

## WELCOME

Welcome to the second newsletter of the Upper Thames Curlew Recovery project.

In this issue, we will share highlights from our 2024 season.

## THANK YOU

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

## Curlew Solutions Trial

This year, we took part in the 'Curlew Solutions Trial'. This national research project is led by the Curlew Recovery Partnership and covers five areas of the country: Yorkshire Dales, Shropshire Hills, Breckland, Severn and Avon Vales, and Upper Thames. Through consultation with stakeholders, workshops and novel research, this initiative compares the effectiveness of Curlew conservation methods in grasslands. We carried out fieldwork to monitor breeding activity in more detail, including using nest cameras and temperature sensors, and recording interactions with avian predators. The results will be used by policymakers to inform future agri-environment schemes.

Badger with Curlew egg, Upper Thames.  
Photo: Curlew Solutions Trial.



## Breeding season results

In 2024 we located 66 pairs of Curlews in the Upper Thames and a further five pairs in neighbouring south Warwickshire. We fenced 27 nests, 15 of which hatched at least one chick – a 56% success rate – much lower than the previous two years. We know that at least 10 chicks fledged, of which, four were from fenced nests. This is the first time since we started fencing in 2021 when nest fencing has not been successful in achieving increased fledging success. 2024 was a very wet season and several of our traditional sites were disrupted by spring flooding, leading to nest abandonment in at least two cases. The welcome increase in the number of pairs observed in recent years is largely due to increases at Otmoor, including several pairs nesting on restored wet grassland habitat on the RSPB reserve.

Year	No. of pairs observed	No. of nests fenced each year	Minimum no. of chicks fledged each year
2021	54	11	14
2022	60	21	8
2023	65	24	14
2024	71	27	10

### CURLEW RIVER – OUR PROJECT VIDEO

Our fabulous project video was screened at the Oxford Shorts film festival in August and received an Honourable Mention certificate! And over 13,000 views on YouTube!

 YouTube

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=e6nL4ZI2cac>





13ROR nesting, Upper Thames, May 2024.  
Photo: Curlew Solutions Trial.

## Curlews on camera

This year, for the first time, we set trail cameras on the fenced nests along the Thames. These were part of the kit we received to help us study nests for the Curlew Solutions Trial project. The cameras provided us with a lot more insight into the Curlews' lives and concrete evidence into the outcome of the nests.

Previously, if a nest was found empty, we wouldn't have known for sure what had happened to it. But, thanks to the nest cameras, we know that this year we had one nest predated by a fox and one by a badger. This information will help us improve our nest fencing methods for next year.

The nest camera pictures were also useful in capturing images of birds with colour rings. This colour-ringed female nesting on the Thames was identified by the BTO as '13ROR' – one they had ringed on the Severn estuary in 2013. It hadn't been seen inland before, but it is a regular winter visitor on the Severn estuary, returning there in late June or early July. This adds to our small body of evidence indicating where our Upper Thames birds spend the winter.

## Muck heap helps feed Curlew chicks

A pair of Curlews returned early (11 Feb) to last year's successful site in the Cherwell Valley. The nest was found and fenced, and chicks hatched. The family stayed in the eight-hectare field for four weeks, then were seen walking four chicks to the adjacent field to feed around a muck heap. They returned to their nest field after feeding morning and night, so the farmers, John, Dianne and Mike Pearson, kindly delayed mowing this field. Another male Curlew had been nearby and helped all season with chasing off predators and watching over the chicks. Other Curlews came through in early July, but these were chased off by the male. These included a male colour-ringed in April 2023 in Shropshire near the Welsh border, which had started a breeding attempt there this spring.

Happily, three chicks fledged and used fields either side of the Oxford Canal before they departed.



Top: A wonderful view of two fledged chicks on the farm track. Photo Di Pearson.  
Bottom: Young Curlew bathing in Oxford Canal. Photo Mark Hunter.

### 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.



A big thank you to The Trust for Oxfordshire's Environment for generously funding new Curlew nest protection kit for the Banbury Ornithological Society.

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