

WELCOME

Welcome to the fourth newsletter of the Upper Thames Curlew Recovery project. In this issue, we will share highlights from our 2026 season.

THANK YOU

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

Curlew success on the Thames

The Thames, between Lechlade and Oxford, has seen a good year for Curlew. The team found and fenced 9 nests, a new record. We were aware of another 9 nests, which we didn't manage to fence, making a total of 18 pairs – about average. All our fenced nests survived to hatching.

The important point is the number of chicks that survived to fledging. Our previous record was 8 in 2022, with typical annual totals varying between 4 and 7. Unbelievably, this year, we recorded a total of 18 fledged Curlew chicks!

Credit to the wonderful volunteers who give up their time to find and fence nests, and to the landowners who manage the land sensitively and allow us access.

Juvenile Curlew flying.
Photo: Mark Hunter.



Breeding season results

This summer, we had record numbers of Curlew in the Upper Thames and South Warwickshire. Our dedicated volunteers located 72 pairs and fenced 37 nests, 9 more than last year. Of the fenced nests, 86% hatched at least one chick, a much higher success rate than previous years. Indeed, this has been our most successful year so far, with 24 chicks confirmed to have fledged – double the number in 2024.

There are many factors that affect chick survival including the weather, predator numbers and the abundance of alternative prey, land management such as hay cutting and grazing, availability of chick food (insects), and disturbance. It is difficult to pin down exactly which of these most influenced this year's numbers.



Adult Curlew, Numenius arquata, with chick.
Photo: Mark Hunter

Year	No. of pairs observed	No. of nests fenced	Minimum no. of fledged chicks
2021	54	11	14
2022	60	21	6
2023	65	24	14
2024	71	27	12
2025	67	28	15
2026	72	37	24



Curlew Crowdfunder



Thank you!

to everyone who donated, and to the Trust for Oxfordshire's Environment who helped put the fundraiser together and acquire match funding to increase the impact of donations.

Our Crowdfunder last autumn was a huge success raising over £50k to support the Upper Thames Wader Group to continue the delivery of our fantastic work. The funds have already helped the group to continue and expand our work to protect curlew nests, provide advice and support to landowners, collaborate with other projects on the importance of Curlews, and purchase essential fencing equipment. We were overwhelmed by the response and were able to invite some of our donors into the field to see the project in action.

Curlew near a fenced nest.
Photo: Mark Hunter.

The Goldilocks effect

Grassland is a vital habitat for Curlew chicks. Long grass is especially important when they are under five weeks old and do not fly as it provides cover from predators. Conversely, short grass can provide important feeding habitat, but can leave chicks exposed.

Challenges come at hay-cutting time when long grass is removed, leaving chicks vulnerable to predation. To overcome this, we have been working with farmers around Banbury to delay hay cuts near Curlew chicks until the birds can fly. This provides enough long grass for chicks to hide in while also creating good feeding conditions. We are happy to report sightings of fledged chicks on the farms we have been working with.

Farmers find Curlews

Building relationships with local farmers helps our efforts to identify, fence and monitor Curlew nests. This year, reports from farmers helped us fence a nest on nearby land and find an additional two pairs. Unfortunately, one of these nests was lost before we had located it. Thanks to help from the farmers, one chick was reared to fledging.



Curlew chick.
Photo: Mark Hunter.

WILD OXFORDSHIRE'S AGROECOLOGICAL LEAD

Project Officer, Sophie Cunningham-Shone, will be stepping down as Project Officer this autumn to take on a new venture.

Wild Oxfordshire has taken this as an opportunity to develop a new role, an **Agroecology Lead**, who will be responsible for leading the Upper Thames Wader Group, as well as farmer-led projects. This new role will create opportunities to expand the impact of our Curlew recovery work and engage with more farmers to support them in providing the best conditions for Curlew and other waders.

Wild Oxfordshire is in the process of recruiting Sophie's successor. In the meantime, if you have any queries, please contact Camilla Burrow, Chief Executive, Wild Oxfordshire:

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