

FRIENDS OF THE SCOTSMAN /

# Curlews need our help if they're going to fly into future

The curlew is a magnificent bird. Few species herald the arrival of spring on Scotland's marginal upland and hill-edge farmland in quite the same way, with their unique bubbling call announcing their presence. No wonder they have a day in April dedicated to them each year. But curlew are in dire straits. They have declined across Scotland by 61 per cent (from 1995 to 2016), twice the rate of decline as that happening in England, which is very worrying as Scotland holds around 60 per cent of the UK population or approximately a whopping 15 per cent of the world population of this globally declining species. Something needs to be done to help them.

A major driver of decline is loss of quality habitat, related to agricultural intensification, but there is also evidence for increasing predation of nests and chicks. These factors probably interact with higher predation rates in sub-optimal habitats. Urgent action is required to understand how to improve curlew habitats and breeding success and then to apply remedial measures across large areas of the countryside.

There are still significant gaps in our knowledge about the needs of curlew. It is crucial we find out how to manage important habitats in Scotland over large areas, and how we might improve productivity to the point where sufficient chicks survive to maintain populations.

The Game & Wildlife Conservation



One of Scotland's most iconic birds is declining in numbers and Dr Dave Parish aims to find out why

Trust is hoping to tackle these issues from its demonstration farm, Auchnerran, on Deeside, where there is still a reasonable population of breeding curlew, and intends to study the productivity and movements of curlew there, and on other farms in the area, principally by tagging adult birds so we can follow exactly where they go in considerable detail.

This work began in 2018 on a small scale and is already yielding fascinating results, but we now need to scale it up to follow more birds from different sites. Unfortunately, Covid-19 has forced us to pause this work as fundraising has become almost impossible.

Early results from Auchnerran have highlighted the short distances our two tagged birds to date have travelled when away from the nest. This is encouraging as it suggests they don't have to go far to find suitable foraging habitat; this is advantageous because it wastes less time and means they are close enough to the nest to help deter roaming predators when the need arises.

If funding is available, future research will investigate how far

curlew are prepared to travel if the required habitats are not nearby and how this affects breeding productivity. This would be invaluable in helping land managers distribute key habitats across the landscape.

The factor which is increasingly found to be limiting productivity, or the number of chicks produced by a breeding pair, is predation. Most of this seems to be due to foxes and various species of crow. At Auchnerran, we want to learn more about how important predation is and which predators are most significant at different times and places.

In future, we therefore hope to deploy trail cameras at as many nests as we can find, both on the farm and at nearby sites too.

This will allow the accurate determination of the ultimate fate of eggs laid and, crucially, reveal which predators are raiding nests. Chicks leave the nest very soon after hatching, so we also hope to radio-tag some to look at where they go and whether predators have an important impact on them too.

Understanding the nature of predation also facilitates discussion



↑ Curlew chicks are at risk from predators – one reason numbers in Scotland have declined by almost two thirds in the last couple of decades

regarding the appropriate balance of productive farming, habitat management for environmental benefits and predator control.

The output from this research continues to influence our practical advice both to farmers and to stakeholders with regard to

agri-environment scheme design.

If you would like more information on this project, or of other work taking place at Auchnerran, please

get in touch [dparish@gwct.org.uk](mailto:dparish@gwct.org.uk)  
Dr Dave Parish, Head of Scottish Lowland Research, Game & Wildlife Conservation Trust



Let's make sure we can still see the wood and the trees

Forestry has a big part to play as we find new normal says Stuart Goodall

The coronavirus has been, and still is, truly awful in its impact on people and on society as a whole. While we're far from being free from its dreadful grip, we do have to begin to prepare for what comes next, including rebuilding an economy that metaphorically fell off a cliff. In doing so, we should grasp the opportunity to do things differently, and safely.

The forestry and wood processing industry is one of few sectors that has partially continued to operate during lockdown. It supplies the wood products needed to keep the country running; pallets and packaging to move food, medicines and medical supplies; woodfuel to heat buildings, including care homes and hos-

pitals. Agricultural fencing has also been vital to ensure livestock safety and support food production.

We're now beginning to see the first signs of renewed activity in sectors like house-building and construction in England, markets that use a lot of wood, and which could use more.

As we contemplate how to restart the economy, we have an opportunity to introduce change, to beef up efforts to tackle those intractable issues like the challenge of climate change which hasn't gone away, even if we are giving the planet pause to breathe a little more easily during this time of limited travel and manufacturing.

Governments across the UK are talking about a "Green Recovery" where economic activity can go

hand-in-hand with positive environmental benefit.

Forestry and wood is well placed to contribute to this green recovery, particularly in rural Scotland. It is one of very few sectors where greater economic activity delivers greater environmental benefit – less carbon in the atmosphere, more places for wildlife, flood alleviation and much more. Put simply, the usual trade-offs don't apply.

The Committee on Climate Change (CCC), official advisers to the Scottish and UK governments, identified this in letters to both governments two weeks ago. Last week, Lord Deben, CCC Chair, told an online meeting of the All-Party Parliamentary Group on Forestry and Tree Planting that

both tree planting and wood use were vital to secure a resilient recovery.

Friends of the Earth also want more tree planting and greater use of home-grown wood to reduce the UK's reliance on imported timber.

Both organisations recognise that greater tree planting and more use of wood will help tackle climate change, and that we now have a unique opportunity to make faster progress towards targets for net zero emissions.

However, achieving that step change is reliant on government action and support, and a renewed partnership with industry.

Before the crisis hit, there had been positive news as all parts of the UK pushed up planting ambitions,

although only Scotland was hitting its target. Over the last months, forest nurseries growing young trees for our future forests have been hit by the lock-down, and we've been working with both them and the Scottish Government to protect supplies for future years and plan for the future investment required to expand production.

Small businesses that harvest trees would also benefit from meaningful support – bringing in new trainees is particularly challenging for this part of the sector and many sole traders and partnerships would benefit from business advice.

The Scottish Government has been quick to begin to plan for recovery, and we can expect assistance

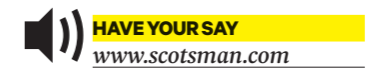
will become available. It is vital this includes support to develop Scotland's green industries.

Of course, it is also crucial that greater activity is also safe activity. Luckily, we are a largely outdoor industry, with people used to operating alone or at a distance from others. This is why forestry operations have been included in Phase 1 of the Scottish Government's route map through and out of the crisis

Confor has been helping develop safe working protocols for all parts of the industry to address the practicalities of re-starting or scaling-up operations. Our sector takes its responsibilities very seriously and is committed to returning to work safely; adapting to a "new normal".

In the coming weeks and months, we have the opportunity to harness UK and Scottish government support for recovery and challenge them to deliver on the rhetoric, to truly take a step-change towards a greener future – with forestry and wood playing its part.

Stuart Goodall is Chief Executive of Confor: promoting forestry and wood



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