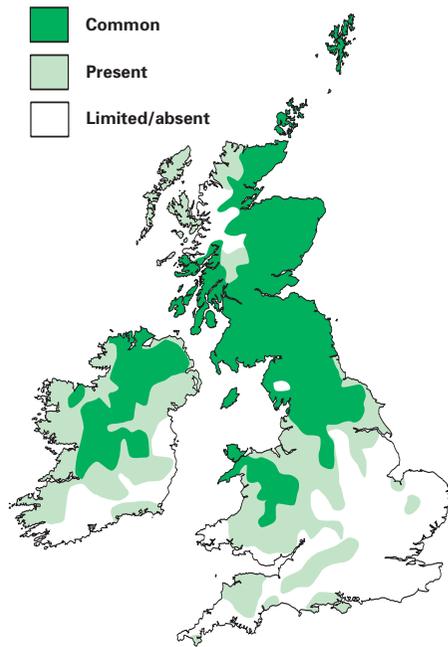




for birds
for people
for ever



Distribution map showing the relative abundance of curlews in Britain and Ireland 1988-91



Chris Gomersall (rspb-images.com)

The curlew is a large wader with a long downward-curving bill and a bubbling song.

Curlews breed on open moorland, rough and damp pastures, unimproved hay meadows and boggy ground; they occasionally use arable crops and silage fields. Curlew numbers have remained stable in some areas, but declined substantially in others. These reductions are probably due to a combination of drainage of farmland and moorland, unsuitable grassland management (through intensification or abandonment), and predation, particularly by mammals.

WHAT DO CURLEWS NEED?

Nesting habitat

Curlews nest in a wide variety of vegetation types, usually selecting relatively tall vegetation, either within a tussock on rough pasture or within the tall, but not too dense, vegetation of an unimproved hay crop. Silage grass may be too dense to attract them.

Food

Adults feed on earthworms, leatherjackets, beetles, spiders and caterpillars. Curlew chicks generally feed on surface insects and spiders.

ANNUAL LIFECYCLE OF A CURLEW

January	February	March	April	May	June	July	August	September	October	November	December
Coastal areas.	Return to breeding grounds.			Main nesting period. Require tall ground vegetation; feeding on earthworms, leatherjackets and insects.							Leave breeding grounds to winter mainly in coastal areas of the UK and Ireland.

HOW CAN I ENCOURAGE CURLEWS?

Nesting habitat

MOORLAND

- **HLS** Small-scale rotational burning of heather provides preferred nesting areas, but bog areas should not be burnt.
- Manage moorland to retain a variety of habitats, including wet flushes, patches of bracken and rough grassland.

MEADOWS

- Most curlews are looking for somewhere suitable to nest in late April/early May. Curlews need around a month to incubate their eggs, with chicks fledging around 5–6 weeks after hatching. Leave damp hollows/corners in meadows uncut, as unfledged chicks are most likely to use these areas. Late cut meadows (post mid-July) can be important for re-nesting birds.
- **ELS** **HLS** Retain and restore traditional hay meadows.
- Silage or haylage fields may be used, but it is vital that the cutting regime is favourable.

PASTURES

- **ELS** **HLS** Retain and restore rough damp pasture.
- Extensively graze to provide some taller, tussocky, vegetation through the breeding season. If possible, avoid grazing during the nesting period. Cattle are often preferred, but management rather than livestock type has the greatest influence over sward structure.

MECHANICAL OPERATIONS

- Mechanical operations, for example muck spreading and harrowing, should be timed before or after the breeding season in the areas used by curlews.

TREE COVER

- Curlews generally avoid nesting in areas close to tall tree and shrub cover. Avoid planting trees close to areas used by nesting curlews.

Feeding habitat

MOORLAND

- **HLS** Restore wet areas by blocking grips.

MEADOWS AND PASTURE

- **ELS** **HLS** Wet flushes, boggy areas and damp grassland are important invertebrate-rich feeding areas, particularly for chicks. Such areas, even if small, should be retained and re-created.

PRIORITY ACTION

- Retain and restore rough, damp pasture and traditional hay meadows.
- Extensively graze to provide taller vegetation through breeding season.
- Timing of cutting is critical in meadows.
- Provide damp areas, wet flushes or small, shallow pools as feeding areas for chicks.

See also the RSPB advisory sheets on

- Heather moorland management
- Moorland grazing
- Grip blocking
- Grazed pasture
- Hay and silage meadows
- Managing water levels to benefit birds

For answers to all of your farm wildlife enquiries, visit www.farmwildlife.info

KEY

ELS = Entry Level Stewardship **HLS** = Higher Level Stewardship

You can get further information on this and other ways of managing your farm for wildlife from:



Agricultural Adviser, The RSPB,
UK Headquarters, The Lodge, Sandy,
Bedfordshire SG19 2DL
Tel: 01767 680551
www.rspb.org.uk/farming



Farming and Wildlife Advisory
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