

**COUNTRYSIDE ALLIANCE BRIEFING NOTE**

**CURLEW**

**Westminster Hall Debate**

**“Lowland curlew” (Rt Hon Richard Benyon MP, Con, Newbury)**

**Tuesday 17 October, 11.00-11.30am**

**Overview**

* The UK is the most important country in the world for curlews [according to the RSPB](https://ww2.rspb.org.uk/our-work/conservation/projects/curlew-recovery-programme).
* The curlew is one of our most rapidly declining wading birds. The [Game and Wildlife Conservation Trust has estimated](https://www.gwct.org.uk/action-for-curlew/) that their numbers have declined by 46% across the UK from 1994 to 2010. The curlew was added to the UK red list in December 2015, and the RSPB argue it is the bird of greatest conservation concern in the UK.
* Modernisation of agriculture, particularly increased management of pastures and wetlands, is likely to have had a large impact. However, in addition to habitat pressures, it is well documented that increased predation is a serious threat to curlew breeding success.
* The lawful control of predators makes a significant contribution to the conservation of many vulnerable species, particularly ground-nesting birds. Left uncontrolled, predators can damage biodiversity, and also have a serious economic effect. Evidence has shown that lawful predator control has helped increase curlew numbers.
* There is abundant evidence that where land is managed for the benefit of game, other species, including the curlew, naturally flourish and many shoots undertake conservation work for its own sake.
* An [RSPB study](https://www.rspb.org.uk/Images/Predator%20Report_tcm9-177905.pdf) of curlew breeding success in Northern Ireland found that 82–95% of breeding attempts failed at the nesting stage, with predation accounting for about 90% of nest failures. Foxes appeared to be the most important nest predators at one study area (Antrim), with hooded crows and lesser black-backed gulls most important at another where foxes were largely absent (Lough Erne Islands).
* Although not in lowland areas, [peer reviewed scientific research by the Game and Wildlife Conservation Trust](https://www.gwct.org.uk/policy/position-statements/predation-control-and-conservation/) has shown that on moors managed for grouse shooting, ground nesting birds such as curlew and lapwing, which are amongst our species of the highest conservation concern, are 3.5 times more likely to successfully raise chicks.
* Welsh moors were once the most successful grouse moors in the UK supporting an abundance of other wild birds. Since management for grouse shooting ceased, they went into serious decline. Studies on a former grouse moor in [Berwyn](https://www.gwct.org.uk/research/scientific-publications/2014/warren2014/) show what can happen in just 20 years with lapwing becoming extinct, golden plover declining by 90%, and curlew declining by 79%. All three species are now listed as being of conservation concern, with both curlew and lapwing red-listed by the British Trust for Ornithology.

**The value of shooting**

* An [independent PACEC survey](http://www.shootingfacts.co.uk/pdf/The-Value-of-Shooting-2014.pdf) on the value of the shooting in the UK reported the following information:
* **Shooting is worth £2 billion to the UK economy (GVA).**
* **Shooting supports the equivalent of 74,000 full-time jobs.**
* **Shooting is involved in the management of two-thirds of the rural land area.**
* **Nearly two million hectares are actively managed for conservation as a result of shooting.**
* **Shoot providers spend nearly £250 million a year on conservation.**
* **At least 600,000 people in the UK shoot live quarry, clay pigeons or targets.**
* **Shooters spend 3.9 million work days on conservation – the equivalent of 16,000 full-time jobs.**

**Suggested interventions**

* The success of curlews on land managed for shooting highlights the conservation benefits of game shooting and the improvement in biodiversity which management for shooting brings.
* There is excellent work being done in lowland areas to help curlew populations, but it is also important to recognise the work being done in upland areas, particularly on grouse moors, where scientific research has shown that curlews are thriving.
* When management for grouse shooting ceased in Berwyn, in north east Wales, scientific research showed that the curlew population decreased by 79%.
* The success of curlews on land managed for shooting highlights the importance of maintaining lawful predator controls, including the use of restraining snares, as part of effective wildlife management.
* New agri-environment schemes, to replace existing EU schemes, must incentivise the conservation work of farmers and land managers, and the curlew should be included in the Government’s 25 year environment plan due to be published later this year.

**For more information please contact:**

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