

Curlew

Description

The curlew is a large wading bird, well known for its very long, curved bill. Its haunting two-note call and bubbling song was once a familiar sound of the open countryside. However, it has declined as a breeding species in Northern Ireland and elsewhere in northern Europe over the last twenty years. Outside the breeding season, birds arrive from the north and east to winter mainly around the coast. The curlew is one of Europe's largest wading birds (48-57cm). It is predominantly a brown, streaked bird with no outstanding plumage features. Its long legs and bill are very distinctive. There is no real difference between the 2 sexes, however females do have a longer bill.



The curlew conceals its nest on the ground amongst long grassy vegetation, where four eggs are laid. The chicks hatch after about 28 days and rapidly become mobile, fledging in about 36 days. Not long after fledging, adults and young birds form flocks and move to coastal localities.

Distribution

In Northern Ireland, the breeding strongholds for this bird are around the wet grasslands in Lough Erne and in Glenwherry in the Antrim hills. In autumn, curlews move across to Ireland from northern Britain, and are joined by additional birds from further afield. A recent breeding wader survey across NI in 2013 estimated that curlew has declined by 82% since 1987 and is red listed on the Birds of Conservation Concern in Ireland.

Action

Some sites have been designated as ASSI's and positive management of these sites can be achieved with the management of special sites scheme. Lower Lough Erne area, protected by RSPB, is an important site for the curlew.

The RSPB are managing over 40 islands Lower Lough Erne for a variety of wildlife, the largest of these are managed for breeding waders. The RSPB has three Conservation Advisors working with over 400 farmers across wet grassland/upland sites with the aim of reversing these devastating declines.

Further Information

<http://www.habitas.org.uk/priority/species.asp?item=32>

MLA Species Champion