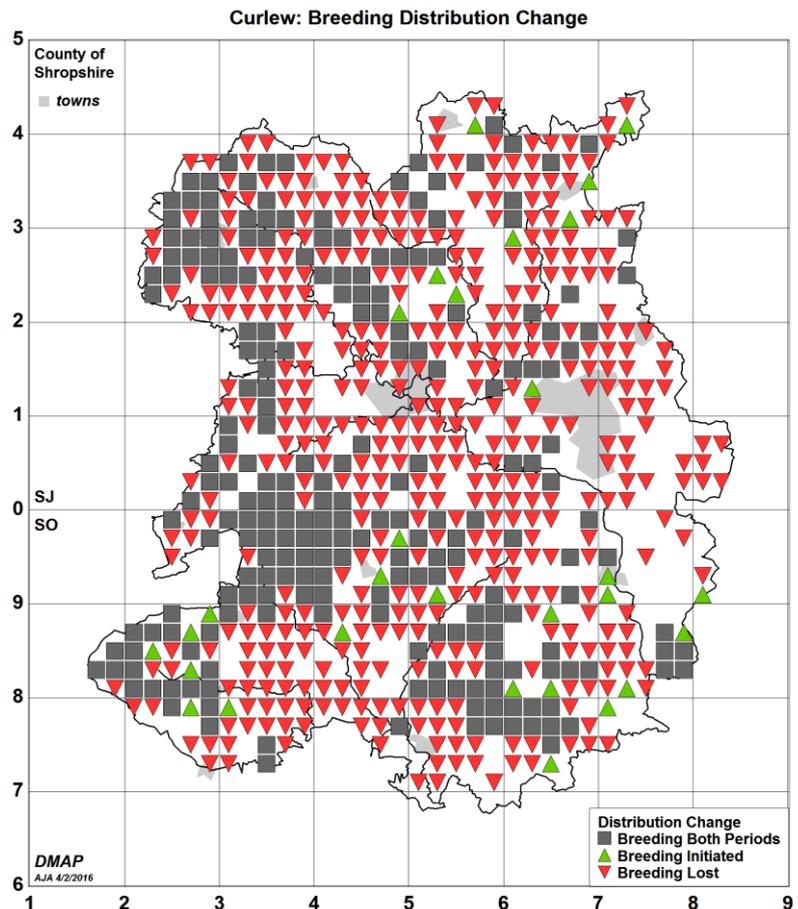


# Curlews in Shropshire, and the Save our Curlews campaign

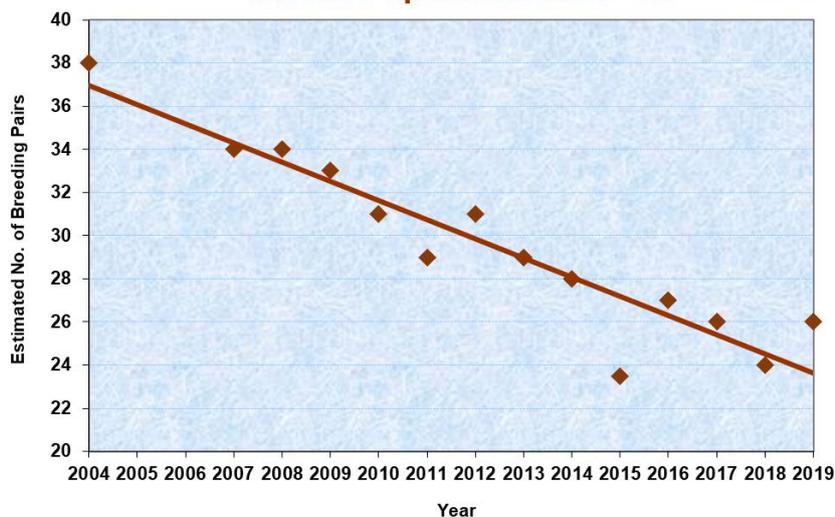
Breeding Bird Atlas surveys were carried out in 1985-90, and in 2008-13, by Shropshire Ornithological Society. The change in Curlew distribution over less than 25 years is shown in the map opposite, published in *The Birds of Shropshire* (2019). Curlews occupied the tetrads shaded grey in both Atlas 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 - 19



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 (31%) in only 15 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.

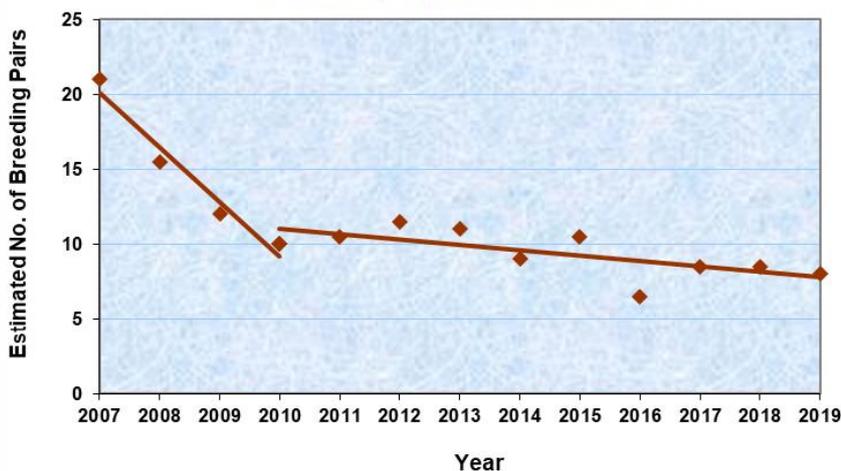
A detailed map, showing all areas where Curlews had been seen breeding or foraging, was submitted to Natural England (NE) in 2012, when most farms in the area were transferring from the Environmentally Sensitive Area agri-environment scheme to the Higher Level Stewardship (HLS) element of the Environmental 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 helped Curlew: 53% of the foraging area was under HLS agreement, and 29% under an option that helped 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 found and protected nests from 2015, and published 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 were 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.

**Decline in the Upper Clun area  
Curlew population 2007-2019**

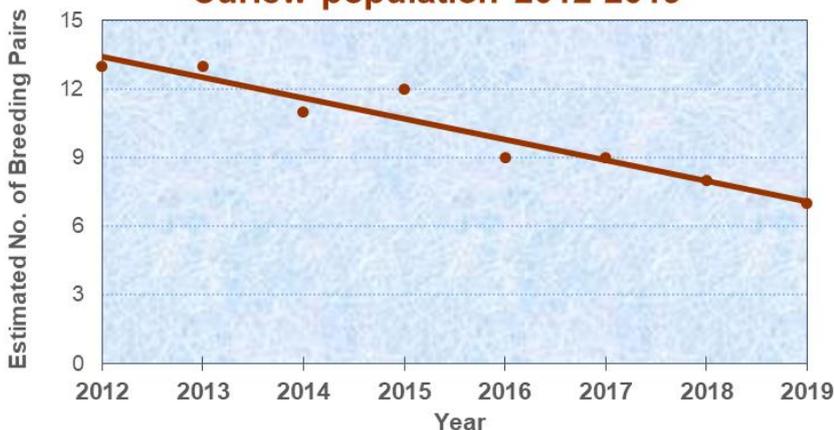


The second CWG, covering the Upper Clun (basically the River Clun catchment west of Clun Bridge, about 110 sq.km.), started monitoring the Curlew population in 2007, when 20-22 pairs were found. There was a rapid decline until 2010, followed by a less steep decline to 2017, when 8-9 pairs were found (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 SWT/SOS *Save our Curlews* campaign worked with UCCWG In 2018 and 2019, and reports of that work can be found else on this website

**Decline in the Clee Hill area  
Curlew population 2012-2019**



The third CWG, covering 80 sq.km. surrounding Titterstone Clee hill, started monitoring in 2012, and has found a decline from 13 to seven pairs, a loss of 48.5% in seven years. It extended its area in 2019, and took in four additional tetrads. The six pairs found are not included in the chart, which shows results for core area monitored since 2012.

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. Similar results were found in 2018 and 2019.

When the SWT/SOS *Save our Curlews* campaign got underway in late 2017, it was decided that two new groups were needed, covering Tanat to Perry (Oswestry South) and Severn-Vyrnwy Confluence. These new Groups were started in 2018, together with a new Group formed by a local resident, covering Abdon district.

These Groups found 12-15 pairs, 7 pairs and 5-8 pairs respectively in 2018, and 15-19, 5-6 and 8-10 pairs in 2019.

### **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.

In 2018, coverage through 10 CWGs increased considerably, and around 80-100 pairs were found altogether, the vast majority of the County population. Over 270 people participated, and put in nearly over 2,400 hours.

In 2019, Clee Hill and Abdon increased their survey areas, to close the gap between them and take in additional known Curlew territories, and the 10 CWGs covered 267 of Shropshire's 870 tetrads, and 320 people contributed over 2,370 hours to the surveys. An estimated 94-115 territories were found, about three-quarters of the County population.

Members of the groups are recruited through promotion in the local communities. Very few are active birdwatchers or members of conservation organisations, a clear indication of the commitment of local people to saving our Curlews.

Apart from the initial attempts in 2017 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. SWT withdrew in November 2019, but SOS has continued with the Campaign and Appeal.

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.

The initial Appeal, together with an earlier Appeal by the Upper Onny Wildlife Group, was successful, and 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 and subsequently, to brief them and gain their support, has been a fundamental pre-requisite.

This is a long-term campaign. It is hoped that the Appeal, and fundraising led by SOS, 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 over the next few years.

Curlew Country is continuing to work in its core area (shown in the Appendix), largely by “headstarting”. For the foreseeable future, the SOS campaign will work across the rest of Shropshire, pursuing the strategy outlined above.

### **Continued decline since 2010**

The three CWGs that have established trends shown in the graphs above had an estimated 54 Curlew pairs in 2010. Fourteen (25.9%) have been lost since. If this rate of loss applied to the whole population, estimated at 160 pairs in 2010, the population in 2019 was less than 120 pairs.

### **Further Information**

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

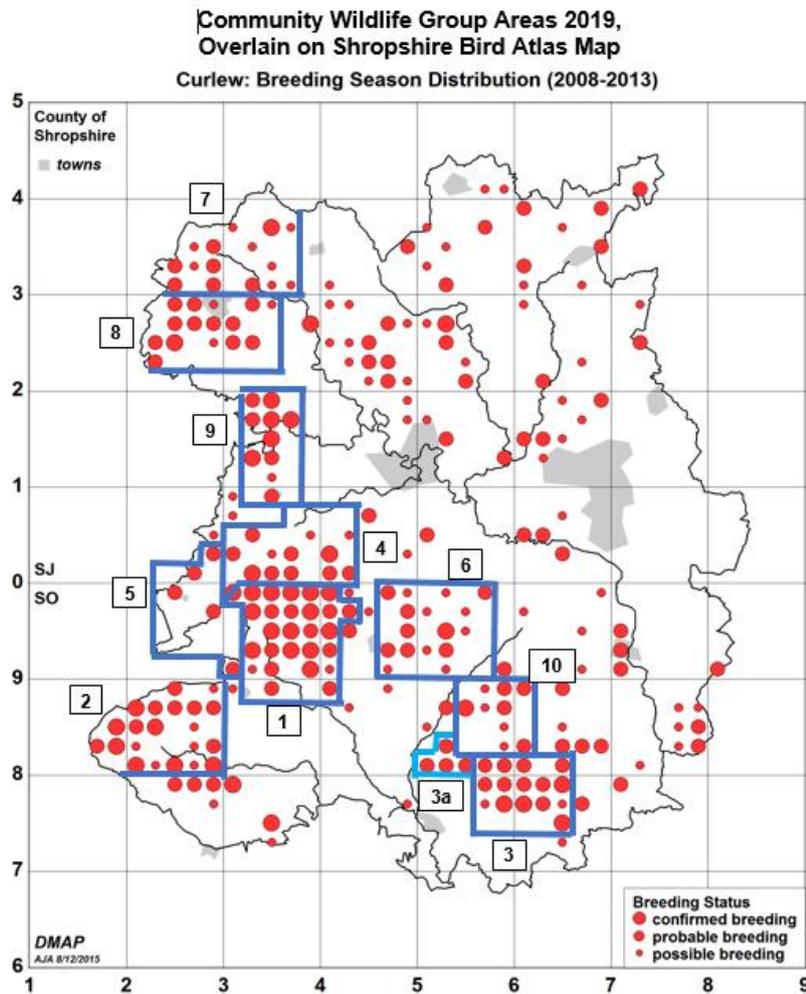
[Full details of the SOS Save our Curlews Campaign and Appeal can be found on the on SOS website](http://www.shropshirebirds.com/save-our-curlews/) [www.shropshirebirds.com/save-our-curlews/](http://www.shropshirebirds.com/save-our-curlews/)

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

Leo Smith  
leo@leosmith.org.uk  
February 2020

## Appendix

The underlying map is the Curlew distribution map found by Bird Atlas work in 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 in 2019. They are numbered in order of formation, and names and vital statistics are shown in the Table.

The CWGs collectively are now monitoring around three-quarters of the estimated County Curlew population.

The LPS Curlew Recovery Project, continuing from 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			Participants		
	Survey squares (tetrads)	(sq. kms.)		Breeding Pairs (2019)		% decline since First Year	No. people	Hours	Minutes
				Min	Max				
1 Upper Onny	31.5	125	2004	27	32	31	31	283	15
2 Upper Clun	31	110	2007	6	10	60	51	150	0
3 Clee Hill	20	80	2012	7	7	46	22	181	2
3a Clee Hill (extension)	4 *	16	2019	6	6	n/a	1	26	30
4 Rea Valley	25.5	102	2014	9	10	n/a	24	183	24
5 Camlad Valley	11 **	44	2014	3	3	n/a	18	119	25
6 Strettons area	30	120	2017	5	8	n/a	45	378	23
7 Three Parishes	28	107	2017	3	4	n/a	21	220	10
8 Tanat to Perry (Oswestry south)	43	172	2018	15	19	n/a	65	356	10
9 Severn-Vyrnwy Confluence	27	108	2018	5	6	n/a	20	176	38
10 Abdon	16 *	64	2018	8	10	n/a	22	298	5
<b>Total</b>	<b>267</b>	<b>1048</b>		<b>94</b>	<b>115</b>		<b>320</b>	<b>2370</b>	<b>2</b>

Orange highlight = 3 CWGs incorporating "Curlew Country" area (76 tetrads)

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

Green highlight = 3 CWGs established in 2018

\* In 2019, Clee Hill took on an additional 4 tetrads to the west, and Abdon took on an additional 7 tetrads to the west and south, to close the gap between the two areas, and cover additional squares with known Curlews  
Some CWG areas include part-tetrads, so the total area is less than the numbers of (whole or part) squares X 4