



Above: The largest white-rumped, brown wader, with a down-curved bill. A distinctive 'curlew' and bubbling display call.

Numbers of breeding curlews have declined as a result of increased drainage, grassland improvement (particularly the conversion of moorland margins to improved grass) and nest predation. The curlew population declined by 56% in parts of upland southern Scotland between the early 1980s and 1998 and has declined by over 50% in Scotland since the mid 1990s*.

WHAT DO CURLEWS NEED:

Rough ground and tussocky vegetation for nesting from April to July

Curlews nest in bogs, on open moorland or rough and damp grassland with rushes and tussocks, and in unimproved hay meadows. Their chicks feed and shelter on rough, wet, tussocky ground, finding food on patches of short vegetation and cover among tussocks or in taller patches of vegetation.

Ground invertebrates during the breeding season

Adult curlews feed on earthworms, leatherjackets, beetles, spiders, and the caterpillars of moths and butterflies. Their chicks feed mainly on surface invertebrates, with adult flies (particularly dung flies), adult crane-flies, beetles, caterpillars, sawflies and spiders all featuring quite prominently in their diet.

*Data source: British Trust for Ornithology

HOW CAN I ENCOURAGE CURLEWS?

On moorland

- Avoid conversion (by drainage, liming, fertilising or re-seeding) to improved grassland.
- Graze to achieve a mosaic of taller, tussocky vegetation and shorter grassy areas. This can be achieved by careful stock movements, by adjusting stocking rates, by using supplementary feeding to target grazing, and by using cattle and sheep where possible.
- Muirburn – the rotational ‘patch burning’ of heather – provides attractive nesting areas.
- Moorland that is managed for red grouse supports higher densities of curlews.

Hay meadows

- Retain or restore some unimproved hay meadows rather than harvesting all grass as silage.
- Take care when mowing fields, curlew chicks can run into any patches of tall vegetation that remain.
- Avoid or minimise farming activity during the breeding season – April to July.

Wet areas

- Retaining or recreating wet flushes, boggy areas and damp, rough grassland by avoiding or minimising new drainage, and by blocking grips and drains where feasible. These provide important invertebrate-rich feeding areas, particularly for chicks.

On in-bye, pasture and marginal ground

- Unimproved pasture should be managed with no, or very limited, use of fertiliser. Where fertilisers are used, phased-release and leach-resistant types avoid excessive growth and allow application during the autumn rather than the nesting season. Organic (and organic-based) fertilisers tend to increase soil invertebrate numbers, which makes for better feeding.
- An absence of grazing by cattle (or, if necessary, a maximum of two livestock units per hectare) from April to mid-June minimises the loss of nests by trampling.
- Grazing by cattle from late summer onwards will provide areas of rushes and sedges for nesting and feeding. Remember to adjust your grazing rates to compensate for any reduced grazing in the spring.

Tree cover

- Curlews avoid nesting and feeding in areas close to tall tree and shrub cover. Avoid planting trees, shrubs or hedges within 30 metres of lapwing/curlew nesting and feeding areas. The minimum viable area of open ground is approximately three hectares, but the ideal is to have more than 10 hectares of open ground.

Contacts and advice

- The best way to help curlews on your farm/croft is to walk the ground with an adviser and discuss options for management and funding. Much of the management suggested in this leaflet can be funded by agri-environment schemes.

Nesting Habitat

- Rough ground, bogs, open moorland, damp grassland and hay or silage meadows particularly with tussocky vegetation.

Summer food

- Soil invertebrates such as earthworms and leatherjackets, beetles, spiders and caterpillars. Chicks will also feed on adult flies (particularly dung flies) and crane flies.

Winter food

- Most curlews over winter on or adjacent to mudflats and estuaries where they obtain the bulk of their food. Some also feed on coastal farmland where they search for similar food types as in the summer.

KEY POINTS

- Avoid the conversion of open moorland and rough, damp grassland to improved grassland.

CATTLE GRAZING

- Graze unimproved pasture with cattle from late summer to late winter to produce a tussocky sward.

WET AREAS

- Avoid or limit drainage, and block existing drains and grips where feasible. Avoid or limit drainage, and block existing drains and grips where feasible.

See also the RSPB Scotland advisory sheets on:

- Lapwing
- Snipe
- Redshank
- Wet grassland for waders
- Rush management

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

RSPB Scotland is part of the RSPB, the UK charity that speaks out for birds and wildlife, tackling the problems that threaten our environment. Nature is amazing – help us keep it that way.

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



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