

A Wales Action Plan for the Recovery of Curlew

Gylfinir Cymru / Curlew Wales



FOREWORD

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MS / AS Curlew Species Champion

Having accepted the invitation to become Wales Species Champion for the curlew back in 2016, I am delighted to be writing the foreword for this Wales Action Plan for the Recovery of Curlew, meticulously prepared by Gylfinir Cymru /Curlew Wales.

I live in and represent North Wales. The moors in this beautiful part of the country hold the largest population of breeding curlews in Wales. Sadly, in recent years the species has seen significant declines and is disappearing from all upland areas. Put in context, since 1993, the population in Wales has fallen by over 90% and is falling by ~6% annually, with country-level extinction threatened by 2033. This species plight is a very sad addition to the nature emergency that we now face in Wales and other parts of the UK.

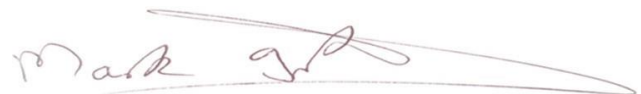
Curlew is listed as globally Near-Threatened on the International Union for Conservation of Nature's Red List of Threatened Species and is a Red-listed Bird of Conservation Concern in Wales. The 'State of Birds in Wales 2018' report reinforces the chronic decline and indicates there is no hint of this trend levelling out.

Because of the seriousness of the curlew crisis this prompted a 'call for help'. In January 2018, a Welsh Curlew conference was held in Builth Wells and attended by 120 participants from across conservation, farming, game and rural policy sectors in Wales. This led to regional workshops and the establishment of Gylfinir Cymru / Curlew Wales. In June 2019, I attended

the first ever UK Curlew Summit at 10 Downing Street, alongside Lewis Macdonald MSP, Species Champion for the curlew in the Scottish Parliament; Jake Berry MP, Species Champion for the curlew in Westminster; and representatives from Gylfinir Cymru - Patrick Lindley, Senior Ornithologist, Natural Resources Wales and Amanda Perkins, Curlew Country Project. At the Summit we heard that sufficient resource will be required to advise, encourage and assist groups of farmers to come together to deliver, monitor and champion curlew and biodiversity across landscapes, and that there is a need to understand the multiple and multi-species benefits of saving curlew from an ecosystem resilience, cultural and natural heritage perspective.

We also heard that in Wales we are at a critical time for breeding curlew, and perhaps have only 15 years left and that we should all be involved in co-designing a scheme, with tests and trials; requiring a needs-based mechanism for farm payments, a SMART-based approach; and that we need co-ordination of actions, working at scale and together, including statutory agencies and across the UK. I emphasised the critical importance that the Welsh and Scottish Governments be invited to become involved fully at the first moment that DEFRA or any UK agency is brought into developing a UK approach to safeguard Curlew.

The curlew's distinct and ethereal song is a familiar sound that is deeply ingrained within our culture. It is essential that through this Action Plan we act together now to stop these beautiful birds from wading into extinction over the next decade.



Context

Like much of the rest of the UK and Europe, Wales faces a climate emergency and nature crisis. The loss of biodiversity is far-reaching, complex and challenging, but it is considered by many that the loss of breeding curlew from Welsh landscapes will be a loss of biodiversity too far. Due to significant declines of Welsh breeding curlew this Wales Action Plan for the Recovery of Curlew was prepared by Gylfinir Cymru / Curlew Wales (a Welsh Curlew Partnership) at the recommendation of Welsh Government to deliver curlew recovery in Wales. The goals and objectives of this Action Plan can be achieved only if a long-term commitment is made to support the recommended actions. Alignment of these goals and objectives will require the continued cooperation of all four Governments in the UK. Within Wales, the shared resources and cooperative involvement of Welsh Government, Natural Resources Wales, National Park Authorities, industry, academia, environmental non-governmental organisations, farming unions and individuals will be required throughout the recovery period.

Introduction

In common with much of the UK and many other parts of Europe, in Wales breeding curlew, redshank, golden plover and lapwing are in significant decline both numerically and spatially, a result of a combination of three significant pressures: habitat loss, unfavourable habitat management and nest/chick predation. The curlew is in urgent need of coordinated UK and Wales conservation action. In the absence of contemporary survey data, estimates of the Welsh curlew breeding population range from 400 to no more than 1,700 breeding pairs and Welsh Breeding Bird Survey data indicate the breeding population of curlew is declining at a rate of ~ 6% per year. Breeding curlew is predicted to be on the brink of extinction as a viable breeding species in Wales by 2033. Due to the significance of this emergency, curlew is now considered to be the most pressing bird conservation priority in Wales.

This Action Plan sets out a short-term framework to conserve Welsh breeding curlew over a ten-year programme of action (2021 – 2031) with the aims to prevent predicted Welsh extinction by stabilising the decline in breeding curlew and laying the foundation

of a longer-term vision to restore a viable population. This Action Plan is designed to align actions for recovery with the AEWA International Species Action for Curlew and will be owned, annually reviewed and evaluated by Gylfinir Cymru with a mid-term appraisal in 2026 to measure progress.

Summary of work

To increase curlew breeding success and halt population decline over the next ten years this plan will seek to address four key themes:

- Identify a network of Important Curlew Areas (ICAs) in Wales to maximise opportunities and provide a focus for targeted conservation action.
- Reverse the current drivers of low productivity (predation and grassland management practices during the breeding season).
- Ensure a package of support is available to enable farmers and land managers to collaborate at the landscape scale to deliver the outcomes required by breeding curlew using the best available evidence.
- Support public awareness campaigns and education to influence consumers choices and demands for agricultural products that support breeding curlew friendly managed habitats.

By 2033 we will seek to have:

- A functional and highly effective Important Curlew Area Working Group, consisting of lead organisations and local curlew champions that are initiating and leading on curlew recovery across the network of ICAs in Wales.
- Secured substantial investment and began implementation of a programme of work to deliver the required measures to improve curlew breeding success to a mean > 0.6 chicks per breeding pair across the ICA network.
- Prevented the extinction of breeding curlew in Wales by halting the decline of breeding curlew across the ICA network and secured at least six stable breeding curlew populations.

- Established or strengthened local networks of farmers and communities in each ICA to facilitate collaborative working and involvement.
- Demonstrably minimised pressures and threats to curlew population resilience within the ICAs.
- Influenced policy development of a package of support to assist farmers and land managers to deliver for breeding curlew and wider environmental/societal benefits.

Next steps

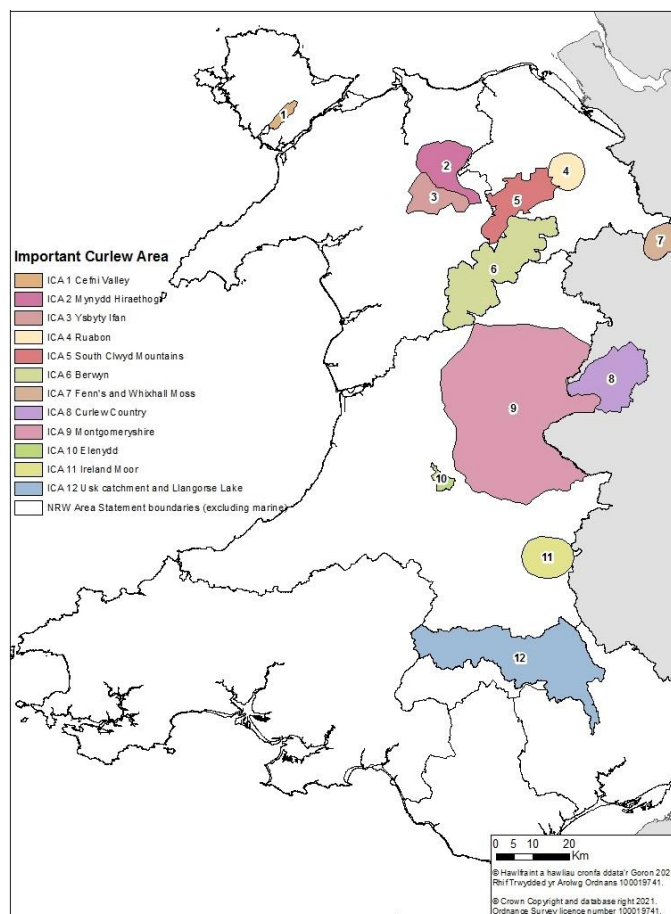
Significant investment is needed to support and deliver this Action Plan. Gylfinir Cymru are exploring options to secure funding for a Wales Curlew Recovery Manager. Gylfinir Cymru will draw up a fully costed programme of work once a Wales Curlew Recovery Manager is in place. To support requests for resources a paper outlining the multiple benefits of curlew recovery action will be produced and provided to key decision-makers in Welsh Government and Natural Resources Wales.

Given the urgency, actions in the Wales Action Plan for the recovery of Curlew are identified and prioritised, here some are associated with ongoing preparatory work to underpin implementation others will not start until funding is secured.

Where are the most Important Curlew Areas in Wales?

A large and coherent network of breeding curlew-friendly landscapes is required across Wales. To maximise opportunities of success for curlew recovery in Wales this plan will adopt a targeted and focused approach. Here, actions will be undertaken at 12 Important Curlew Areas (ICAs) that form a Welsh ICA network. These sites reflect our current understanding of breeding curlew populations, their range and structure in Wales. The ICAs have been selected by Gylfinir Cymru partners on the basis of local knowledge, contemporary surveys, population models and areas where motivated people and organisations are either already engaged in curlew conservation or available to undertake necessary action at the scale required to conserve breeding curlew. It is estimated the Wales ICA network may hold up to 65% of the remaining Welsh breeding curlew population.

Important Curlew Areas in Wales



We consider the Welsh ICA network to be important for maintaining both the geographic and ecological representation of breeding curlews coupled with the need to safeguard the integrity of curlew genetic variability. Although the identified Wales ICA network will form the focus of recovery efforts, any land with breeding curlew should remain to be eligible to receive land management payments to provide favourable habitat that meet this species ecological needs. If new evidence emerges that additional Important Curlew Areas are necessary for the long-term population viability of breeding curlew in Wales, the Wales ICA network will be revised by Gylfinir Cymru accordingly.

Objective 1. Establish and activate a recovery team to implement the recovery plan.

Result	Action and scope	Priority	Timescale	Responsibility
1.1 An ICA Working Group is operational and oversees curlew conservation delivery across the ICA network.	Identify and agree ICA lead organisations and local champions that will develop 12 ICA management plans and take responsibility for actions and delivery. Each ICA lead organisation will provide an annual report on progress to the ICA Working Group.	Critical	Short-term	Gylfinir Cymru
	Establish an ICA Working Group to advise, guide and provide knowledge transfer to aid curlew recovery across the network of ICAs in Wales.	Critical	Short-term	Gylfinir Cymru
	Establish a clear communication and governance pathway for the ICA Working Group to report progress to Gylfinir Cymru.	High	Short-term	Gylfinir Cymru

Objective 2. Develop the conservation toolkit and seek funding to initiate appropriate conservation action to stop the decline of curlew in Wales by increasing curlew breeding success to >0.6 chicks/pair/year.

Result	Action and scope	Priority	Timescale	Responsibility
2.1 Identify at least 12 Important Curlew Areas for conserving curlew in Wales	Undertake surveys to establish contemporary population status of breeding curlew (number of breeding pairs) using standardised methods. When identifying ICAs, evaluation will take account of population viability and criteria for success.	Critical	Short-term	Gylfinir Cymru
2.2 Recruit a Wales Curlew Programme Manager (for a minimum of three-years)	Develop the rationale and job specification for a Wales Curlew Programme Manager and apply for funding. This post will support the network of ICA lead organisations, local champions and communities, share knowledge between leads and champions and will be a figurehead and ambassador for Curlew conservation in Wales. [Dependent on secured funding]	Critical	Short-term	Gylfinir Cymru

2.3 Land management projects are identified, and funding secured	Identify a costed programme of intervention measures required to benefit curlew within the ICA network.	Critical	Short-term	ICA leads
	Submit funding applications to appropriate UK, WG and NRW funding packages.	Critical	Short-term	ICA leads
	Implement conservation intervention measures (habitat enhancement and predator control). [Dependent on secured funding]	High	Short-term	ICA leads

Objective 3: Build the evidence base by monitoring the number of breeding curlew (baseline) and population response (number of breeding pairs and breeding success) to habitat management measures and predator control.

Result	Action and scope	Priority	Timescale	Responsibility
3.1 Confirm Important Curlew Areas	Identify and confirm ICAs.	Medium	Short-term	Gylfinir Cymru
	Determine ICA level of productivity and population viability (see 1.1).	Critical	Short-term	Gylfinir Cymru
3.2 Monitor ICA in response to habitat and predator control interventions	Develop a standardised, comparable monitoring programme to provide necessary data and information concerning the current conservation status of curlew at each ICA.	Critical	Short-term	Gylfinir Cymru
	Consider the feasibility of a marking, re-sighting and monitoring programme in Wales to allow sustained resighting effort and to enhance knowledge on wintering areas.	Medium	Short-term	Gylfinir Cymru
	Develop a pressures and threats matrix for each ICA and regularly review management plans to ensure they include appropriate measures to conserve curlew populations and the ecological requirements they require. (AEWA: 1.3.1)	Critical	Short-term	Commission
3.3 Assess curlew translocation proposals	Assess any licences for ICA head starting proposal(s) – see Annex 1 - that require appropriate licensing as set out by NRW's translocation policy and IUCN guidelines.	Medium	Medium-term	NRW

Objective 4: Manage or eliminate significant pressures and threats to curlew population resilience within the ICAs.

Result	Action and scope	Priority	Timescale	Responsibility
4.1 Identify site designation opportunities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Advocate any ICA that qualifies as a site of international and national importance for breeding curlew are protected under the Conservation and Habitat and Species (Amendment) (EU Exit) Regulations 2019 and/or Wildlife & Countryside Act 1981, as appropriate. (AEWA: 1.1.1, 1.2.1) 	Medium	Medium-term	NRW
4.2 The impact of farming operations on breeding success is minimised	<p>Within the ICA network:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Raise awareness amongst farming communities of the importance of the area for breeding curlew, and highlight the critical role of farming in conserving the species. • Proactively work with farming communities to encourage uptake of beneficial management practices such as delayed mowing of grassland, appropriate grazing regimes, and minimising other detrimental field operations (e.g. rolling, spraying etc) and disturbance during the breeding season. (AEWA 2.1.1) 	<p>Critical</p> <p>Critical</p>	<p>Continuous</p> <p>Continuous</p>	<p>ICA Working Group</p> <p>Farming unions, champions, ICA Working Group and NRW</p>
4.3 Beneficial farming practices are supported and encouraged.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Investigate whether appropriate options and other conservation support schemes (e.g. s16 agreements) are (i) available and adequately funded to support farmers and other land managers in carrying out conservation management and (ii) targeted to where they will deliver the greatest benefit. (AEWA 2.1.2) • Ensure wider agricultural policy support mechanisms are available to maintain agricultural activity at important breeding sites at risk from land abandonment. (AEWA 2.1.3) 	<p>Critical</p> <p>High</p>	<p>Short-term</p> <p>Medium-term</p>	<p>ICA leads, champions, ICA WorkingGroup and NRW</p> <p>WG</p>

<p>4.4 Land management techniques that reduce levels of nest and chick predation within all ICAs</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Promote uptake of and where possible monitor the effectiveness of different land management techniques designed to reduce predation through non-lethal means (e.g. manipulation of landscapes features such as small woodlands, scrub, corvid perches, etc.). • Promote and undertake targeted and legal predator control as a conservation tool in tandem with habitat management, identify the funding and public policy* pathways. (AEWA 2.2.1) 	<p>Medium</p> <p>Critical</p>	<p>Long-term</p> <p>Short-term</p>	<p>ICA leads, champions and ICA Working Group</p> <p>ICA leads, champions and ICA Working Group</p>
<p>4.5 Protected Area Network</p>	<p>For ICAs within the existing protected sites network:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Respond to potential negative impacts from proposed developments of national significance. (AEWA: 1.4.1) 	<p>Critical</p>	<p>Continuous</p>	<p>NRW</p>
<p>4.6 Ensure adequate protection for curlew from development pressures (onshore renewable energy, woodland recreation)</p>	<p>Increase breeding curlew awareness amongst renewable energy developers, planning authorities and land management planners by producing:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A curlew Development Guidance Note to compliment Future Wales: The National Development Framework to aid decision-making on land management planning i.e. onshore wind developments and woodland creation. • Guidance Note on standardised survey methods. • Curlew training and guidance for ecological consultants. (AEWA 1.2.4) 	<p>Critical</p>	<p>Immediate / continuous</p>	<p>Commissioned work</p>

* Public policy making is characterised as a dynamic, complex and interactive process through which public problems are identified and re- solved by creating new public policy or by reforming existing public policy

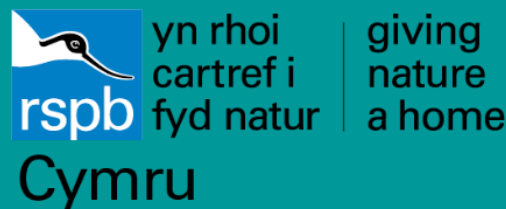
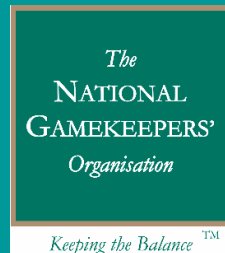
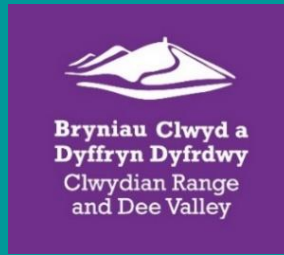
Objective 5. Co-design initiatives with the farming and game management and local communities/wider general public in parallel with developing citizen science initiatives to work together on delivery.

Result	Action and scope	Priority	Timescale	Responsibility
5.1 Promote curlew friendly management on farmed and game managed land	Support farm managers, owner/occupiers and game estates to promote positive management for all ICAs.	Critical	Short-term	Farming unions, ICA leads and champions (all three actions in 5.1)
	Engage landowners, farmers and game managers to gain cross-sector support for the objectives and provisions of this plan.	Critical	Short-term	
	Work with local farming communities to maintain or establish ICA management strategies for favourable curlew management.	Critical	Medium-term	
5.2 Communications, public awareness/education	Develop and implement a national communications plan to support conservation actions.	Medium	Short-term	Gylfinir Cymru
	Encourage and promote educational and public awareness programmes amongst communities (especially in schools close to ICAs).	Medium	Short-term	ICA leads and champions
	Ensure appropriate MSs and Welsh Government Senior Advisors are updated on the delivery of the SSAP for curlew in Wales.	Medium	Long-term	NRW and Gylfinir Cymru
	Develop broad partnerships with farmers, the wider food industry and local communities to work together to implement the relevant actions within this SSAP.	Critical	Short-term	ICA Working Group

Objective 6. Influence the policy development of a package of financial support to assist land managers to deliver for breeding curlew and wider environmental/societal benefits supporting the concept of 'public goods and public services.

Result	Action and scope	Priority	Timescale	Responsibility
6.1 The unfavourable conservation status of breeding curlew in Wales and the causes behind their decline are better understood by the public, stakeholders and decision-makers	Develop a national campaign to raise awareness about the conservation status of breeding curlew, the threats they face, and the conservation work being undertaken to conserve them.	Critical	Short-term	Gylfinir Cymru
	Commission a review that identifies the potential wider benefits to society and to the wider environment associated with the conservation of breeding curlew and their habitats.	Critical	Completed	NRW
	Inspire decision-makers by showcasing successful conservation projects and the actions required to achieve them e.g. successful deployment of AE schemes, nature compensation/mitigation in response to developments, the rewetting of peatlands for the multiple purposes of curlew conservation, carbon sequestration and flood alleviation.	High	Medium-term	Gylfinir Cymru and ICA Working Group
6.2 Policy and strategy development, such as the Sustainable Farming Scheme, Future Wales (the National Development Framework), NRW Area Statements etc ensure space to live, work and play, food production, and use of other natural resources is met sustainably, in a way that also allows curlews to flourish	Advocate that the Sustainable Farming Scheme and associated land management policies enable all farmers to deliver all the ecological needs of breeding curlews, at the required spatial scale and is based on robust evidence.	Critical	Medium-term	All

Organisations participating in the development of this plan



Cover photo: Eurasian curlew (Ian Francis, rspb-images)