

WELCOME

Welcome to the first newsletter of the Upper Thames Curlew Recovery project. In this issue, we will introduce the project and share the highlights of our 2023 season.

THANK YOU

We'd like to thank the farmers who have allowed us to survey their land and fence nests this year.

Curlews under pressure

Each spring, about a hundred Curlews seek out their traditional meadowland territories in the Upper Thames and prepare for the huge challenges they face in raising enough young each year to sustain their population. These majestic birds are declining because they face many threats including changes to their favoured hay meadows, high levels of predation, spring flooding, and increasing development and disturbance.

James Taylor, North Aston Farms thinks there is hope: *"If farmers can link up – we've got neighbours also doing great things – together we can create a much bigger area, which is what Curlews really need."*

Meadows can provide abundant food for adults and chicks.

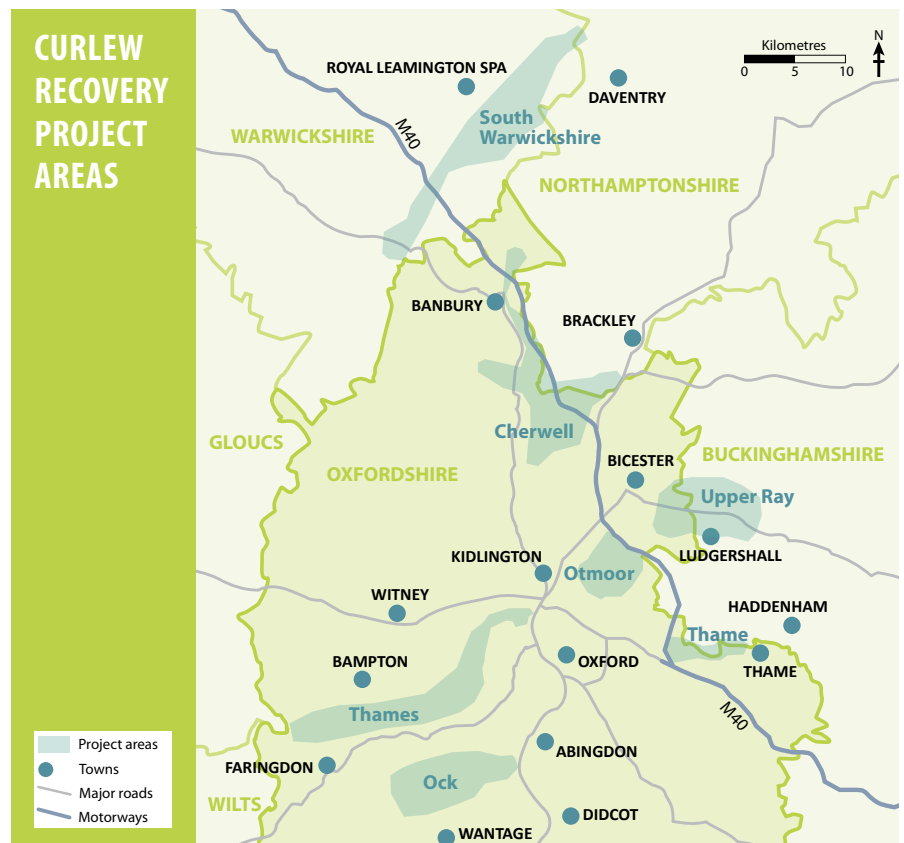


What we do

The Upper Thames Wader Group is a partnership of organisations working with farmers and volunteers to promote the recovery of Curlews and other wading birds.

Research has shown that predation by foxes and badgers is a major cause of Curlew nest failure. Our current activity focuses on finding as many nests as we can and protecting them using temporary electric fencing.







This level of intervention is a 'sticking plaster' in the toolkit of Curlew conservation. What they need in the longer term are extensive mosaics of nature-rich grassland habitats, alongside a reduction in the impacts of predation.



CURLEW RIVER – OUR NEW PROJECT VIDEO

Watch our fabulous project video, available on YouTube, featuring some amazing aerial footage of Curlew strongholds at Otmoor and Chimney Meadows, interviews with farmers and volunteers and, of course, plenty of Curlews! A big thank you to everyone who contributed to this. Please share with your friends, family, and contacts.

 **YouTube** <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=e6nL4Zl2cac>

Year	Number of nests fenced each year	Minimum number of chicks fledged each year
2021		
2022		
2023		

Breeding Season Results

In 2023, we located **61 pairs of Curlews in the Upper Thames** and a further **four pairs in neighbouring south Warwickshire**. We fenced **24 nests**, 21 of which hatched at least one chick – an **87.5% success rate!** Of those lost, two were predated and one was affected by flooding. Many chicks were lost before reaching the flying stage, but we know that at least 15 chicks fledged (13 of these from fenced nests) including seven at Otmoor. Two chicks fledged on a farm in the Cherwell Valley and a further three at Chimney Meadows.

Focus on ... Fledging!

Curlew chicks are very precocious, with strong legs and good eyesight, enabling them to feed themselves soon after hatching. If food is plentiful, they grow quickly but it still takes them about **SIX WEEKS** to be able to fly confidently. This year a pair we closely monitored hatched their chicks on 26th May and two that fledged were first seen flying on 4th July – 41 days after hatching. The male Curlew continued to keep a close eye on the adolescent young for at least two weeks after they could fly, aggressively chasing away Red Kites, Buzzards, and people!

Twenty-one nests hatched at least one chick – including this fabulous brood of four very young chicks.



Curlews can be a bit unpredictable in where they choose to nest each year, so it is important to be flexible with things like grass cutting and livestock numbers.



Farming and Curlews: TOP TIPS

Flexibility in farming is really important for Curlews. Each year, they make decisions on where to nest and where to take their chicks; sometimes this is predictable but often as not there is a surprise! Examples of farming adjustments that can really help include: delaying a grass cut for a week to enable chicks to feed up before they move to another field; or keeping grazing light during the breeding season to retain vital cover that hides chicks from predators and ensures plenty of insect food for them.

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