

National Parks & Wildlife Service Curlew Conservation Programme
Curlew Conservation Partnership



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The Eurasian Curlew is protected under Irish and EU law. It is Ireland's only Red Listed bird species on the IUCN list of threatened species. A national survey commissioned by NPWS in 2015 and 2016 found drastic declines of the national breeding population of Curlews. Whereas 5000 pairs are estimated to have bred in the late 1980s, there now remains no more than 150 pairs. This represents a 97% decline. Breeding productivity is so low that population viability analysis predicts that in the absence of any action, the Curlew will go extinct as a breeding species in Ireland within 5-10 years.

A Curlew Task Force has been established with all major stakeholders represented, with a view to progressing action for Curlew conservation.

One of the key constraints for breeding Curlew is the difficulties they are experiencing in hatching eggs and rearing young. Predation, especially by Fox, is believed to be a main cause of breeding failure. Another constraint is habitat quality. With the cooperation of landowners (via this scheme), the Curlew Conservation Project will find Curlew nests and target effective action by means of nest protection, predator control and small-scale habitat enhancement through capital works.

The scheme, which operates under the auspices of the NPWS Farm Plan Scheme, is carefully designed to avoid any potential of double-funding, for example by GLAS. The input of any farmers on this scheme is entirely separate and there are no "per hectare" payments or actions similar to those available under other agri-environmental schemes. Participants of GLAS cannot get paid under the Curlew Conservation Partnership for works that they are already being paid to deliver under their GLAS plans.

Landowners with Curlew on their land are paid for transaction costs (at the standard agricultural rate of €12.40/h) and their time involved in the undertaking actions, as advised, supervised, sanctioned and certified by the Curlew Advisory Officer operating in their region. Labour can include capital works such as scrub clearance, rush cutting, drain blocking/unblocking, scrape creation, etc. Only labour not associated with or being paid by other schemes (including agri-environmental plans or Rural Social Scheme) shall be paid for. Work needs to be agreed and sanctioned in advance by the Curlew Advisory Officer and NPWS Agri-Ecology Unit and will be limited by the budget available for such efforts on a regional basis. In cases where contractors are required to undertake capital works, a decision will be made as to whether to pay the contractor directly from project funds or to issue payment through the landowner.

Liaison shall entail discussing actions, providing support in actions (including access to lands, transport where required, assistance in delivering actions, etc.).

As a novel technique, with a view to ensuring maximum effort and results, and also with a view to trialling for wider roll-out under RDP-AECM schemes, given the landowner is paid according to his/her time effort in cooperating with the scheme, the longer the breeding effort lasts through the season, the greater the payment can be.



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