



Shropshire Ornithological Society

# Save our Curlews Campaign & Appeal

[www.shropshirebirds.com/save-our-curlews/](http://www.shropshirebirds.com/save-our-curlews/)



## Shropshire Hills AONB Conservation Fund Project Report and Final Claim 2021

### Introduction

The project operated in 2021 in three Community Wildlife group areas, Upper Clun, Clee Hill, and the Strettons area. Work in the first two areas was part-funded by a Conservation Fund Grant of £2,000 awarded in 2020, but carried forward to 2021 because the work was postponed as a result of Covid-19. A separate grant of £1,000 was awarded for work in the Strettons area in 2021. Therefore, one project report has been submitted, with an In-kind Record Sheet, but the two grants are accounted for separately, with separate Claim Forms.

### Project Results

These are set out in the attached Project Work Summary, which has been widely distributed. The financial support from the AONB Conservation Fund has been gratefully acknowledged.

The lessons learnt include

- i. the electric fences work (no nest was wholly predated)
- ii. the curlew population in Clee Hill increased in 2021 (presumably due to chicks that fledged from fenced nests in 2018 and 2019 returning to the area to breed)
- iii. chick survival is insufficient to stem the decline of Curlew, due to predation. High predation levels are attributed to the annual release of millions of pheasants for shooting, only a third of which are actually shot, resulting in an over-abundant food supply which maintains the numbers of the Curlew's main predators well above naturally sustainable levels. SOS is calling for the number of pheasants released annually to be reduced to the number currently shot, within five years.
- iv. If the current rate of decline continues, the County Curlew population (and that in the AONB) will halve in 12 years, and virtually disappear in 25.

These lessons have been widely disseminated, and incorporated into the project plan for 2022, as appropriate.

### AONB Conservation Priorities

Curlew is a Shropshire BAP species, and the AONB is the County population stronghold. The special qualities of the AONB states "The area holds some national rarities and is very significant in a regional and county context for upland plants and animals such as . . . Curlew". This statement won't be true for much longer if the current rate of decline continues. The Save our Curlews project is for the long term, and aims to stop and then reverse the decline.

In the case of Curlew, habitat restoration and improvement must be accompanied by measures to stop nests and chicks being lost to agricultural activities, and predation. This includes working with farmers to join up and improve habitats at the landscape scale, specifically in the case of this project through the Land, Life and Livelihoods Clun Forest Farmers Facilitation Fund project, the Clee Hill Commoners Association, and the Stepping Stones project.

The project operates in four of the five Shropshire Biodiversity Action Plan 'Priority Areas for Action' in the AONB..

## Participants

The Community Wildlife Group Bird Surveys locate the Curlew territories, an essential first step for the nest finders. The contribution of participants in 2021 was:-

CWG Area	Number of people	Total Hours
Upper Clun	10	90
Clee Hill	25	205
Strettons area	51	477
<b>Total</b>	<b>86</b>	<b>772</b>

Note that UCCWG operates in a different way from the other two groups. Several local residents submit records of all Curlews that they see or hear from home. No-one undertakes tetrad surveys any more., The hours spent is an estimate, whereas the surveyors in the other areas record the actual time spent on each survey

The awareness of participants has been raised on many levels, not least about Curlews and their place in our heritage and landscape.

## Outputs

The Grant Offer letters specified the following outputs

- Finding curlew nests, erecting and maintaining electric fences around each
- Radio tagging the chicks to track and monitor

The number of each output achieved, in each area, is set out in the attached Project Work Summary. The outputs actually achieved exceeded the initial targets.

## Special Conditions

Apart from the requirement to publicise the funding contribution made by the AONB, referred to above, there were no special conditions in the 2020 Grant Offer letter, but a request to publicise the Farming in Protected Landscapes programme in the Strettons area in 2021. While some publicity was given to the programme, particularly by the Stepping Stones project, our intention to hold a feedback meeting for farmers who had helped this project, over the late autumn / winter period, was abandoned due to a resurgence of the covid-19 infection rate. The Save our Curlews project is continuing in all three areas in 2022, and further publicity will be given to the programme in 2022.

## Photos

A photos supplement is attached. Jpegs, and further photos, can be supplied if required. There were no events or written publicity.

## Volunteer Time (In Kind Record Sheet)

As well as the time of the participants who undertook the CWG Bird Surveys, itemised above, this includes the time to organise the surveys, analyse the results and compile the CWG Annual Reports, and the time to organise the SOS Campaign and administer the Appeal. The latter has been apportioned equally across the three project areas.

## Conclusion

The projects exceeded their targets, and the AONB funding enabled it to proceed in full. The expenditure on both projects was higher than the initial budget set out in the initial applications, and in the Grant Offer letters, so both grants are claimed in full.

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