

# Curlew

*Numenius arquata*

Category A

Winter visitor and passage migrant.

*World/British distribution (Snow & Perrins 1998):*

Breeds across middle and upper latitudes in Europe eastwards through western Siberia and north-central Asia beyond Lake Baikal to the Amur River. Some birds are resident in the west of its range, but most are migratory. It winters widely across Europe and south into Africa, Arabia and southern Asia.

*Kent status (KOS 2021):*

In Kent it is a common winter visitor and passage migrant, whilst non-breeding birds may over-summer. It is uncommon in land.



Curlew at the Willop Basin (Brian Harper)

As a consequence of its “near threatened” conservation status globally and of both the rapid decline and the significance of the UK breeding population (estimated at 19–27% of the global population) the Curlew was described by Brown *et al.* (2015) as “the UK’s highest conservation-priority bird”. The rate of the population decrease has been alarming, with declines of 32% across England and 55% across Scotland between 1995 and 2013, 81% across Wales between 1993 and 2006, and 82% across Northern Ireland and 99% across the Republic of Ireland between 1985 and 2013. The main driver of decline is thought to be low breeding productivity which has typically been attributed to predation of eggs and chicks, mostly by foxes and crows.

In the UK, the expansion of commercial conifer forests since the mid-twentieth century also has led to substantial loss and fragmentation of moorland breeding areas. Moreover, there is growing evidence that forests have “edge” effects well beyond their boundaries by supporting populations of generalist predators such as foxes and crows. As a result, greater predation pressure in the remaining open landscape may lead to lower densities and nesting success, and more negative population trends of ground-nesting birds, including the Curlew. In southern Finland, for example, nest predation was found to be much higher in a fragmented landscape consisting of woodland and farmland, compared with an area of continuous farmland.

The Curlew was included in Knight and Tolpuitt’s “List of birds observed in Folkestone and its immediate neighbourhood” (1871). This list covered an area of six miles radius from Folkestone town hall, therefore extending further inland than the current Folkestone and Hythe area, so this does not provide conclusive evidence of its occurrence here, however it would have been very likely to have been recorded at the coast and so within the modern boundary.



Curlew at Nickolls Quarry (Brian Harper)



Curlew at Nickolls Quarry (Brian Harper)

## Overall distribution

Figure 1 shows the distribution of all records of Curlew by tetrad, with records in 18 tetrads (58%).

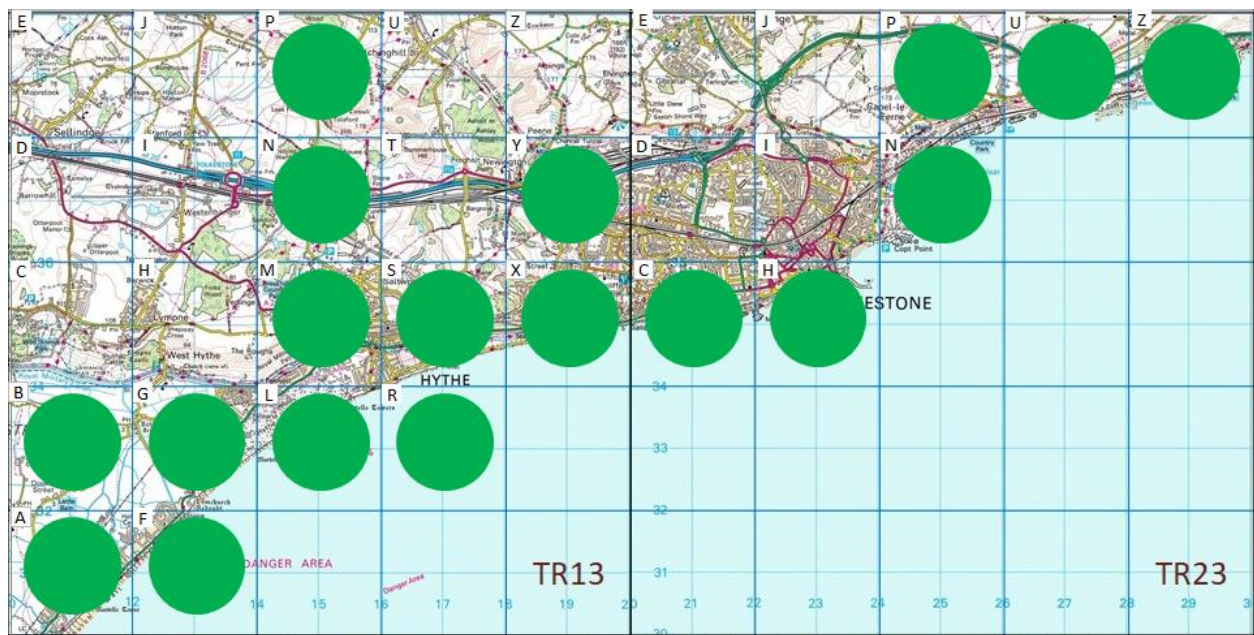


Figure 1: Distribution of all Curlew records at Folkestone and Hythe by tetrad

Taylor *et al.* (1981) stated that numbers are always at their lowest in the county in May, but some non-breeding birds over-summer, so there can be local sightings in any month. Autumn passage starts early and large flocks have been recorded in Kent by late June.

Locally small numbers are usually noted from the second half of June, typically up to four birds, but with larger counts of five flying west past Copt Point on the 17<sup>th</sup> June 2021 and 16 flying west past Mill Point on the 15<sup>th</sup> June 2005. Passage continues through July into November, but numbers remain low, with counts of five flying west past Princes Parade on the 20<sup>th</sup> August 2015, seven at Nickolls Quarry on the 21<sup>st</sup> August 1952, five flying west past Samphire Hoe on the 25<sup>th</sup> October 2013, six flying west past Copt Point on the 2<sup>nd</sup> November 1998, 13 flying west there on the 6<sup>th</sup> November 2000 and six at Nickolls Quarry on the 14<sup>th</sup> November 1992.

Curlews tend to appear at the only local wintering site at the Willop Basin from the end of September, with a peak count in that month of five on the 29<sup>th</sup> September 2007, or in October (maximum 13 on the 20<sup>th</sup> October 2007), and numbers may increase during November (maximum 13 on the 6<sup>th</sup> November 2011) and December (maximum 31 on the 26<sup>th</sup> December 2013), having peaked in January (maximum 48 on the 27<sup>th</sup> January 2014) and February (maximum 54 on the 2<sup>nd</sup> February 2013).



Curlew at Samphire Hoe (Ian Roberts)



Curlew at Samphire Hoe (Phil Smith)

Whilst birds have been present at the Willop Basin since in all winters since at least 2004/05 numbers have fluctuated considerably, with peak years in 2012/13 and 2013/14 but comparatively few in recent years. The slight recovery that was apparent in 2020/21 can be attributed to a count of nine on the 14<sup>th</sup> March 2021 that were probably migrants moving north after a significant cold spell in February, the peak count prior to March was just three.

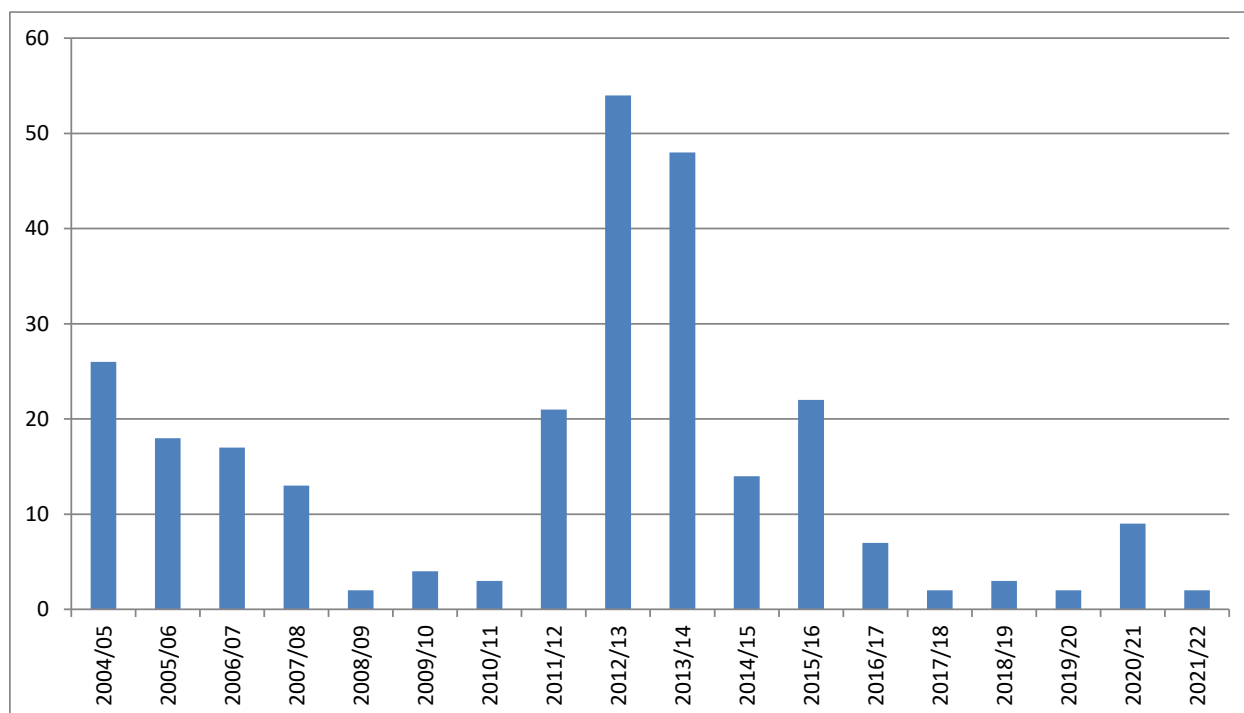


Figure 2: Winter maxima of Curlew at the Willop Sewer since 2004/05

Small numbers have been noted from many other, primarily coastal, sites in winter and often relate to birds flying past, sometimes in response to cold weather. Larger counts have comprised up to 17 feeding in a sheep field at Botolph's Bridge from late December 1998 into early January 1999, 25 flying east past Samphire Hoe on the 29<sup>th</sup> December 2012, seven flying past the Dymchurch Redoubt on the 2<sup>nd</sup> January 2004, six flying west past Hythe Ranges on the 4<sup>th</sup> January 1997, six in the West Hythe area on the 14<sup>th</sup> January 1982, a flock of 60 flying past Copt Point during the late afternoon of the 20<sup>th</sup> January 2013 and six at Nickolls Quarry on the 5<sup>th</sup> February 2012.



Curlew at Nickolls Quarry (Brian Harper)



Curlew at the Willop Basin (Brian Harper)



Wintering birds have typically departed from the Willop Basin by mid-April, although in 2007 up to two were present until the 2<sup>nd</sup> May, and an isolated record of one on the 13<sup>th</sup> May 2010 was presumably a migrant.

Spring passage is irregular and typically occurs between early March and mid-May, with most records involving counts of up to seven moving up-channel past coastal sites. Larger movements have involved:

8 east past Samphire Hoe on the 2<sup>nd</sup> March 2005  
19 east past Mill Point on the 9<sup>th</sup> March 2016  
19 east past Samphire Hoe on the 22<sup>nd</sup> March 2012  
10 east past Samphire Hoe on the 22<sup>nd</sup> March 2013  
35 east past Samphire Hoe on the 23<sup>rd</sup> March 2013  
8 east past Mill Point on the 24<sup>th</sup> April 1991  
9 east past Samphire Hoe on the 18<sup>th</sup> April 2007  
8 east past Copt Point on the 19<sup>th</sup> April 1998

There is also a record of a flock of 24 flying west over Nickolls Quarry on the 25<sup>th</sup> March 1958.



Curlew at the Willop Basin (Brian Harper)

### **References**

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### ***Acknowledgements***

The tetrad map images were produced from the Ordnance Survey [Get-a-map service](#) and are reproduced with kind permission of [Ordnance Survey](#).

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