

Ballydangan Red Grouse Project
Curlew Conservation Programme
Ballydangan South
Breeding Season Report 2019

August 2019

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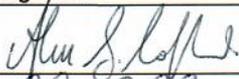
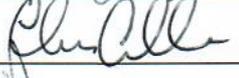
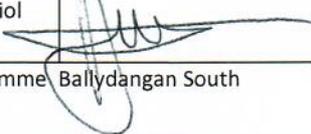
Quality Assurance

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Due cognisance has been given at all times to the provisions of the *Wildlife Act (1976)*, the *Wildlife (Amendment) Act (2000)*, the *European Union (Natural Habitats) Regulations (SI 378/2005)*, the *European Communities (Birds and Natural Habitats) Regulations (2011)*, EU Regulation on Invasive Alien Species under *EU Regulation 1143/2014*, the *EU Birds Directive 2009/147/EC* and the *EU Habitats Directive 92/43/EEC*.

No method of assessment can completely remove the possibility of obtaining partially imprecise or incomplete information. In line with Best Practice, any limitation to the methods applied or constraints however are clearly identified within the main body of this document.

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Title		Ballydangan Red Grouse Project Curlew Conservation Programme Ballydangan South Breeding Season Report 2019		

Aim: To determine Curlew population levels and productivity at Ballydangan to inform ongoing site management.

Rationale

Curlew has recently been added to the IUCN Red List of globally threatened species and is on the Red List of Birds of Conservation Concern in Ireland, due to significant population and range contractions over the last 50 years. It is now estimated that fewer than 120 breeding pairs of Curlew remain in Ireland. Previous surveys have recorded up to seven pairs of breeding Curlew at the larger complex of bogs in the Ballydangan area.

Methods

Standard Curlew survey methodologies (Brown & Shepherd, 1993) were used in order to accurately estimate the number of breeding pairs. In brief, two visits were made to Ballydangan South between mid-April and the end of June. Separate visits to the same site are at least seven days apart. The survey itself requires walking to within 100m of all points on the site. In practice, parallel transects with a maximum spacing of 200m were used at Ballydangan South as these transects in the majority of cases followed drainage lines. The observer stopped and scanned around (360° arc) every 100m to look for birds in flight at distance.

A third visit in July is used to detect breeding productivity. This requires a less intensive survey approach, as only areas where Curlew have been observed in the first two visits need to be checked. As a result, this third visit also covered Knocks Bog and Cranberry Bog.

Survey visits were undertaken on the following dates:

- Visit 1: 17 April
- Visit 2: 15 May
- Visit 3: 04 July

No constraints were identified.

Results

Data from the three visits are indicated separately below

Visit 1

Curlew were recorded displaying in five locations on the site during fieldwork:

- A single bird was heard calling (“bubbling”) and seen in flight circling over a large area of bog towards the western edge of the site at 07:30. What was almost certainly the same birds was seen again at 08:35, and seen to land at 08:38
- A Curlew calling (“bubbling”) along the southern edge of the site at 09:15. IN the same area, a Curlew was heard in this area at 09:35 and picked up flight calling (“Curlui-curlui”) and flew west across the site before heading of site West-south-west in the direction of Cranberry. A different bird was heard again in the same southern section calling (“bubbling”).
- A Curlew was heard calling (Whaup-whaup) at 09:55 in the central part of the site; this bird was not seen. At the same time, two separate birds were heard calling (both “bubbling”) and seen in flight towards the north-eastern edge of the site. One of these birds was seen to be joined (at 10:00) in flight by a second bird (i.e. a pair) and landed in the eastern end of the site at 10:12.

Visit 2

Lots of Curlew activity was observed at the southern edge of the site between 06:30 and 09:05. It is assumed that only two adult birds were observed as their behaviour suggested one pair with chicks on the bog. As a result, this area was not walked to within 100m, but additional time was taken (c.2hrs) observing this area from the periphery to maximise observations and minimise disturbance.

In addition, a single bird was observed flying around in the centre of the site at 08:03. This bird did not interact with the two birds observed noted above. At 11:01 a Curlew was observed to lift very close to the observer in the centre of the site; flew off a short distance and landed. No vocalisation were heard from this bird.

Visit 3

No Curlew were observed at Ballydangan south on this visit, although one calling Curlew was heard to the south of the site. No Curlew were recorded at Knocks Bog or Cranberry.

Discussion

Collectively, these records suggest a minimum of four pairs at Ballydangan South (one at the western end (only recorded in Visit 1), one in the centre of the site (recorded on both visits) and two pairs at the north-eastern end (both pairs recorded on visit one, with one pair also recorded on visit 2)). The bird recorded flying off-site towards Cranberry suggest a pair may be present in that area, although this could not be confirmed.

It appears likely that at least one pair hatched chicks, and anecdotal information from observers on site would indicate that at least one pair are likely to have fledged young, although this could not be confirmed from the data presented here.

In addition to the Curlew sightings, Fox was observed in the centre of Ballydangan South on both Visit 1 and Visit 3.

Also, evidence of breeding Merlin (old and recent plucking posts) was recorded at Cranberry. The methodology for surveying for breeding Merlin requires prominent hummocks or post to be checked for prey remains. With the bog restoration work at these three sites, particularly the presence of large numbers (>1,000) peat dams, there are huge numbers of potential plucking sites so such a survey effort may not be practical. Nevertheless, the likely confirmation of this species breeding at this bog complex is noteworthy.

Conclusion

The Ballydangan Bog group clearly remains an important area for Curlew nationally. A continuation of survey effort, perhaps expanded to include a full survey of Cranberry and Knocks Bogs, would further help reinforce the importance of these sites as well as guide continued conservation efforts. This includes continued predator control efforts (particularly for Fox) and consideration should be given to additional measures such as predator-proof fencing around the site. Also, consideration should be given to a full evaluation of the area for breeding Merlin (with is also an Annex I species in the EU Birds Directive).