

Land Manager Liaison



CURLEW
RECOVERY
PARTNERSHIP
ENGLAND

1. Introduction

Land managers (who may or not be the landowner) are likely to be a key component of a Curlew project, so it is therefore important that the best possible working relationship is established and maintained with these key stakeholders at the earliest opportunity. Curlew will often be found nesting on private land and, if this is the case, then the land managers will need to be contacted to ask for permissions for accessing land and carrying out conservation measures if required (e.g. deployment of nest cameras and/or nest fencing). A written agreement confirming third-party access can be useful, especially if challenged when conducting fieldwork on private land. In some circumstances, monitoring from public rights of way may be possible, although when this is the case, it is still advised that the landowners are contacted as a courtesy.

Where birds are found nesting on public access land, it is still recommended that the organisations and/or individuals involved in the management of the land are contacted as a courtesy before undertaking monitoring so that a dialogue can begin regarding Curlew conservation and any potential land-management changes that could be implemented that may benefit the breeding Curlew in the longer term.

In addition to requesting access permission, it is important to recognise that land managers are likely to already have a good understanding of Curlew on their land, and so they should be actively asked for this information as it may help inform site monitoring and assessment of population trends and productivity. You should also offer to keep them informed throughout the fieldwork period (particularly if fields with nesting Curlew may be cut or have livestock turned out) and to show them where any mapped territories are located.

Individuals with considerable local knowledge and expertise are also likely to be present within a Curlew project's team and links with some local land managers may already be established. However, where there is any uncertainty regarding the ownership of fields or habitat it is highly recommended that confirmation is sought to avoid any misunderstandings with land managers.

2. How to find a land manager

There are a number of options available to you when it comes to finding the owner of a piece of land including:

- **Using local knowledge** – One of the most effective methods for finding out who owns a piece of land is to enquire within the local area, most notably among the local farming community. This can be done by taking an OS map or print out that clearly shows the field boundaries of the land in question to a farm and asking the farmer if they know who owns the individual fields/habitat. If they are unsure regarding ownership, they are likely to know who else to ask and to point you in the right direction. This is also an excellent way to introduce yourself to the local farming community and to begin a dialogue regarding Curlew conservation within your survey area.
- **Using the HM Land Registry** – Another way to find out who owns land is to conduct a search using the HM Land Registry, which can be found here <https://www.gov.uk/search-property-information-land-registry>. You can search by 'house name' or 'postcode' as well undertaking a map search, which will inform you as to the property under which the land in question is registered. For a small fee you can get a copy of the documentation.

Bear in mind that the landowner and land manager may not be the same, so if approaching a landowner bear this in mind. The type of agreement under which an occupier manages land will have a bearing on the type and intensity of management being carried out, so this is also useful information. Depending on the type of land occupation, a tenant, farm business partner, licensee or grazier may have to notify the owner of any activities not detailed in their occupation agreement.

3. Engaging with land managers and maintaining positive working relationships

The majority of land managers will be happy to engage in conversation and many will be keen to ensure that they provide the best possible chance for Curlew to breed successfully on their land. By following a few basic pointers, establishing a friendly and positive working relationship with the local farming community is possible. There are a number of key areas that should be considered for points of discussion with landowners before contacting them directly, including:

- Land/field access to monitor Curlew during the breeding season (Feb–July).
- Vehicle access for monitoring and nest finding.
- Permission to actively monitor/protect nests (insert/deploy temperature loggers, nest fences, nest cameras etc).
- Permission to conduct ringing and/or tagging on their land.
- Concessions in relation to mowing (e.g. leaving sections of fields uncut, cutting nest fields last, delaying mowing until broods have fledged).
- Land management changes.
- Predator control measures.
- Any potential hazards that should be considered in the Risk Assessment.

Many land managers will want to help the Curlew but may not know how, or they may be constrained by time and/or financial pressures. It is vital to gain an understanding of where the land manager is coming from before asking for too much from them (i.e. changes to their farming practice). An understanding of the potential costs involved and how these may be countered is important.

- At an early stage give ask if they would like further information on Curlew and provide it accordingly.
- Tell the landowner who you are, who you work with, what you are trying to achieve and how.
- It is essential not to raise expectations which will be thwarted at a later stage, e.g. if there is no funding for crop sacrifice where needed, but a farmer is distressed about losing chicks in the crop. Detail what is needed for Curlew recovery and what can help in the absence of a full package.

Depending on a project's objectives, the priorities for discussion will encompass a number (if not all) of the above points. Individual judgement is required to determine how best to approach individual land managers in terms of what is realistically achievable and which are the most pressing areas of discussion. Other points to consider are listed below:

- It is important to take the long-term view when attempting to establish a working relationship with a land manager. Asking for too much from land managers you don't know runs the risk of alienating them before you've begun. Each meeting with a new land manager should be assessed on its own merits and if they are happy to talk and engage then make the most of the opportunity. However, it is generally advised not to go in with too many requests initially.
- Occasionally, a land manager will not want to engage with you and in these situations it is important to take the long-term approach. If you are able to establish a positive working relationship with their neighbours and prove yourself to be respectful and conscientious in your work, it is possible that they may come round to the idea of working with you in the future.
- If you have an email address and/or telephone number for the land manager it can be useful to attempt an initial contact via these means; however emails can be easily overlooked and unknown phone numbers ignored so a face-to-face meeting will often be required.
- When attempting to make contact face-to-face, be mindful that land managers are busy and although they might be interested in what you have to say, the timing of your visit may be wrong so be prepared to have to return at a later date. With this in mind it can be useful to have a card with your contact details on or a small pamphlet that briefly explains your project and its aims to leave with them. Weekends, evenings and lunchtimes are often good times to catch people who are often more likely to be available to chat during these hours.

- Land managers may often wish to know what is happening to the data collected and how it is to be used. They will not necessarily want lots of people to know that there are Curlews on their land, sometimes because they wish to retain privacy of information. Land managers can be reluctant to engage for fear that if others discover that Curlew are nesting on their land they will be easily disturbed. Data should be collected in a way that complies with General Data Protection Regulations (GDPR). Most land managers will want to know who will see the data, how it will be used and if it will be made publicly available. Some land managers will prefer their neighbours not to know their business. It is important to be clear on this detail.
- If a land manager has given you permission to access their land and/or undertake monitoring/conservation measures on the proviso that certain conditions are met, under no circumstances should you deviate from these conditions. No matter how small or inconvenient a condition may seem, failure to comply with them runs the risk of alienating the land manager and losing access to survey sites.
- At the end of the year it is important to provide feedback to the land managers in the form of a written summary (including with a map), outlining the key areas of success/failure over the season and thanking them for their cooperation. Whilst the land managers will be loosely aware of the activities on neighbouring farms, providing an overview of the area as a whole can help them feel part of something positive and worthwhile in their local community and encourage others to get involved.

By following the above advice, it is likely that productive relationships with local land managers can be established and maintained throughout the course of the project's lifespan. Ideally, where there is a local hotspot of land managers, it will likely be more effective to form a farmer cluster group.

