

From the field

News from the Upper Thames wader and curlew projects

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Kirsty Brannan (RSPB)



Andy Hay (rspb-images.com)



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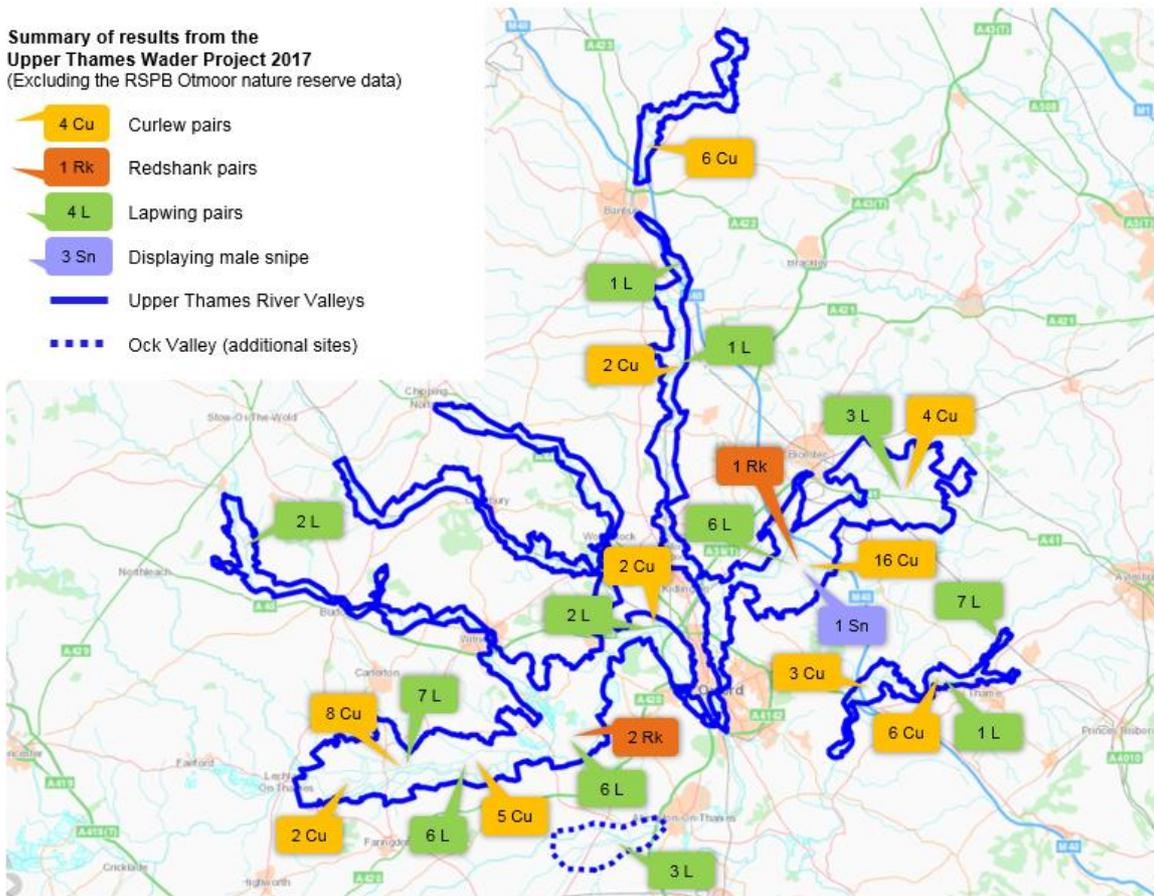
Andy Hay (rspb-images.com)

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- 2017 monitoring results
- Are curlew raising enough chicks?
- Nature Friendly Farming Network
- Surveyor highlights

Summary of results from the Upper Thames Wader Project 2017
(Excluding the RSPB Otmoor nature reserve data)

- 4 Cu Curlew pairs
- 1 Rk Redshank pairs
- 4 L Lapwing pairs
- 3 Sn Displaying male snipe
- Upper Thames River Valleys
- ⋯ Ock Valley (additional sites)



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Wader survey news 2017

This spring, the number and distribution of breeding waders was surveyed in a sample of the best sites across the Upper Thames river valleys. Additional fieldwork sought to help us measure the breeding success of curlew.

The breeding waders here are regionally important, and the curlew population is one of the largest remaining in the British lowlands. Volunteers have been measuring the trend in local wader populations since 2005. Whilst numbers of waders in the area have been boosted by recent increases at the Otmoor nature reserve, almost all of the curlew make their home on privately-owned farmland.

This spring, 43 volunteer surveyors completed standardised breeding wader surveys on 47 sites. On some of these sites, volunteers visited even more frequently – recording curlew behaviour to help staff locate and monitor nests.

Results

The standardised breeding wader surveys recorded:

- 44 pairs of lapwing,
- 53 pairs of curlew,
- 3 pairs of redshank, and
- 1 pair of snipe.

The sites on the Thames were particularly important, accounting for almost 40% of recorded wader pairs.

This is in addition to the waders on the RSPB Otmoor nature reserve this year:

- 103 pairs of lapwing,
- 1 pair of curlew,
- 91 pairs of redshank and
- 32 pairs of snipe.

For most sites these numbers are similar to those recorded last year. The number of curlews has increased slightly and the number of lapwings reduced. The latter finding was possibly due to the particularly dry spring.

Thanks to all the farmers who welcomed surveyors onto their fields, and all the volunteers getting up early. Special thanks to MSC student Matthew Purkis for helping with curlew-themed fieldwork just after the breeding season, and to Emily Upcott for helping with the data management.

For more details about wader surveys and / or to become more involved protecting curlews next spring, contact **Anna Broszkiewicz**.



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A tale of four eggs

Curlew can live for over thirty years, so measuring their breeding success is an important way of assessing their likely future population trend.

Last year nest monitoring showed that mammalian predation was a common cause of nest failure. With so few local farms carrying out predator control, this year we trialled using electric fencing to temporarily protect a vulnerable nest. Surprisingly, the female bird sat tight whilst farmers and project staff erected 100m of mesh around her. In due course, her eggs hatched out, and chicks could clearly be heard cheeping outside the mesh soon afterwards.

In total, volunteers helped staff find eleven curlew nests this year. In nine of them, staff were able to install temperature loggers (under licence). The temperature of the nest indicates whether it is being incubated or not, which in turn can help us understand whether the eggs hatched successfully, or the likely cause of nest failure.

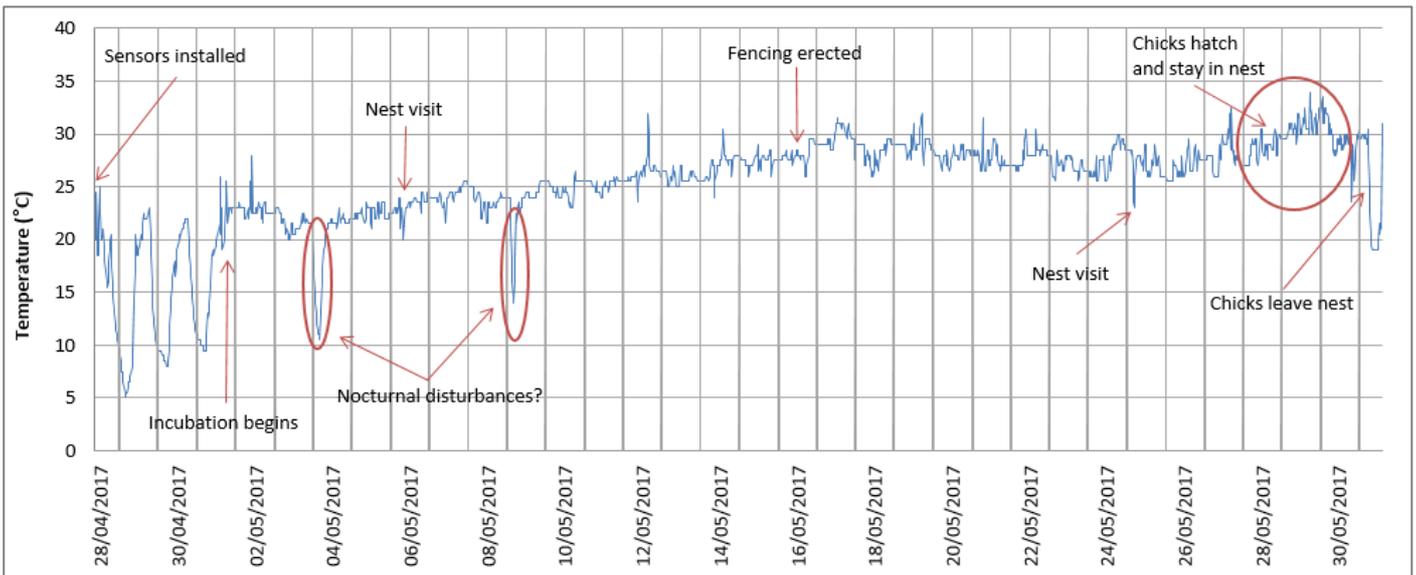
The fenced, successful nesting attempt is shown in the graph below. The egg remains are also pictured to the right; only with practice and a combination of evidence can the nest outcome be determined.

Of the eleven nests found, four hatched successfully, with the others failing due to both predation and disturbance.



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Nature Friendly Farming Network

There are many farmers across the UK who choose to farm in sustainable ways that benefit nature.

The newly-formed Nature Friendly Farming Network is a farmer-led community where like-minded farmers can learn from each other's knowledge and experience, build public awareness of nature friendly farming, and work together

to influence agricultural policy.

Chair Martin Lines said 'The Nature Friendly Farming Network provides a platform for members of the farming community to share their knowledge, attend training and events, and spread the benefits of nature friendly farming at a national level.'

'The community of like-minded farmers can shape policy, take

advantage of social media promotion and increase support for sustainable farming techniques.'

Find out more online at: www.nffn.org.uk



My favourite survey moment

Some of this year's volunteer surveyors share their fieldwork highlights.

There is nothing quite like being out and about in lovely flower- and butterfly-rich hay meadows in the peace and quiet of early summer mornings. I would say the surveying highlight for me was seeing an otter footprint in a damp muddy patch at the corner of one of the survey fields.

- Richard Astell

Having worked in a science-based area all of my working life, I love collecting and collating data. After monitoring curlew activity in June (admittedly in a large meadow adjacent to my survey area) the curlews eventually moved across

the boundary into my area and I was able to photograph a juvenile curlew!

- Terry Godfrey



The highlight for me has been the experience of watching and hearing these charismatic birds on land around a beautiful section of the river Thame, which I wouldn't have had the chance to visit had I not been surveying.

- Genevieve Sandalls

We felt that conducting a survey for the RSPB would be a wonderful opportunity to learn from some experts; this proved to be the case. The highlight was discovering an area close to home where we could monitor lapwing and yellow wagtails. An added bonus was a resident barn owl, the lure of which has drawn us back to the site many times.

- Dan and Catherine Sager

I am a retired architect with an almost lifelong interest in wildlife and conservation. This season has proved to be similar to last year in that you soon learn how elusive breeding curlews and their nests can be. One of the highlights this year was an over-flying osprey!

- John Hicks

Working together for wildlife

The profile of curlew in the lowlands has never been greater.

Earlier in the year, individuals and organisations from across England convened to highlight the perilous state of curlew in the southern lowlands of the country. Out of this, a smaller group was formed who have been helping each other learn about curlew monitoring and new intervention techniques. You

can find their website at www.curlewcall.org

Closer to home, along the Oxfordshire Thames, eleven farms have formed their own conservation group. With the support of RSPB and other specialists, they are equipping themselves to help waders, water voles and other farmland wildlife, and manage species-rich meadows.

In the last two years alone they've collectively restored three ponds and more than 1.5 kms of hedgerows, pollarded 123 trees, created more than 14,000 squares metres of footdrains and scrapes and managed 371 hectares of wet grassland and meadow.

What wildlife would you like to see on your farm? Let us know!

Further information

To find out more, ask...

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Newsletter compiled by Emily Upcott

The RSPB is the country's largest nature conservation charity, inspiring everyone to give nature a home.



The RSPB is a member of BirdLife International, a partnership of conservation organisations working to give nature a home around the world.

