

The bird's song is not being heard as often, so volunteers monitored 500 fields to see what is happening

Villagers' shock discovery about curlews' decline



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SILENCE BUILDS in the valleys where the curlew's call once rang, the absence of song an indication of the bird's decline.

Numbers have fallen drastically over recent years and the wading bird is in danger of disappearing from some countryside sites.

Now citizen scientists in Nidderdale have taken matters into their own hands, with a vast project over 400 hectares to draw a picture of local decline.

Under the Darley Beck Curlew Project, villagers surveyed some 500 fields, to watch and wait for chicks to arrive. Just three survived the season.

Barry Carter, a retired company director and keen photographer, is one of a handful of neighbours and friends who banded together to find out what was happening.

The curlews weren't calling as they used to, he said.

Mr Carter said the problem wasn't that the birds weren't producing young; they were. But they proved a feast for carrion crows, foxes, and black headed gulls.

"There's an unbelievable amount of predation," he said. "Of more than 20 nests, there are just three chicks left. The rest have perished."

"This unbelievable dip in curlew numbers is going to get dramatically worse," he warned. "They are just not producing enough chicks."

The project was masterminded by local farmer Clive Meldon White, who noticed a decline in bird song, and enlisted some 40 volunteers.

Work began in the spring, dividing fields around Thornthwaite into manageable patches.

Volunteers would survey their sites, charting what they saw from buzzards to grasses. Then, with thermal imaging cameras, they were able to map out the nests.

As the chicks grew, they watched progress from a distance. And then their decline, with just a handful surviving.

Mr Carter started with 18 fields, then took on a few more.

What he thought might take him three hours a week, in walking the countryside, has grown to almost 25.

He has come to enjoy it, he said. The curlews led them on a "mesmerising trail" to find the nests, while he has seen species he didn't know remained in Nidderdale.

One chick, he watched for weeks,

sitting for hours outside the field and finding himself returning almost every day. Once he catches a glimpse, he said, "it's all golden again".

He chuckled: "I'm a big softie at heart. It's so wonderful, to go out looking for curlews, and to find hares boxing. You've got roe deer, hopping around you, jumping over walls."

"It does make you feel alive. There's a lot of benefits you get from volunteering."

Most farmers have helped, he said, holding off the grass cutting when they've been aware of nests in their fields. A local gamekeeper helped create a safe space for a breeding pair.

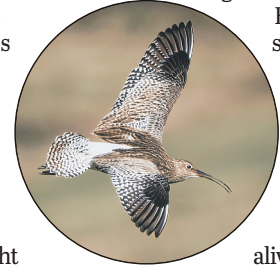
There has long been a worrying decline in the UK's breeding population of curlews, with suggestion that numbers have nearly halved over 25 years.

The picture, said Mr Carter, is more stark than anticipated.

"The findings are absolutely dramatic. It's actually worse than we thought," he said. "At this early stage we can see they are disappearing at an unbelievable rate, with so few chicks getting to fledging stage. We can count the chicks on one hand."

There are many factors at play, he believes, and much to change. Greater grants for farmers would be a start, while dog walkers have a responsibility to keep pets on a lead.

"Maybe we can help with giving curlew chicks a chance to survive, by thinking how we cut," said Mr Carter. "From this small survey, it isn't enough to keep up curlew numbers. These curlews are dying, and new birds aren't coming through in the right numbers."



Farmer's idea to start project

THE CURLEW conservation project, driven by landowner Clive White, is supported by the Farming in Protected Landscapes programme and Nidderdale AONB.

Mr White, who has produced suckler beef cattle for 35 years, enlisted the support of farmers who have permitted volunteers to carry out detailed surveys.

Supported by ecologists, volunteers were trained to monitor the curlews, identify nest sites, and record habitat and field management. It is hoped findings can be shared at Nidderdale Show in September.



MONITORING CURLEWS: Barry Carter and some of his curlew photographs. He was among a group of neighbours and friends who banded together to find out what was happening to the curlews. He said the birds were not calling as they used to. PICTURES: BARRY CARTER



Wedding in new series of vet drama

WEDDING BELLS will chime for James Herriot and Helen Alderson when the highly-anticipated third series of *All Creatures Great and Small* airs in the autumn, but there will be darker storylines, too, as war with Germany looms on the horizon.

Plot details revealed by PBS Masterpiece, which hosts the series in the US, suggest that lead vet and Skeldale House's unpredictable proprietor Siegfried Farnon, played by Samuel West, will have to contend with painful memories of his own

experiences during the First World War, when he served in combat with the Army Veterinary Corps.

Set and filmed in the Yorkshire Dales and based on the best-selling stories of Thirsk vet Alf Wight, who wrote under the name James Herriot, *All Creatures Great and Small* series three will begin in spring 1939 as James (Nicholas Ralph) and Helen (Rachel Shenton) prepare to walk down the aisle and their wedding is unlikely to go without a hitch.

James will also have a new

stake in the business and, while his scheme to participate in the government's practice to test for tuberculosis in cattle will expand the veterinary practice, it could put him at odds with local farmers.

Helen, too, will face the challenges of letting go of her old life on her family farm with her father and sister Jenny and finding her new place within the welcoming, yet eccentric, embrace of Skeldale House.

Tristan (Callum Woodhouse) must now face the world as a qualified vet, still seeking

to win big brother Siegfried's approval.

Meanwhile, Mrs Hall (Anna Madeley) may be ready for love. And Mrs Pumphrey (Patricia Hodge) returns with her pampered Pekingese Tricki-Woo.

Channel 5 has not yet revealed precisely when *All Creatures Great and Small* series three will air in the UK, although PBS has revealed that it will air on Masterpiece in the US from January 8, 2023.

A UK launch date announcement is expected soon.

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Pub built by council is given Grade II-listing

A BRADFORD city centre pub has been awarded a Grade II-listing, with a heritage body describing it as a "rare survival" of a pub from that era.

The New Beehive Inn, on Westgate, has been granted listed status by Historic England, which acknowledged it as one of the city's most significant pubs.

The local branch of Camra, the Campaign for Real Ale, has welcomed news that the building is now protected for future generations, but raised concerns about changes made to the pub earlier this year.

Built in 1901 by the Bradford Corporation, the precursor to Bradford

Council, the Beehive was part of an improvement scheme for the Westgate area of the city.

Dave Gamston, from Camra's national Pub Heritage Group, said he hoped "the new owners will be respectful of the New Beehive's significance as a rare historic pub, be alive to the unique opportunities that may offer, and give it every chance to thrive again".

A Bradford Council spokesman said: "The New Beehive has formed part of Bradford's landscape for well over 100 years. It's unique in the district as a public house built by Bradford Corporation and it still retains the original four-room layout."

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