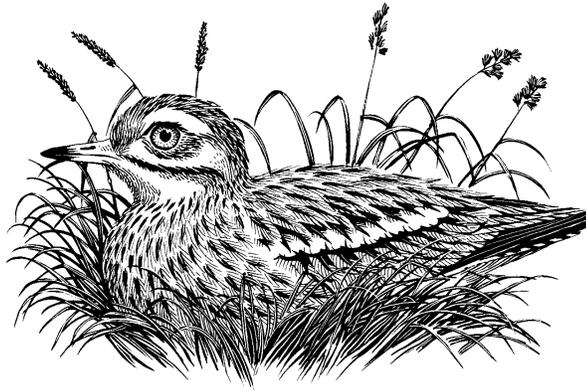


Stone Curlew (*Burhinus oediconemus*)

1 Definition

The Stone Curlew is a migratory bird of dry, stony, open ground such as heathland and acid grassland. It is now largely confined to East Anglia, in particular the Breckland, where in recent years the species has adapted to breeding on open arable land. It is largely crepuscular or nocturnal and nests in scrapes on patches of bare earth.



2 Current status

2.1 National status

Rare and localised in the UK, Stone Curlew numbers have fallen by some 85% since the 1940s and the species is now largely confined to Wessex and the Breckland. The Stone Curlew is a UK Red list species, having declined by over 50% in the last 25 years, as well as being a rare breeder and a species with an unfavourable conservation status in Europe (SPEC 3).

2.2 Local status

Norfolk and Suffolk together held 183 pairs in 2000 (72% of UK breeding Stone Curlews). In Suffolk, these are largely confined to the Breckland although a small population also exists on the Suffolk coast.

2.3 Natural Areas

Breckland, Suffolk Coast and Heaths

3 Current factors affecting Stone Curlew in Suffolk

- Loss of semi-natural grasslands. The conversion to arable farmland or forestry of suitable short-grazed, sparsely vegetated grasslands, particularly chalk and heath grasslands, is thought to be the main reason for the decline in breeding Stone Curlews in England.
- Reduced grazing by Rabbits and livestock. The reduction or loss of grazing pressure by both Rabbits and livestock has resulted in areas becoming unsuitable for breeding stone curlews due to the growth of tall grass and scrub.

- Changes in farming systems. Breeding can occur on arable land, mostly spring-sown field crops since these retain their open structure (and therefore suitability as a breeding habitat) until June or July. The reduction in spring-sown crops and the general trend of agricultural intensification has led to a reduction in availability and suitability of this habitat. This is a less serious problem in Breckland than elsewhere in the UK.
- Agricultural operations such as mechanical hoeing can destroy eggs and young where nesting occurs on agricultural land.
- Fox, Crow and possibly stoat predation, particularly on grasslands.
- Disturbance prevents the species using some areas that are otherwise suitable.
- Egg collecting.
- Impact of noise or lights from roads.

4 Current action

4.1 Legal status

Stone Curlew is protected under Schedule 1 of Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981, Annex 1 of 1979 EC Birds Directive and Appendix II of the Bern Convention.

4.2 Management, research and guidance

- Most semi natural heathlands supporting Stone Curlew are SSSIs and are positively managed. EN also manage heathland nature reserves in the Brecks.
- Brecks ESA is encouraging grazing of heathlands for Stone Curlew and contains prescriptions for arable reversion. Take-up of reversion is currently poor.
- Countryside Stewardship OS3 (over-wintered stubble followed by spring fallow) option introduced by Defra to existing Countryside Stewardship scheme.
- Breckland Heathland Heritage five year project commenced 2001. Recreating 300ha of heath from forestry and carrying out management work on further 6000ha of Breck heath in both Norfolk and Suffolk.
- Breckland Farmland SSSI has been notified. Wildlife Enhancement (WES) Scheme for Stone Curlew plots is being taken up by farmers.
- The RSPB/EN Stone Curlew Recovery Project has been operating in Breckland since the mid-1980s. The project locates and monitors breeding birds and where necessary liaises with farmers and landowners to protect nests from destruction by agricultural operations. The project has allowed the population to expand gradually in recent years. RSPB also appoints a part-time Stone Curlew fieldworker in east Suffolk
- Awareness raising/advisory work by RSPB.
- Management plans have been prepared for many Breckland heaths.
- Set-aside has been beneficial for Stone Curlews. Guidance is available from Defra to create bare ground for breeding Stone Curlews.
- Liaison with Forest Enterprise by RSPB, EN, SWT to re-establish new areas of heath from forest clearance.
- LIFE funding was received from 1994 - 1996 by the Brecks Wildlife Partnership to part finance Stone Curlew protection.
- Elvedon Farms Monitoring – Elvedon Estate landowners are monitoring and ringing Stone Curlew.

5 Action plan objectives and targets

- 1. Maintain the breeding population in Breckland (Norfolk as well as Suffolk) at no fewer than 172 pairs.*
- 2. Increase the breeding population (east Anglia-wide) to at least 225 pairs by 2005.*
- 3. Maintain a minimum of 3 breeding pairs in the Sandlings with a target of 7 breeding pairs by 2010.*
- 4. Encourage Stone Curlews to return to semi-natural grasslands and grass heaths where their future would be more sustainable and less costly. Target is to achieve 55 breeding pairs on Brecks heath in 2010 (in Suffolk).*
- 5. Maintain a minimum productivity of 0.70 fledged chick per pair by intervention on arable and reserve management where appropriate.*

6 Stone Curlew: Proposed local action with lead agencies

Action	Date	Partners
POLICY AND LEGISLATION		
Ensure that Higher Tier agri-environment scheme to be rolled out in 2005 contains prescriptions meeting Stone Curlew requirements and promotes grazing of heathland and habitat to reverse fragmentation.	2004	EN, SWT, RSPB,
SITE SAFEGUARD AND MANAGEMENT		
Seek to ensure that sites designated for their Stone Curlew interest are safeguarded from development.	2004 2005 2006 2007	EN
Ensure that all sites designated for their Stone Curlew interest are maintained in favourable conservation status for the species.	2004 2005 2006 2007	EN, RSPB, SWT
Seek to increase the range of Stone Curlew in east Suffolk through appropriate management of Sandlings heath.	2004 2005 2006 2007	Sandlings Group
SPECIES MANAGEMENT AND PPROTECTION		
Continue the current Stone Curlew protection work in the Brecks and on the Suffolk Coast.	2004 2005 2006 2007	RSPB, EN
Continue to promote the management of set aside for Stone Curlews.	2004 2005 2006 2007	RSPB, , FWAG
Promote English Nature Wildlife Enhancement Scheme in the Breckland.	2004 2005 2006 2007	EN, RSPB,
Promote Countryside Stewardship OS3 (over-wintered stubble/spring fallow) and its equivalent in the Higher Tier Scheme in areas where it may be used by Stone Curlew.	2005 2006 2007	Defra, RSPB

Determine through remote monitoring, the causes of predation of Stone Curlew nests and implement necessary control measures where feasible.	2004 2005 2006 2007	RSPB, EN
Discourage egg collecting and seek to ensure offenders are prosecuted.	2004 2005 2006 2007	SOG, EN, RSPB
RESEARCH AND MONITORING		
Monitor Stone Curlew breeding population in Suffolk to assess whether the action plan is attaining its objectives.	2004 2005 2006 2007	RSPB, EN
Monitor the condition of SSSI heaths for Stone Curlew with particular attention to sward height and grazing levels and adjust management as necessary.	2004 2005 2006 2007	EN, RSPB
Analyse crop mapping survey to determine recovery potential for the Stone Curlew in east Suffolk.	2004	RSPB, EN
Investigate mechanisms determining the avoidance of major roads by Stone Curlew and make recommendations for the mitigation of these affects.	2004 2005 2006 2007	RSPB
ADVISORY		
Provide further training in Stone Curlew conservation for agri-environment scheme project officers and FWAG staff.	2004 2006	RSPB, EN
Advise major landowners, farmers and Defra staff on land management for Stone Curlew.	2004 2005 2006 2007	RSBP, EN, FWAG
COMMUNICATIONS AND PUBLICITY		
Highlight the decline and importance of the species and minimise the disturbance elsewhere by articles in popular nature magazines, press and at bird reserves.	2004 2005 2006 2007	EN, RSPB, Sandlings Group, Brecks Heathland Heritage Project
Encourage visitors wishing to see the Stone Curlew to go to Weeting Heath in the Norfolk Brecks where viewing facilities are provided.	2004 2005 2006 2007	RSPB, EN, SWT