

David Hill, Chair of the Northern Upland Chain Local Nature Partnership (NUCLNP) writes about;

World Curlew Day – April 21st

We are experiencing a new and disquieting silence across our towns, cities and adjoining countryside. Its hard to believe that only a months ago, the Yorkshire Post published an article by Ian Proudler which celebrated the arrival of the curlew back into its upland breeding ground. Since then we have only been able to imagine what sounds and sights we have been missing, but such is the necessity of the current lock down.

And so, as someone who lives relatively close to Ripon but also high enough to have curlew within sight and earshot, I wanted to bring them closer to you as we celebrate World Curlew Day.

They usually arrive on our land around 18th February and numbers start to build. Being long lived (up to 30 years!) many are undoubtedly the same birds who come back here year after year from their wintering grounds – perhaps the west coast of Ireland or Morecambe Bay, though good numbers winter in Wensleydale. To hear the first calling curlews is awe inspiring and bodes of the spring to come. This year they arrived amidst the wettest winter on record and no doubt found plenty of worms. But the ground is so hard now that they can only forage in wet flashes where a spring carries water to the surface. The dryness and lack of growth of the grass sward is delaying their breeding – we need rain desperately – something I certainly wasn't saying in the middle of February!

I get so much pleasure from watching them almost hover, wings in a 'v' shape as they descend to the ground calling vociferously. And those haunting long-monosyllabic calls that seem to pose a question about what is happening to them out there in the wild, a 'suspicious' call without a conclusion. They seem to have their own complex language, or at least I like to think so.

They deserve greater respect from us. It is difficult being a curlew today. We wreck their home through silage making and land practices that support abnormal populations of egg predators. It makes utter sense to me that we need to address these practices. Farmers need to make a living and provide our food and they too love their curlews. But we can surely make life better for this iconic and wonderful bird. We will all benefit if we do that.

World Curlew Day was established 2 years ago as those with a passion for this iconic bird felt the need to highlight the dramatic decline we have experienced over the last few decades. Indeed, its is now as rare as the Jaguar and one of the UK's most endangered birds

We at the Northern Upland Chain Local Nature Partnership have all felt the impact of these current lockdown restrictions but aim to bring you stories and glimpses of nature in the uplands over the forthcoming months to help cheer you soul or simply distract you from whatever your concerns might be. Once this is over, and who knows at this stage what that statement means, there will be a need to reconnect with the wider outdoors. The curlew conservation project we have been developing may also serve a new purpose through helping people to reconnect but also heal after what will for many be a very personally challenging time. Nature has a way of calming us and the curlew with its haunting call is certainly no exception.

In the meantime, simply observe nature within our local environment be that a garden or local park. Try to draw what you see, write about how it impacts upon you and please always share your news and stories with Ian and the wider team.

Here are 3 questions we would love you to consider:

- If you no longer have curlew, what do you remember about them and how did they stir you in the past
- If you're living in a region where, when you open your window or go for a short walk, you encounter the curlew, tell us what this means to you here in the present
- We still need to look after the curlew once we've come through this current crisis. How important is this for you and to what degree does / will the curlew and the uplands and coastal zones where it occupies, become a place of reflection and healing in the future

Website – <http://www.nuclnp.org.uk/curlew-conservation/>

Contact details – ian.proudler@yorkshiredales.org.uk

Ends.