse clearance



Picture 3 One of the 'uncovered' pools.



Once the site was cleared it became apparent that some areas were covered in deep gorse leaf litter which was acting as a mulch, thereby reducing the potential regeneration of grasses & forbs.

This litter was raked into heaps to reveal bare ground which was suitable for re-seeding.

Re-seeding of the site was undertaken using meadow seed purchased from a member of the MMG, thereby helping to support the ongoing management of the source meadow. This seed was been harvested less than 600m from the work site. The source meadow has high floristic diversity and contains both Common Spotted, *Dactylorhiza fuchsii*, and Greater Butterfly, *Platanthera chlorantha*, Orchids.

The raking and seeding were undertaken by the Curlew Country Team.

Picture 4 Raking



Picture 4 Seeding



It is imagined that the grassland will take a few years to develop and at the time of writing few of the seeds have germinated, although it is encouraging to see dog violets emerging on the site.

There are high hopes that this work will be of benefit to the local Curlew population as a returning headstarted Curlew has been spotted feeding on the site in March 2022 by Simon Cooter, Natural England Reserve Manager

JP Brayford, Curlew Country, 2022