

CURLEW *NUMENIUS ARQUATA* SPECIES ACTION PLAN

1. INTRODUCTION

The curlew has been selected for local action due to the importance of the breeding populations found in Caerphilly county borough.

Relevant Legislation/Species Status	
priority species (P) or species of conservation concern (S)	S
EC Birds Directive 1979	Annex I I / 2
Berne Convention 1982	App. I I
Bonn Convention 1979	App. I
CITES 1975	Annex A
WCA 1981	Part I Section 1
Birds of Conservation Concern List ³⁰	Amber
Other Species Status	RDB Birds: RDB1a / RDB1b



© CCBC 2002

2. CURRENT STATUS

2.1 UK and Wales

The curlew is a bird of open moorland, farmland and coasts. It breeds mainly in upland areas in Britain, up to 550 metres and occasionally as high as 760 metres above sea level. Outside the breeding season, the species move to coastal areas. Curlew feed on earthworms and other invertebrates, which they find by probing the ground with their long, curved bills and by picking from the surface. Breeding pairs require damp grassland or tilled land with soft earth for feeding, but also some taller vegetation such as heather, tussocks of grass or rushes for nesting. They are therefore associated with mixed farmland, where suitable feeding, nesting and chick-rearing habitat can be found in close proximity. Birds start returning to their nest sites from February when their bubbling display calls are a feature of many parts of the area. The species generally prefers extensive unimproved habitats to improved pastures for rearing young. They become secretive during incubation but conspicuous again when luring potential predators away from their chicks.

The curlew has declined in most European countries mainly due to habitat changes linked to agricultural intensification. Long-term breeding trends are uncertain, but across the UK trends have shown a decline (Breeding Bird Survey 1994-1999). Between 1968-72 breeding birds were recorded in 1,714 ten-kilometre squares, compared with 1,354 squares in 1988-91. The most recent population estimates are 33,000-38,000 pairs in Britain²² which, when combined with Ireland's figure of 12,000 represents at least 35% of the European breeding population. The current Welsh breeding population is difficult to gauge with accuracy; 2,000 pairs are estimated². Rhos pasture and coedcae/ffridd land on the upland margins are an important habitat in Wales. The decline in mixed farming in Wales, particularly in the wetter western and upland areas, is probably a contributory factor in the decrease of numbers here.

2.2 Caerphilly County Borough

The Glamorgan bird surveys of the 1980s found the breeding stronghold of the curlew in Glamorgan was the area around Gelligaer Common, where almost 50% of the confirmed and probable breeding records occurred. The Caerphilly county borough breeding population continues eastwards from Gelligaer, with scattered pairs being found along Mynydd Bedwellte

and Cefn Manmoel ridges. The most southerly breeding pairs are found in the Mynyddislwyn area. The total breeding population in the county borough is probably about 30-50 pairs, based on the assumption that occupied tetrads hold only one or two pairs (see **Map 2.3**).

2.3 Links with Habitats

- **Species-rich Grasslands** (rhos pasture)
- *Commons*
- *Coedcae/ffridd*
- *Heathland* (upland heath)

3. CURRENT FACTORS AFFECTING THE SPECIES

- Loss and fragmentation of breeding sites; agricultural improvement of grasslands with the switch from late hay to multiple silage cuts in the late 1970s to early 1980s brought about principally by re-seeding, increased fertiliser applications and drainage has led to the loss and fragmentation of breeding sites.
- Inappropriate management; over-grazing, or lack of management leading to scrub and bracken encroachment on moorland habitats.
- Recreational pressures on breeding grounds may be a factor in disturbing these birds.
- Nest predation is possibly a contributory factor affecting the species, mainly as loss of eggs to other birds, such as crows. Foxes, which are often at much higher population levels in some areas through the decline in game keeping, will also predate curlew nests.

4. CURRENT ACTION

- 4.1 Tir Gofal, run by CCW, aims to restore areas of heathland and wet grassland for the benefit of their associated wildlife.
- 4.2 Although the species is not monitored systematically, the Gwent Ornithological Society and Glamorgan Bird Club gather information from its members on the distribution of curlew and other birds, and both bodies publish annual bird reports^{17, 18, 19}.
- 4.3 BTO Breeding Bird Survey contributes to the monitoring of breeding curlew populations throughout the UK⁶.

5. OBJECTIVES AND TARGETS

5.1 UK Objectives and Targets

Not applicable to this species.

5.2 Caerphilly Objectives and Targets

- 5.2.1 Gain a full understanding of the current population of the curlew in the county borough by carrying out a county wide survey on existing and historical breeding sites (Target: 2005).

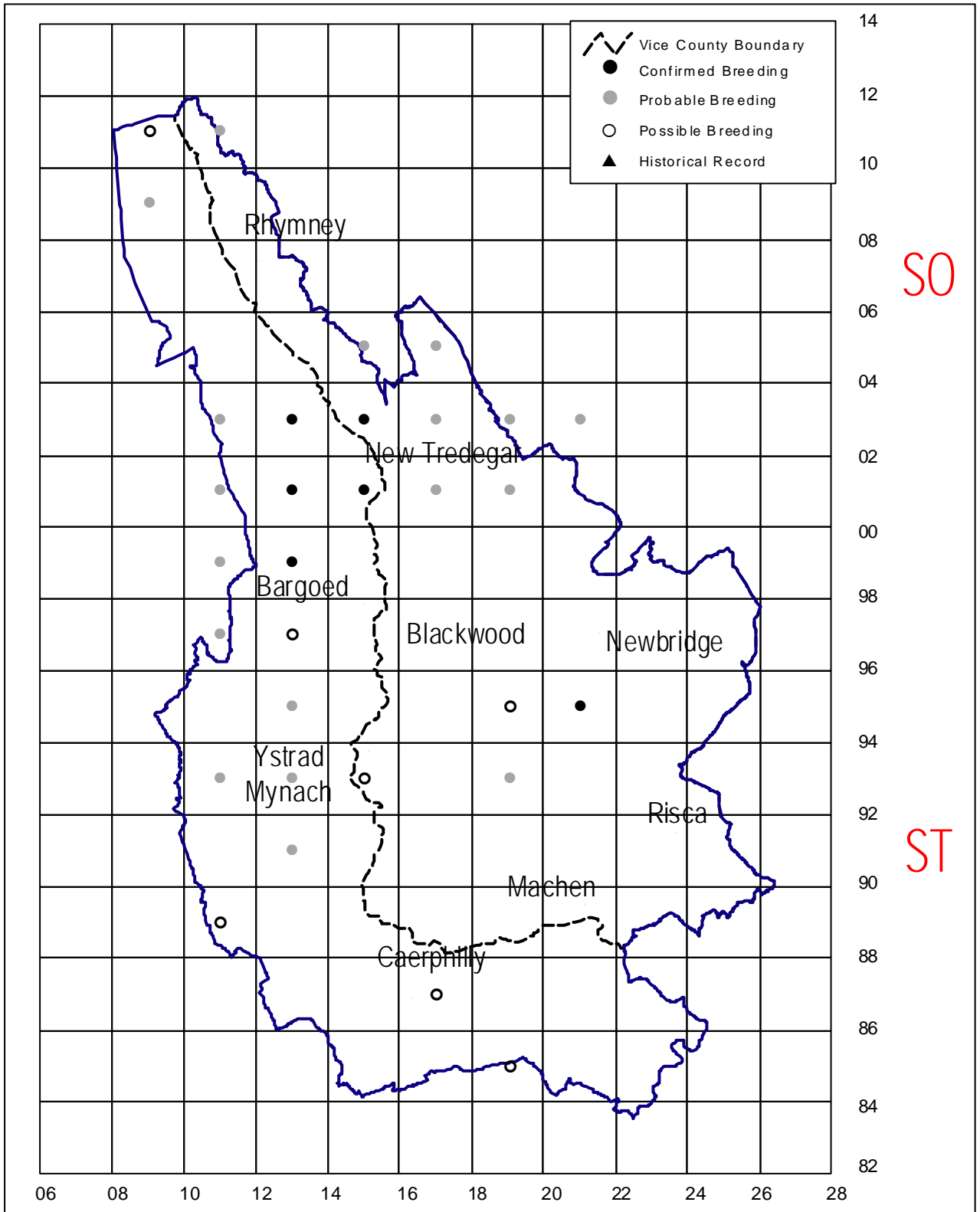
- 5.2.2 Ensure no further loss, degradation or fragmentation of breeding sites by identifying and bringing suitable habitat into appropriate management (Target: 2010 and ongoing).
- 5.2.3 Maintain the current distribution and abundance of the curlew (Target: ongoing).
- 5.2.4 Increase the number of breeding pairs by 20% from current levels (as identified in 5.2.1) (Target: 2010).

6. ACTION AND KEY PARTNERS

Action	Key Partners		Year to be complete or in place by								
	Lead	Partners	2003	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
6.1 Policy and Legislation											
No action proposed.	-	-									
6.2 Site Safeguard and Management											
6.2.1 Ensure the requirements of the curlew are taken into account when reviewing agri-environment schemes.	CCW	-	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
6.2.2 Encourage suitable habitat restoration to link and extend existing sites where opportunities arise.	CCBC	CCW								✓	
6.2.3 Ensure development schemes do not compromise the integrity of breeding sites.	CCBC	CCW	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
6.3 Species Management and Protection											
6.3.1 Ensure breeding sites are protected from disturbance and deterioration of habitat quality.	CCBC	CCW landowners									✓
6.3.2 Continue to implement wildlife legislation.	Gwent Police	-	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
6.4 Advisory											
6.4.1 Ensure planning officers are aware of the curlew's distribution and requirements within their area.	CCBC	CCW	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
6.5 Future Research and Monitoring											
6.5.1 Undertake a breeding birds survey to identify present distribution.	GBC GOS	RSPB BTO	✘								
6.5.2 Collate all the known information on historical and present curlew breeding sites in Caerphilly county borough, to help target survey, monitoring and management work.	GBC GOS	CCBC RSPB			✓	✓					
6.6 Communications and Publicity											
6.6.1 Improve coordination and information sharing between all groups and individuals with knowledge of curlews and their distribution.	CBP	RSPB	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
6.6.2 Publicise the decline in breeding numbers and encourage landowners and managers to manage habitats sympathetically.	CBP	-	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

✘ Survey year to be determined.

MAP 2.3 – CURLEW



Reproduced from the Ordnance Survey mapping with the permission of the Controller of Her Majesty's Stationery Office Crown copyright. Unauthorised reproduction infringes Crown copyright and may lead to prosecution or civil proceedings. Caerphilly County Borough Council, LA09004L, 2001.

Atgynhychwyd o fapiad yr Arolwg Ordnans gyda chaniatad rheolwr Llyfifa ei Mawhydi hawffraint y Goron. Mae atgynhychu heb awdurdod yn torri hawffraint y Goron. Gall hyn arwain at erlyniad neu achos sifil. Cyngor Bwrdeistref Sirol Caerffili, LA09004L, 2001.