



The Conservation of Breeding Curlew in Ireland

Geographical Location	IE 042 West & IE 041 Border Region
Keywords	Breeding Curlew, Predator Control, Electric Fencing, Results-based, Turf Cutting, Bogs, Marginal Farmland
Project Leader	Dr Anita Donaghy, Birdwatch Ireland (email: adonaghy@birdwatchireland.ie)
Project Type	Operational Group
Starting Date	2018
End Date	2021
Project Status	Ongoing
Main Funding Source	Rural Development Programme (RDP) 2014-2020
Total Budget	€1,100,000



Project Rationale

In Ireland, the Curlew has been identified as a conservation priority in the Government’s Prioritised Action Framework (PAF) and is Red Listed in the Birds of Conservation Concern. The National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS) commissioned a National Breeding Curlew survey in 2015. This study was completed in 2017 and found an estimated >90% population Curlew decline since the 1970s. Habitat loss and degradation is likely to be a key factor in these declines; however, in addition, as with other studies across the breeding range, very low levels of productivity as a result of predation were recorded, with many pairs failing at the nest stage and very few young fledged. It is likely that without significant intervention, Irish breeding Curlew may become extinct in the wider countryside within the next 10 years. Conservation action to prevent this is therefore urgently required.

Project Aims & Objectives

The project aims to prevent further losses to the Irish Curlew population through the protection and enhancement of known Curlew breeding sites in Ireland, and also to educate and compensate farmers and rural dwellers for creating and managing Curlew habitats.

To achieve these goals, the project will pursue the following objectives in two focus areas, Lough Corrib in County Galway and the south Leitrim bogs:

- (i) Trial innovative methods which have so far not been tested in Ireland, on both farmland and bog habitats, to reduce predation and protect and enhance suitable habitat, both at the site and landscape level &
- (ii) Establish baselines and targets for breeding success, habitat condition, landowner participation, predator densities and capital works.

Project Activities

- Determine Curlew Breeding outcomes by assessing the behaviour of adults and monitoring for the presence of juveniles and fledged young.
- Trial the use of temporary electric fences (TEFs) at nest sites in an Irish context.
- Train farmers/landowners to undertake direct predator control.
- Direct control of generalist predators (foxes, corvids and mink) at known nest sites.
- Enhance habitats through capital works.
- Trial a hybrid agri-environmental scheme combining a results-based approach with some prescriptive elements specifically for Curlew.
- Monitor the extent to which peat extraction is causing disturbance to nesting habitat by mapping the extent and timing of active turf cutting.

