

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 1980's.

While we may see large numbers of Curlew along Irish coasts during the winter season the majority of these are overwintering. During a national Breeding Curlew Survey conducted in 2015-2016 it was discovered that there are only 123 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 Task Force

Minister for the Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs Heather Humphreys TD announced a Task Force for Curlew in January 2017. The Task Force consists of a wide range of relevant stakeholder groups and key individuals with experience in Curlew conservation.

The Task Force adopts a collaborative approach, whereby all members can contribute something towards Curlew conservation, from those who shape policy to those who deliver action on the ground.

For updates on the activities of the Curlew Task Force please visit www.ipcc.ie and follow the link.

Irish Peatland Conservation Council

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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. Take a photograph or video with your phone, through a telescope if you can. Please also try to make sound recordings of calls e.g. the typical bubbling call or song.
3. Take detailed notes about Curlew behaviour and the habitat they are using e.g. rough pastures, wet grasslands, blanket bog, raised bog.
4. Take a GPS of the location and the date of your sighting.
5. Report sighting to the Curlew Task Force care of IPCC at bogs@ipcc.ie

Please note: We do not need records of overwintering flocks of Curlew from coastal habitats.



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

Curlew Facts

How to identify Curlew

The Curlew (*Numenius arquata*) is the largest European wading bird, instantly recognisable on winter estuaries or 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 770g (male) and 1000g (female). Curlew are winter visitors in large numbers to Ireland's coasts, and they breed in small numbers in boglands, rushy pastures and wet grassland.

Curlew call

Unmistakable ascending "cur..lee, cur..lee" whistle, or sometimes "cew, cew, cew". Song in breeding season a long, rapid bubbling repetition of a single note.

What do Curlew eat?

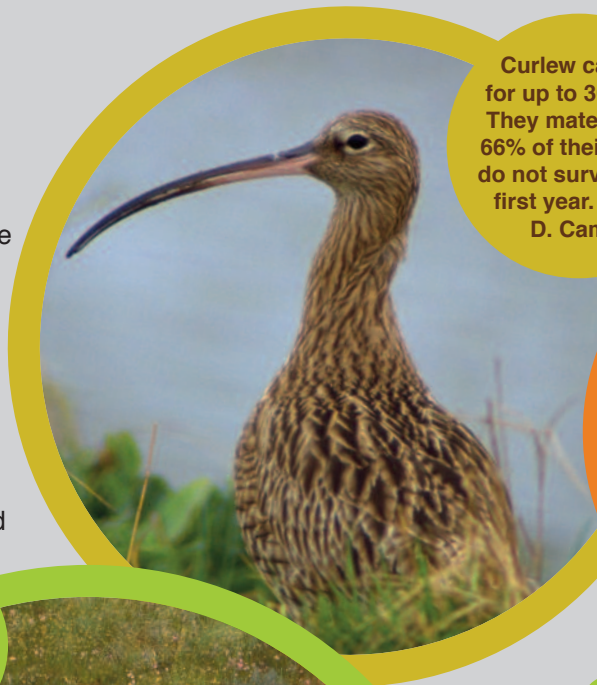
Curlew feed mostly on invertebrates located by touch, they use their down-curved bill to search for invertebrates in soft peaty soils. On the coast Curlew feed mostly on ragworms, crabs and molluscs.

Curlew eggs and chicks

The size of the eggs is 68 x 48mm and they weigh 76.0g (of which 6% is shell). The clutch size is 2-6 eggs with an incubation time of 27-29 days usually by the female. Eggs are laid in April and May. Chicks fledge after 32-38 days. Curlew have one brood.

What do Curlew need?

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



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

71% of Irish Curlew breed on bogs



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

DID YOU KNOW?
There are only 123 pairs of Curlew breeding in Ireland!! Curlew populations has seen a 97% decline since the 1980's!!!



Harvesting peat from Irish bogs for turf fuel, compost and generating electricity is causing a loss of Curlew breeding habitats.



Curlew egg that has been predated. Photo: IPCC

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 being more susceptible to predation.