

Ballydangan Curlew Survey

Clonboley complex, incorporating Ballydangan, Cranberry Lough and Knock bogs, South Roscommon

September 2022

David Fallon



Objective of Survey

To determine the breeding status of Curlew at the sites under the management of the Ballydangan Red Grouse Conservation Project.

Ecologist biography

David Fallon has degrees in Forestry and Environmental Science along with a research MSc in peatland restoration, he has been working as an ecologist for 20 years. Much of his career has been spent as a peatland ecologist where he was responsible for the restoration and management of peatland for climate, biodiversity, and communities. He has been involved with the Ballydangan project since 2009.

Methodology

Standard Curlew survey methodologies (Brown & Shepherd, 1993) were used to determine the number of breeding Curlew using the site. This involved walking transects across the site to within 100m of all parts of the site. The surveyor stopped frequently to listen to and observe any call and/or sightings of Curlew. Surveys commenced at dawn and all sections of the site were surveyed on each date.

Survey dates –

May 7th

May 28th

June 4th

Results

May 7th visit

A foggy start to the day made sightings difficult until later in the day. Five Curlew calling in total, three from Ballydangan and two from Knock Bog.

May 28th visit

Clear conditions for this survey. Three pairs of Curlew observed on Ballydangan and two pairs on Knock Bog with one on Cranberry Island Bog. Adult birds appear to be nesting on the restored bog areas and using the surrounding farmland for foraging, particularly the wet grassland to the South and West of Ballydangan Bog. Curlew were quiet for the survey, with actual sightings resulting in most confirmations of Curlew presence. Adults frequently left their nest site and upon return the other adult Curlew left to forage. Buzzards are active on site and on two occasions resulted in defensive behaviour from the Curlew, drawing them from the nest site to confront the Buzzard in a defence manner.

June 4th visit

Dry conditions with a low breeze made for excellent surveying conditions. Six Curlew nest sites were confirmed over the site, two in Knock Bog, one in Cranberry Lough Bog and three in Ballydangan Bog.

Discussion

The ongoing work on this project appears to be working well for the benefit of breeding Curlew and biodiversity in general with many species benefiting, including many birds of conservation concern. Figure 1, below, shows a list of species recorded on site during the surveys in 2022.

Common name	Scientific name	Conservation status
Curlew	<i>Numenius arquata</i>	Red
Mallard	<i>Anas platyrhynchos</i>	Green
Snipe	<i>Gallinago gallinago</i>	Red
Merlin	<i>Falco columbarius</i>	Amber
Kestrel	<i>Falco tinnunculus</i>	Red
Buzzard	<i>Buteo buteo</i>	Green
Stonechat	<i>Saxicola rubicola</i>	Green
Meadow Pipit	<i>Anthus pratensis</i>	Red
Grasshopper Warbler	<i>Locustella naevia</i>	Amber
Skylark	<i>Alauda arvensis</i>	Amber
Red Grouse	<i>Lagopus lagopus hibernicus</i>	Red
Wheatear	<i>Oenanthe oenanthe</i>	Amber
Lapwing	<i>Vanellus vanellus</i>	Red
Blackbird	<i>Turdus merula</i>	Amber
Robin	<i>Erithacus rubecula</i>	Green
Thrush	<i>Turdus philomelos</i>	Green
Rook	<i>Corvus frugilegus</i>	Green
Swallow	<i>Hirundo rustica</i>	Amber
Grey Heron	<i>Ardea cinerea</i>	Green
Willow Warbler	<i>Phyllocopus trochilus</i>	Amber
Hare	<i>Lepus timidus hibernicus</i>	Least concern
Stoat	<i>Mustela erminea</i>	Least concern

In total six Curlew nest sites have been recorded across the project sites, restoration of the sites in 2013 coupled with ongoing management of the site has resulted in a habitat that benefits multiple species. Curlew breeding success is difficult to ascertain, however sixteen juvenile Curlew were observed foraging in agricultural land in late June by workers on the project, it is difficult to confirm if these juvenile Curlew were from the project in Ballydangan or other areas.

In the future GPS tagging of Curlew chicks would lead to a greater understanding of breeding success on site.

Restoration of the site occurred in 2013, with the blocking of all drains within the site, some of these dams (a low number) appear to be leaking in some sections of the site resulting in a low number of drains becoming active again. A site survey would be beneficial to locate the failing dams, and with funding, more dams could be installed.

The Killeglan Bog complex is located 4km to the North-West of Ballydangan, these sites are home to a number of breeding Curlew. Management, similar to that at Ballydangan, would greatly enhance the long-term prospects of breeding Curlew at these sites.