

A6.73b Curlew *Numenius arquata* (non-breeding)

1. Status in UK

See section A6.73a.

2. Population data

	Population sizes (individuals)	Selection thresholds	Totals in species' SPA suite
GB	115,000	1,200	46,008 (38% of GB total)
Ireland	87,500	875	4,198 (5% of all- Ireland total)
Biogeographic population	348,000	3,500	50,206 (14% of biogeographic population)

GB population source: Cayford & Waters 1996

All-Ireland population source: Cranswick et al. 1999

Biogeographic population source: Rose & Scott 1997

3. Distribution

Section A6.73a outlines the global distribution and taxonomy of Curlew.

The non-breeding range of the Curlew covers most of the Atlantic and Mediterranean coasts of Europe and Africa, as well as the coasts of Arabia, the Indian Ocean, and south-east Asia. In mild, temperate climates (such as parts of Britain and Ireland) Curlews winter at inland wetlands (Smit & Piersma 1989; Cramp & Simmons 1983; Lack 1986).

Within Europe, major concentrations occur on the southern coasts of the North Sea, including the international Wadden Sea (Smit & Wolff 1981; Meltofte *et al.* 1994). These birds breed in northern Scandinavia and western Russia. Numbers and distribution in the Wadden Sea, as elsewhere in Europe, are strongly affected by the severity of winter weather. In periods of prolonged cold, Curlews move further south and west.

Curlews wintering in Britain also originate from Scandinavia, especially Finland and Sweden (Bainbridge & Minton 1978). Curlews are found around most of the coastline of Britain and Ireland in winter (Lack 1986). They also frequent extensive areas of wet grasslands such as valley floodplains (Sheppard 1993).

4. Population structure and trends

The biogeographical population for Curlew in the UK is the European population (amounting to the whole of the nominate sub-species). This is currently estimated at 348,000 individuals (Rose & Scott 1997). Approximately 30% of this population overwinters in the UK, an estimated two-thirds of which are found at estuarine sites, with the remainder on non-estuarine coasts and adjacent farmland (Cayford & Waters 1996).

Although Curlew was classified as being in moderate decline by Tucker & Heath (1994), who reported that 40% of the European breeding population had declined between 1970–1990, subsequent estimates have indicated a more favourable status. Recent international collation of data (Davidson 1998) indicates an increase of 22% in the international population since the late 1980s.

This trend is reflected within Great Britain, where numbers overwintering on estuaries increased by 54% between 1981–1985 and 1987–1992 (Cayford & Waters 1996). There has also been a continuing upward trend in UK annual population indices (Cranswick *et al.* 1999), a trend closely mirrored in Ireland (Colhoun 2000).

5. Protection measures for population in UK

SPA suite

In the non-breeding season, the UK's SPA suite for Curlew supports, on average, 50,206 individuals (calculated using WeBS February site totals for the period 1992/93 to 1996/97 – see section 4.4.1 and Appendix 2 for further explanation). This total amounts to about 38% of the British population, about 5% of the all-Ireland population, and about 14% of the international flyway population. The suite comprises 25 sites at which Curlew has been listed as a qualifying species (Table 6.73b.1).

Other measures

The UK has contributed to the development of a European Union Management Action Plan for Curlew as part of the Ornithological Committee's initiative to develop such plans for a number of Annex II species with unfavourable conservation status. Although these action plans are advisory rather than legally binding, the UK will be seeking to implement the recommended actions of the plan as specified for the period 1999–2002. As one example of the implementation of recommended actions, JNCC and other organisations are currently developing an Integrated Monitoring Programme related to UK waterbird monitoring. As indicated by the Curlew Action Plan (Operational Objectives 2.4.1 & 2.4.2), this aims to develop a better understanding of the factors influencing Curlew population dynamics through integrating results from separate programmes which currently collect data and information on parameters such as population sizes, distribution, productivity, mortality and dispersal.

6. Classification criteria

All five sites in the UK that were known to support more than 1% of the international population of Curlew were considered under Stage 1.2, and all were selected after consideration of Stage 2 judgements (Morecambe Bay; the Severn Estuary; The Dee Estuary; The Wash; and the Upper Solway Flats and Marshes). A further 20 sites were considered and selected under Stage 1.3 (see section 5.3), with Curlew identified as an important component of non-breeding waterbird assemblages at these localities.

The sites within the suite are distributed throughout the range of the population in the UK, from sites in Northern Ireland and Wales, to the Dornoch Firth in northern Scotland, to sites along the south coast of England. All sites are multi-species SPAs, of importance also for a range of other waterbirds. There is a long recorded history of occupancy at most of these sites (Prater 1981).

As the selection of sites under Stages 1.2 and 1.3 resulted in a suite which gives adequate coverage of the population and range of non-breeding Curlew in the UK, it was not considered necessary to select additional sites using Stage 1.4.

Distribution map for non-breeding Curlew SPA suite

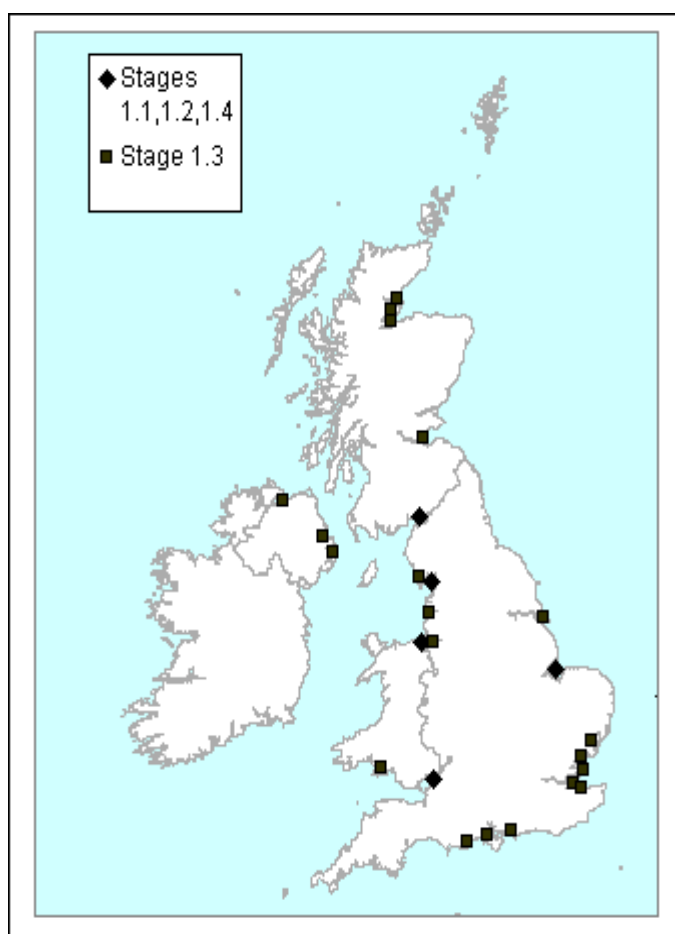


Table 6.73b.1 – SPA suite

Site name	Site total	% of biogeographical population	% of national population	Selection stage
Belfast Lough	1,031	0.3	1.2 (Ire)	1.3
Blackwater Estuary	2,682	0.8	2.3	1.3
Burry Inlet	1,234	0.4	1.1	1.3
Chichester and Langstone Harbours	1,861	0.5	1.6	1.3
Cromarty Firth	1,475	0.4	1.3	1.3
Dornoch Firth and Loch Fleet	1,366	0.4	1.2	1.3
Duddon Estuary	2,192	0.6	1.9	1.3
Firth of Forth	2,188	0.6	1.9	1.3
Foulness	2,127	0.6	1.9	1.3
Humber Flats, Marshes and Coast	2,423	0.7	2.1	1.3
Inner Moray Firth	1,337	0.4	1.2	1.3
Lough Foyle	2,038	0.6	2.3 (Ire)	1.3
Medway Estuary and Marshes	1,900	0.6	1.7	1.3

Site name	Site total	% of biogeographical population	% of national population	Selection stage
Mersey Estuary	1,156	0.3	1.0	1.3
Morecambe Bay	13,620	3.9	11.8	1.2
Poole Harbour	1,726	0.5	1.5	1.3
Ribble and Alt Estuaries	1,798	0.5	1.6	1.3
Severn Estuary	3,903	1.1	3.4	1.2
Solent and Southampton Water	1,877	0.5	1.6	1.3
Stour and Orwell Estuaries	2,153	0.6	1.9	1.3
Strangford Lough	1,911	0.6	2.2 (Ire)	1.3
The Dee Estuary	4,028	1.2	3.5	1.2
The Swale	1,622	0.5	1.4	1.3
The Wash	3,835	1.1	3.3	1.2
Upper Solway Flats and Marshes	5,881	1.7	5.1	1.2

TOTALS	50,206 (in February)	14.3%	38.3% 4.8% (Ire)
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