Scottish Forestry
Coilltearachd na h-Alba

Woodland Creation and Curlew

Background

The British Trust for Ornithology (BTO) identifies Eurasian Curlew (*Numenius arquata*) as one of our most rapidly declining breeding bird species, showing a 48% decline across the UK from 1995-2016 with this figure exceeding 50% in Scotland.[1] "Changes in land-use, agricultural practices and nest predation are considered the most significant causes responsible for the decline of Curlew in the EU. Such habitat loss and modification has suppressed breeding success and thereby led to population decline. Human disturbance on breeding and wintering areas is believed to be of secondary importance."[2]

The UK Forestry Standard (UKFS) acknowledges that forestry has the potential to affect both the immediate woodland site and the ecology of the wider environment, so minimising the risk and impact of forestry activities is vital.[3]

Scottish Forestry recognises the importance of protecting breeding sites of Curlew where they are important to maintain the viability of local or regional populations, so recommends the following approach when planning woodland creation proposals, to avoid or reduce the potential effect of any damage or disturbance on the conservation status of this species.

Species information

Curlew spend much of the year on coasts or estuaries but migrate inland between 1st April and 31st July to breed. They are widely distributed across Scotland though the greatest breeding densities are to be found in the Southern Uplands, Eastern Highlands, Caithness and the Northern Isles.[4] Curlew can be found on a range of habitats though favour moorland, extensively managed rough grasslands and bogs; they exhibit a high degree of breeding site fidelity, rarely nesting more than 250m from previous nesting attempts. "Regionally numbers have shown significant declines in most areas with the exception of northern Scotland and the southern uplands."[5]

Due diligence

The best way to avoid significant impacts from woodland creation is through good forest design and forward planning, which is then carried through to establishment and management. Woodland creation proposals should be designed to protect and enhance important nesting sites through appropriate mitigation.

If Curlew currently use the location for breeding, you will need to gather sufficient information to demonstrate that the woodland creation proposal will not have a significant negative impact on the regional breeding population. This information along with evidence of stakeholder engagement and where appropriate any proposed mitigation should be included in your woodland creation application.

---

[1] BBS Report 2017
[2] EU Management Plan for Eurasian Curlew (Numenius arquata) 2007-2009
[3] UKFS Requirements for Forestry and Biodiversity - Good forestry practice requirement 3
[4] https://www.bto.org/volunteer-surveys/bbs/latest-results/maps-population-density-and-trends
[5] NatureScot Trends of Breeding Farmland Birds in Scotland October 2013

Identify and protect important breeding sites – breeding densities can vary between different habitats, as can the numbers of breeding pairs required to identify a sites significance in a geographical context, consequently in some situations it may not be appropriate to plant. For example, where proposals would displace 7 or more breeding pairs from important breeding habitat and where there is a lack of suitable alternative habitat nearby, thereby adversely affecting the viability of the local population. In regions that have had recent significant declines in Curlew densities, this requirement may be reduced to cover proposals that displace 5 or more pairs.

Desk assessment – NBN Atlas Scotland and local environmental records centres should be investigated for occurrence records. Additional information could also be obtained through an RSPB data request or by discussing proposals with local land managers such as farmers and gamekeepers or local ornithology groups.

Early engagement – with Scottish Forestry is strongly advised to determine what level of additional information is required to allow appropriate mitigation to be adequately planned for and included in the woodland creation proposal. Additional engagement with RSPB may also be necessary.

Ground truthing – if the initial assessment has identified the presence of Curlew, the level of further investigation will largely depend on the quality of existing information, potential suitability of the habitat and the size and type of woodland planned. Where further surveys are requested they will be proportionate to the risk or potential impact caused by not having that evidence available.

> ***Walkover survey –*** on smaller schemes a walkover survey during the breeding season by a qualified ornithologist or a competent field ecologist may be acceptable to identify whether breeding Curlew are present.
>
> ***Breeding Bird Survey*** – on larger schemes a breeding bird survey will be required, especially where local evidence indicates Curlew are present. It is essential this is undertaken by a suitably qualified or experienced person, using a recognised survey methodology. In addition to identifying numbers of breeding pairs, a survey report should evaluate the potential impact of the woodland creation proposal on Curlew and suggest specific management actions, where appropriate, which would reduce the overall impact to a level necessary to ensure the continued viability of local populations.

Mitigation – each site will be different therefore appropriate mitigation will depend on a site's individual characteristics underlining the importance of early engagement and obtaining specialist advice.

Opportunities for mitigation may involve including buffer areas in the woodland design, increased predator control, habitat restoration or ongoing habitat management in adjacent open ground. In certain situations it may be more effective to implement a combination of these techniques.

It is also important to undertake an overall assessment of the biodiversity benefits that the woodland creation proposal will provide and include this in your application, as this will need to be considered alongside the potential impact on Curlew.

Decision Process

Scottish Forestry would expect any woodland creation application for consent to have followed the approach set out in this information sheet and will provide feedback on the acceptability of any proposed design as the proposal is being developed.

When considering whether or not to approve a planting proposal Scottish Forestry will carefully consider the potential impact on curlew populations together with the effectiveness of any proposed mitigation and other environmental benefits before reaching a decision.

Where there is an unmitigated impact on a significant local breeding population or area of breeding habitat, it is unlikely that Scottish Forestry would approve a planting proposal.

References and further sources of information

SRDP FAS - Technical Note TN688 SEP 2017 • ELEC *Management and Conservation for Farmland Waders.*

Guidance Note 31: *Forest operations and wildlife protection: Forest operations and wildlife in Scottish forests - the law and good practice*.

EU Management Plan for Eurasian Curlew (Numenius arquata) 2007-2009.

RSPB: *Land Management for Wildlife – Curlew (Numenius arquata).*

Brown, D.J. 2015 *International Single Species Action Plan for the Conservation of the Eurasian Curlew* Numenius arquata arquata, N. a. orientalis and N. a. suschkini. AEWA Technical Series No. 58. Bonn, Germany.

Leyrer, J., Brown, D., Gerritsen, G., Hötker, H. and Ottvall, R. (compilers). (2018) *International Multi-species Action Plan for the Conservation of Breeding Waders in Wet Grassland Habitats in Europe (2018-2028). Report of Action A13 under the framework of Project LIFE EuroSAP (LIFE14 PRE/UK/002). NABU, RSPB, VBN and SOF*.

BTO - https://app.bto.org/birdfacts/results/bob5410.htm

Local Environmental Records Centres - http://www.alerc.org.uk/

NBN Atlas Scotland - https://scotland.nbnatlas.org/

RSPB - https://www.rspb.org.uk/birds-and-wildlife/wildlife-guides/bird-a-z/curlew/

Working for Waders - https://www.workingforwaders.com/