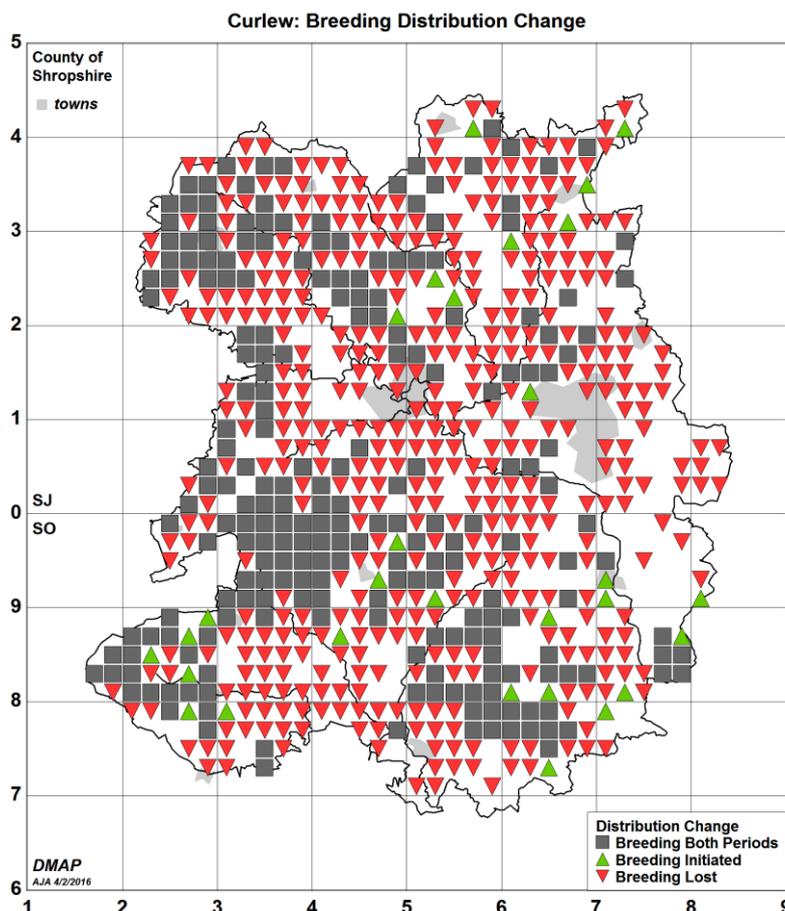


## Curlews in Shropshire, and the Save our Curlews campaign

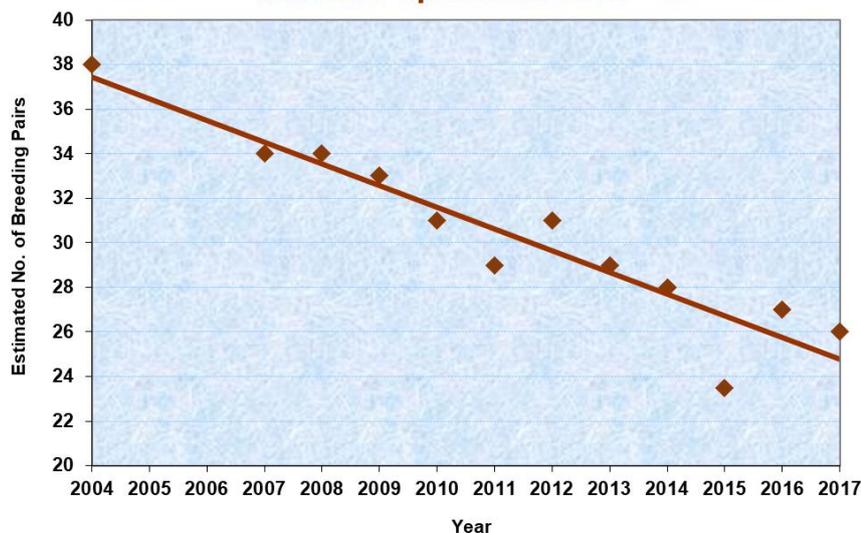
Breeding Bird Atlas surveys were carried out in 1985-90, and in 2008-13, by Shropshire Ornithological Society. The change in Curlew distribution over less than 25 years is shown in the map opposite, to be published in the forthcoming *Birds of Shropshire*. Curlews occupied the tetrads shaded grey in both Atlas periods, but there was a reduction of 62% in tetrads with breeding evidence (downward red triangles), and Curlews have disappeared from many parts of the County. In 1990 the population was estimated at 700 pairs, but the estimate of 160 pairs in 2010 represents a catastrophic 77% decline in only 20 years.

Monitoring by Community Wildlife Groups (CWGs) has shown that the population has declined further since 2010 (see below).

The areas covered by each of the CWGs is shown in Appendix 1.



### Decline in the Upper Onny area Curlew Population 2004 - 17



The first CWG, the Upper Onny Wildlife Group (UOWG), has been monitoring its Curlew population since 2004, in 125 sq.km. between the Long Mynd and the Welsh border. Even in the County stronghold, it has declined by almost one-third (32%) in only 13 years. The chart shows the decline.

During this time, as well as producing annual reports detailing the decline, UOWG has put forward several Curlew conservation initiatives.

A detailed map, showing all areas where Curlews had been seen breeding or foraging, was submitted to Natural England (NE) in 2012, when most farms in the area were transferring from the Environmentally Sensitive Area agri-environment scheme to the Higher Level Stewardship (HLS) element of the Environmental Stewardship (ES) scheme. UOWG proposed that all Curlew habitat should be incorporated into HLS agreements. NE accepted this in principle. When the process was completed, 31 of the 37 holdings with HLS agreements in the

Curlew foraging areas had HLS options in place that specifically safeguarded Curlew: 53% of the foraging area was under HLS agreement, and 29% under an option that safeguards Curlew. These are 10 year agreements, many planned to run until 2024.

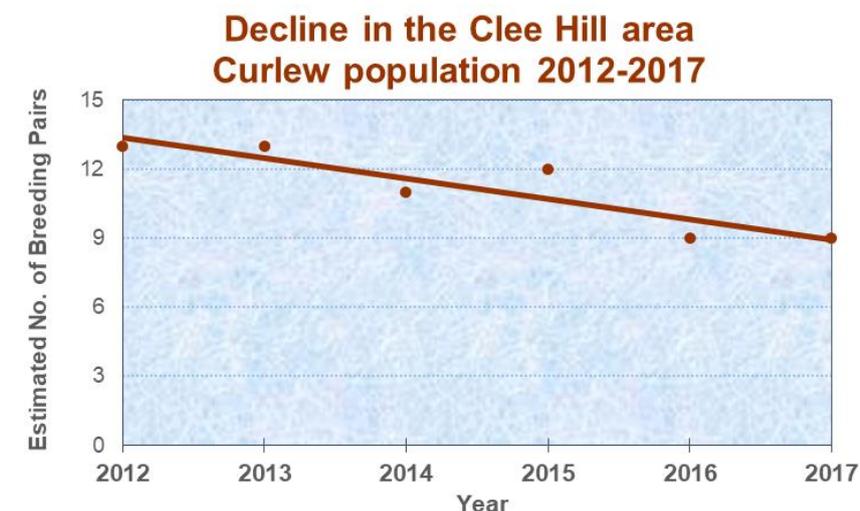
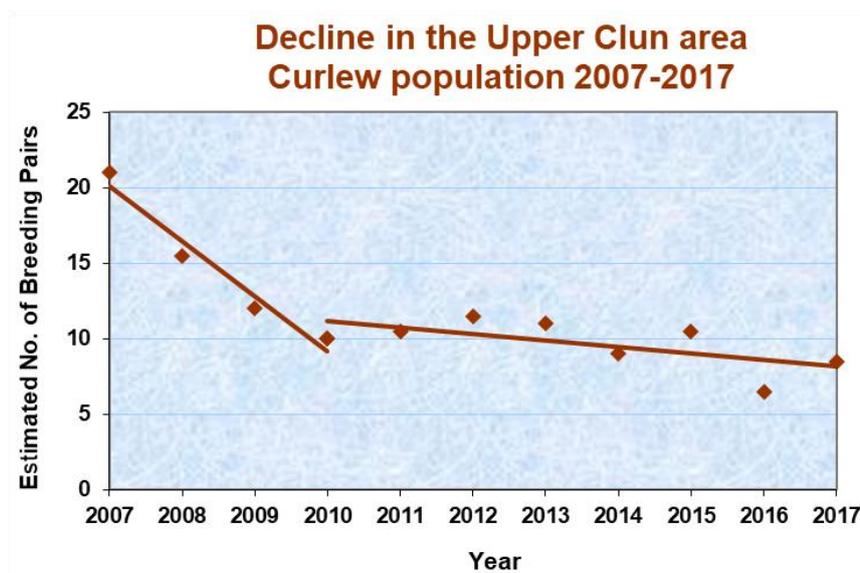
When NE consulted on the Targeting Statement for the new Countryside Stewardship agri-environment scheme, which replaced ES in 2015, UOWG nest-site data was used to show that Curlews did not breed here in the same habitat as the other species in the “wader assemblage”, and the initial proposals were changed so Curlew is now a target (priority) species in its own right.

When a Heritage Lottery funded Stiperstones-Corndon Landscape Partnership Scheme (LPS) was proposed in 2012, the decline in the Curlew population found up until then (18% in eight years) was used by UOWG to justify proposing a Curlew Recovery Project as part of the LPS. This was agreed, and the project has evolved into “Curlew Country”. Curlew Country has been finding and protecting nests since 2015, and publishes its own reports. Monitoring by Community Wildlife Groups (CWGs) across the whole of the LPS area found an estimated 44 – 48 breeding pairs in 2017 (including 2-3 in Wales), around 30% of the County population. The 22 nests found and monitored by Curlew Country in 2017 are therefore about half of those in the LPS area, and about 15% of the County population. The LPS area, and Curlew Country’s area of operation, are indicated in Appendix 1.

The second CWG, covering the Upper Clun (basically the River Clun catchment west of Clun

Bridge, about 110 sq.km.), started monitoring the Curlew population in 2007, when 20-22 pairs were found. There was a rapid decline until 2010, followed by a less steep decline to 2017, when 8-9 pairs were found (a 60% decline since 2007).

UCCWG started its own *Save our Curlews* Campaign in 2016, and one nest was found and fenced in 2017.



The third CWG, covering 80 sq.km. surrounding Titterstone Clee hill, started monitoring in 2012, and has found a decline from 13 to nine pairs, a loss of 31% in five years.

Other CWGs have started more recently, but have not been surveying long enough to produce robust estimates or trends yet. Two CWGs in the LPS area, Rea Valley and Camlad Valley started in 2014. Their results are included in the

LPS total above. Together with UOWG, 76 tetrads are covered by these three CWGs.

Strettons area (30 tetrads) found 5-7 pairs of Curlew in 2017. Another new group, the Three Parishes of St. Martin's, Weston Rhyn & Gobowen, the first CWG outside the Shropshire Hills, covered 25 tetrads to the north and north-east of Oswestry, and found 3-4 pairs.

### **Continued decline since 2010**

The three CWGs that have established trends shown in the graphs above had an estimated 54 Curlew pairs in 2010. Eleven (20%) have been lost since. If this rate of loss applied to the whole population, estimated at 160 pairs in 2010, the population in 2017 was around 130 pairs.

### **Community Wildlife Groups - overview**

In 2017, 171 people participated in the surveys carried out by the seven CWGs, and spent a total of 1,400 hours doing them. This is a very clear demonstration of how much local people value the Curlews.

Members of the groups are recruited through promotion in the local communities. Very few are active birdwatchers or members of conservation organisations.

When the two new groups are established in 2018, the number of participants, and the time they spend, will grow, and over half of the Shropshire Curlew population will be systematically monitored.

Apart from the initial attempts at nest finding in the Upper Clun, described above, the CWGs have made no attempt to find nests. However the CWG work in locating territories is the foundation for the *Save our Curlews* campaign described next.

### **Save our Curlews Campaign**

Prompted partly by Mary Colwell's walk, and the declines summarised above, Shropshire Wildlife Trust and Shropshire Ornithological Society started discussions in early 2017 about the need to safeguard the priority work of the LPS project, and initiate conservation work in other "hotspots" across the County. A joint campaign, funded by an appeal, was launched in November 2017. The campaign is overseen by the "Shropshire Curlews Group", led by SWT, and including representatives of the Community Wildlife Groups, Natural England, the National Trust and RSPB, as well as SOS.

The campaign has adopted a strategy based on CWGs locating Curlew territories, then, when that has been achieved, working closely with landowners and farmers to find and protect nests.

The areas covered by existing CWGs were reviewed, in relation to the Curlew distribution found in the 2008-13 Bird Atlas, as shown in Appendix 1. They are numbered on the map, and named in the table below.

Most patches with a concentration of Curlews were already covered, but there were two gaps, and it was decided to launch new CWGs to cover them in 2018, to the south of Oswestry, and in the Severn-Vyrnwy Confluence. These groups have now been started. The CWGs between them will monitor over half of the County population.

The Appeal has been successful, and has raised sufficient funds for work to start in 2018 in the Upper Clun and Clee Hill areas (2 and 3 on the map in the Appendix), to find and protect nests with electric fencing, and radio tag and monitor chicks. Contacting the landowners and farmers in these areas that had Curlew territories in 2017, to brief them and gain their support, is already underway.

This is a long-term campaign. It is hoped that the Appeal, and fundraising led by SWT, will enable nest finding and protection to be undertaken in all the areas where CWGs are locating territories, as and when each group has collected the necessary information to make finding a good proportion of the nests a realistic possibility. Subject to raising the funds, this will happen in the next couple of years.

Curlew Country is continuing to work in its core area (shown in the Appendix) finding, protecting and monitoring nests. It was involved in the initial meetings of the “Shropshire Curlew Group”, and is included in the list of members in the agreed Terms of Reference, but it has since withdrawn. Therefore, for the foreseeable future, the SWT / SOS campaign and the Shropshire Curlew Group will work across the rest of Shropshire, pursuing the strategy outlined above.

### **Further Information**

The Community Wildlife Groups have a joint website, [www.ShropsCWGs.org.uk](http://www.ShropsCWGs.org.uk).

Full details of the *Save our Curlews* campaign, including the Strategy, can be found on the on SOS website [www.shropshirebirds.com/save-our-curlews/](http://www.shropshirebirds.com/save-our-curlews/)

Details of the SWT / SOS Appeal can be found on [www.shropshirewildlifetrust.org.uk/appeals](http://www.shropshirewildlifetrust.org.uk/appeals)

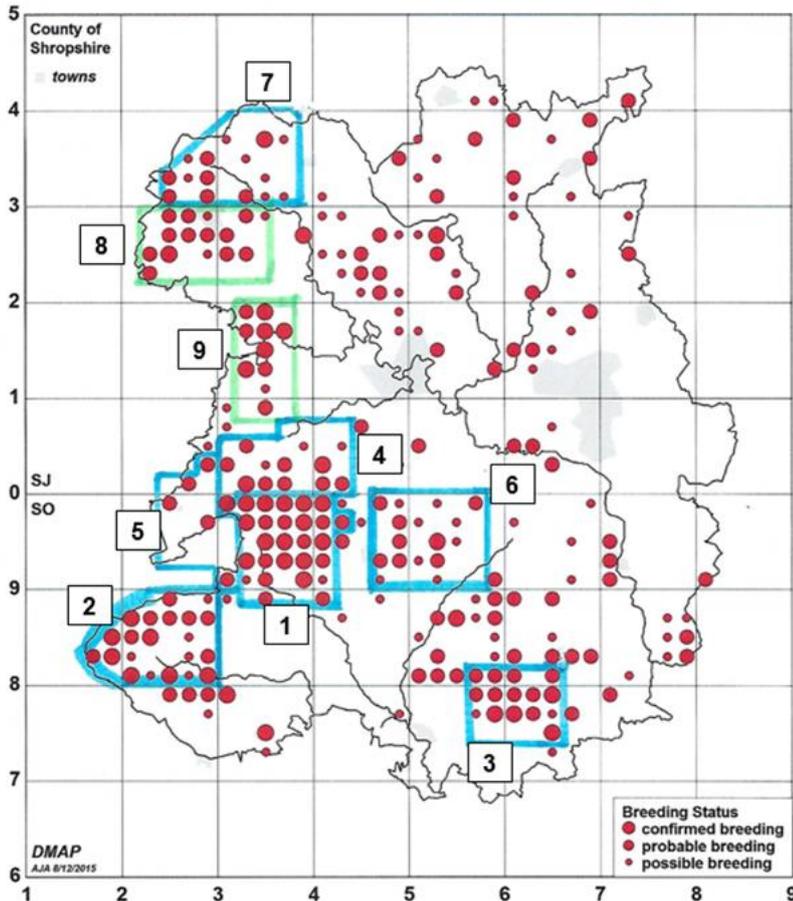
Curlew Country has its own website, [www.curlewcountry.org/](http://www.curlewcountry.org/)

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March 2018

## Appendix

The underlying map is the Curlew distribution map found by Bird Atlas work in 2008-13.

Shropshire Community Wildlife Group areas,  
overlay on Map of  
Curlew Breeding Distribution 2008-13



Fieldwork covered all 870 tetrads in the County. A red dot (large = confirmed breeding, middle size = probable breeding, and small = possible breeding, definitions as set out in *Bird Atlas 2007-2011* (BTO 2013)) shows where Curlews were found during the Atlas period.

The blue rectangles show the areas covered by CWGs at the end of 2016. They are numbered in order of formation, and names and vital statistics are shown in the Table.

The green rectangles show the areas to be covered by the new CWGs 8 and 9, starting in 2018.

The CWGs collectively will then be monitoring over half the estimated County Curlew population.

The LPS Curlew Recovery Project, continuing in 2018 as "Curlew Country", operates within an area enclosed by CWGs 1, 4 and 5. Note that No.5, Camlad Valley, includes nine tetrads in Wales in a triangular area bounded on two sides by Shropshire.

Group	Area		First Year	Curlew	
	Survey squares (tetrads)	(sq. kms.)		Breeding Pairs (2017)	% decline since First Year
<b>Existing CWGs</b>					
1 Upper Onny	31.5	125	2004	28-30	32
2 Upper Clun	31	110	2007	8-9	60
3 Clee Hill	20	80	2012	9	31
4 Rea Valley	25.5	80	2014	9-11	n / a
5 Camlad Valley	11*	44	2014	4-5	n / a
6 Strettons area	30	120	2017	5-7	n / a
7 Three Parishes	28	100	2017	3-4	n / a
<b>Total</b>	<b>177</b>	<b>659</b>		<b>66-75</b>	
<b>Proposed New CWGs</b>					
8 Oswestry Hills (south)	??	??	2018	10 (est)	n / a
9 Severn-Vyrnwy Confluence	??	??	2018	10 (est)	n / a

Orange highlight = 3 CWGs in LPS area (76 tetrads)

\* + 9 tetrads mainly in Wales (Camlad CWG = 20 tetrads), with 2-3 pairs of Curlew