



Shropshire Ornithological Society

Save our Curlews Campaign & Appeal

www.shropshirebirds.com/save-our-curlews/



Project Work Summary 2021

Work has been carried out in three Community Wildlife Group areas, Upper Clun, Clee Hill and Strettons. In April, the Community Wildlife Groups located the pairs in these areas.

Nest-finding started in early May, and a total of 16 were found. Three were predated within a day, before the planned electric fence to protect them could be erected, and the owners refused permission to fence another. A fifth was inside a rabbit-proof fence enclosing a tree nursery, and a nest-fence was considered unnecessary. The project target, finding four nests in each area, and fencing three, was exceeded.

The fences were effective - none of the clutches in them were wholly predated, but the one inside the tree nursery fence was. One clutch was incubated for the full term, but failed to hatch. Two clutches were abandoned close to the estimated hatch date. Eight more eggs in five nests failed to hatch, although other eggs in the clutch did so. Twelve unhatched eggs were sent to Sheffield University for expert analysis, to ascertain the reasons for failure. There were no unfertilised eggs. Several had thin shells, which probably contributed to their failure. This is a potentially serious problem, and the University will do further research in future years to look at the causes.

Twenty-three eggs in eight nests hatched, and all except two of the chicks were radio-tagged. Tracking the tagged chicks aims to show how they use the landscape, and what happens to them. Failure of chicks to survive and fledge is a major cause of the Curlew population decline, locally and nationally, and we need a better understanding of the reasons so we can develop effective conservation measures.

Project Area	Pairs Located	Nests Found	Nests Fenced	No. Eggs in Fenced Nests	Unhatched Eggs	Nests producing chicks	Chicks Hatched	Chicks Radio-tagged	Fledged Young
Clee Hill CWG	8 + 2*	6	4	16	12*	1	4	4	0
Strettons CWG	7 - 8	5	5	17	6	4	11	11	0
Upper Clun CWG	7	5	3	11	3	3	8	6	3
Total	24 - 25	16	12	44	21	8	23	21	3

* two fenced nests were just outside CWG area

* = includes four predated eggs

In the Upper Clun, a brood of three (one tagged and two not) all fledged, but none of the chicks in the other tagged broods did, and there is no evidence that any of the other pairs in the area produced fledged young either. In Clee Hill, three other pairs produced chicks, which were closely monitored, but none fledged. There is no evidence that any other chicks hatched in the Strettons area. Therefore 24-25 nests in the project areas with known outcome produced only three fledged young. The Table summarises the project results.

Only half the nests found produced any chicks. Only one of the 21 tagged chicks fledged. All the 20 tagged chicks that died were predated (none were lost to agricultural activities), usually very quickly – on average, the chicks died within 5.65 days, only a small fraction of the 35 days they need to fledge. Most predation is carried out by foxes. There is increasing evidence, reproduced on the SOS website (www.shropshirebirds.com/bird-conservation/save-our-curlews/), that the food supply provided by the annual release of millions of pheasants for shooting, only a third of which are actually shot, results in an over-abundant food supply which maintains the numbers of the Curlew's main predators well above naturally sustainable levels.

Seven other Community Wildlife Groups have been monitoring most of the remaining County Curlew population, and found a further 66-79 pairs. Ten of these pairs are known to have had at least one chick, but no evidence was found that any fledged. Last year, it is believed that only one of the 100 or so pairs monitored produced any fledged young. So, in two successive years, almost all pairs in Shropshire had their nests or chicks predated.

These results are sent to the South of England Curlew Forum, the UK and Ireland Curlew Action Group and the newly-launched Curlew Recovery Partnership, so the work is an integral part of the case to Government for effective Curlew conservation measures.

SOS has contributed to the project costs from its own funds, and an appeal to members, Community Wildlife Group members and the general public also contributed. SOS gratefully acknowledges grants from the Stepping Stones project, via Strettons area Community Wildlife Group, with funding from the People's Postcode Lottery*, the Shropshire Hill AONB Conservation Fund*, British Birds Charitable Trust, Wader Quest, the Garreg Llwyd Windfarm Community Benefit Fund* and Stretton Focus Community Awards* (* = funding for specific project areas). This is a long-term project, which will continue in future years.

For further information, please contact Leo Smith

SOS Curlew Campaign Co-ordinator, email leo@leosmith.org.uk, or ring 01694 720296.

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