Breeding Curlew in Ireland

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Eurasian Curlew
**Numenius arquata**
Autumn/winter passage
Trends

- 78%*
- 43%
+/-

- 20%
- 25%
- 12%

- 22%*
- 70%*
- 25%
80% of range lost in 40 years
“...Agreement that the unique combination of the curlew’s global conservation status (IUCN Globally Near Threatened), the importance of Britain and Ireland’s breeding population (equating to 16-24% of the global total) and the magnitude of the declines makes the curlew the highest priority breeding bird species in Britain and Ireland”
## Curlew breeding season

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>April</th>
<th>May</th>
<th>June</th>
<th>July</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Nests</td>
<td>Chicks</td>
<td>Fledglings</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

- Images: Nests, Chicks, Fledglings
Habitat Preferences

• Curlew nest on the ground.
• Prefer open landscapes.
Semi natural vegetation
High water table

• Soft mud for probing.

• Shallow pools rich in invertebrates, important for chick feeding.
Why are the declines so severe?

- Loss and fragmentation of Curlew breeding habitat.

- Agricultural intensification of upland unimproved rushy pastures and lowland wet grasslands.
## Subsequent predation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>% Nests</th>
<th>% Chicks</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total Mammals</td>
<td>96</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Birds</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>68</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### 2014 Curlew records

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Farm land</th>
<th>Bog</th>
<th>BnM</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No of pairs</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% of Total</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>7</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Curlew pairs on Ballydagan Bog 2014
Bogs as Curlew habitat

- Bogs are a crucially important habitat for the remaining Curlew population.

- Almost one third of known pairs nest on bogs.
• In the last 40 years, bog habitats have retained breeding Curlew better than farmland habitats.

• Breeding success is slightly higher on bogs than on farmland.

• Observations of Curlew breeding on nearby farmland and using cutaways for chick rearing and feeding
Cutaways/Remnant bogs

• Intact bogs provide the best Curlew habitat.

• Some of the prime habitat sites for Curlew, e.g. Clara Bog, were transferred to NWPS by Bord na Móna for conservation in the 1980s and 1990s.

• However, cutaways and remnant raised bogs can also provide very good habitat for Curlew.

“Peatland habitats may increasingly become important refuges in areas where farmland no longer provides suitable breeding habitat.” AEWA INTERNATIONAL SINGLE SPECIES ACTION PLAN FOR THE CONSERVATION OF THE EURASIAN CURLEW
Bord na Móna

• Objective 2: To survey and identify potential biodiversity areas within Bord na Móna bogs.
• Objective 3: To promote and develop best practice [...] and enhance biodiversity.
• Bord na Móna have already funded several surveys of their landholdings for breeding waders, including Curlew.

• A number of pairs have been recorded – clearly an important resource.
Bord na Móna – BWI Curlew Conservation Programme Phase I 2015

• To identify and survey Bord na Móna peatland sites where breeding Curlew have been previously recorded.
• Develop management recommendations for each site to enhance habitats for breeding Curlew
• Develop a methodology to identify other potentially suitable Bord na Móna sites for breeding Curlew.
At least 5 pairs on Bord na Móna land in 2014

Probably at least another 5 pairs.

Possibly 13% of the national population on just 8 sites.
• Bogs can be degraded as breeding habitat for Curlew by activities such as drainage, unregulated peat extraction, overgrazing and burning.

• Areas, such as those owned by Bord na Móna, where these activities can be controlled or prevented are extremely important.
Management plans

• Even where some modification has occurred, eg drainage ditches installed, habitat can be improved by raising water levels through ditch blocking and dam construction.

• Other measures such as scrub clearance near wetland areas could remove habitat for predators and improve breeding success.

• Appropriate grazing regimes may further improve some habitats.
In summary

• Breeding Curlew are one of the highest conservation priorities in Ireland.

• A significant proportion are nesting on Bord na Móna lands; possibly the single most important landholder for breeding Curlew.

• The BnM commitment to a Conservation Programme for Curlew with BWI is a significant step forward in saving the species from extinction.

• We look forward to the findings of the 2015 survey and working more closely to conserve these pairs through management planning and trialling habitat management.
THANK YOU