

Curlew in Crisis

The curlew has suffered widespread declines across its European range.

Nowhere has this been more severe than in Ireland, where experts have estimated a 97% decline since the 1980s.

While we may see large numbers of curlew along Irish coasts during the winter season, the majority of these are overwintering. Based on a national Breeding Curlew Survey conducted in 2021, it is now estimated that there are now just 105 pairs of Curlew breeding in Ireland!

If the Irish breeding population of curlew continues to decline at its present rate, it is predicted that breeding Curlew will be lost within 5-10 years. It's time to take action to help save this iconic species.

Curlew Conservation Programme

In January 2017, then Minister for the Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs, Heather Humphreys, TD, announced the formation of a Curlew Task Force. The Task Force consisted of a wide range of relevant stakeholder groups and key individuals with experience in curlew conservation, including the Irish Peatland Conservation Council. The Task Force recommended a national Curlew Conservation Programme be established and managed by the National Parks and Wildlife Service. Today it includes teams of advisors, community engagement and nest protection officers working closely with landowners and other local interests to protect curlew nesting attempts and to improve habitat quality.

Actions to take if you believe you have seen or heard a Curlew

Five points to remember

1. You are most likely to see or hear a curlew between April and June. Be careful not to disturb the bird(s).
2. Try to make sound recordings of calls; for example, the typical bubbling call or song. You could also try to take a photograph or video with your phone.
3. Take detailed notes about curlew behaviour and the habitat they are using; for example, rough pastures, wet grasslands, blanket bog, raised bog.
4. Record the location (using GPS) and the date of your sighting.
5. Report the sighting to the Curlew Conservation Programme, care of IPCC at bogs@ipcc.ie

Please note, we do not need records of over-wintering flocks of curlew in coastal habitats.

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Ireland's Breeding Curlew



*"O Curlew cry no more to the air,
Or only to the water in the West"*

W. B. Yeats



CHY 6829
RCN 20013547

Curlew Facts

How to identify curlew

The Curlew (*Numenius arquata*) is the largest European wading bird, instantly recognisable on winter estuaries and summer bogs by its long, down-curved bill, brown upperparts, long legs and evocative call. Curlew measure 55cm long, have a wingspan of 90cm and weigh between 770g (male) and 1,000g (female). Large numbers of curlew visit Ireland's coasts during the winter, and small numbers breed in Ireland's boglands, rushy pastures and wet grassland.

Curlew call

Unmistakable ascending 'cur..lee, cur..lee' whistle, or sometimes 'cew, cew, cew'. During the breeding season, they may sound a long, rapid bubbling repetition of a single note.

What do curlew eat?

Curlew feed mostly on invertebrates located by touch; they use their down-curved bill to search for invertebrates in soft peaty soils. On the coast, curlew feed mostly on ragworms, crabs and molluscs.

Curlew eggs and chicks

The size of the eggs is 68 x 48mm, and they weigh 76g (of which 6% is shell). The clutch size is 2-6 eggs and the incubation time is 27-29 days; incubation is usually performed by the female. Eggs are laid in April and May. Chicks fledge after 32-38 days. Curlew have one brood a year.

What do curlew need?

Curlew nest on the ground, so they require an open landscape where they can spot potential predators and vegetation of mixed heights so they can both forage and hide from predators. They also need soft ground for probing and shallow pools rich in invertebrates for chicks to feed on.

DID YOU KNOW?
There are only 105 pairs of curlew breeding in Ireland! Curlew populations have seen a 97% decline since the 1980s!

Predation and habitat loss have been identified as reasons why the curlew populations have declined since the 1980s.
Photo: É de Buitléar

Curlew egg predated on Lodge Bog.
Photo: IPCC

71% of Irish curlew breed on bogs from where they will also fly to feed in surrounding fields.

Curlew can live for up to 30 years. They mate for life. 66% of their chicks do not survive their first year. Photo: D. Camier

A pair of curlew flying over Lodge Bog, Co. Kildare. The birds return to this bog every year to breed. Photo: A. McCluskey

Curlew probe for invertebrates in bog pools using their long, curved bills. Photo: P. Foss

Curlew Habitats

The results of a National breeding Curlew survey conducted by National Parks and Wildlife Service in 2015–2016 showed that:

- * 71% of breeding pairs were on peatlands, heather moorland. Some sites had active turf-cutting.
- * 29% of breeding pairs were mainly on rushy pasture and wet grassland.
- * The birds nesting on bogs are also reliant on grassland for feeding

Unfortunately, breeding curlew have suffered severe declines due to habitat loss and fragmentation caused by activities such as drainage, peat-extraction, intensive farming and afforestation. This loss of habitat has led to the birds becoming more susceptible to predation.

