

Response to Sunnica 11th September 2023 - Re- Stone Curlews – Linda Homan

I am unhappy with the piecemeal response from Natural England regarding the habitat of the Stone Curlew. That a full report is not available should not deter them from strongly condemning this scheme. It is well known that the Stone Curlew is categorised as “Near Threatened” by the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN), and that a significant number of these endangered birds migrate in the winter to the site proposed by Sunnica. Indeed, a Natural England Publication updated in 2020 states (p.339) that “The main pressures facing curlews in the UK are the predation of eggs and chicks, and habitat loss and degradation through changing farming practices and afforestation of open ground.”

80 pairs of Eurasian Curlew were monitored annually between 2019 and 2021 in eight locations across Breckland, eastern England (Ewing, et al., 2023) identifying that work must be done to conserve these species and in order to meet post-2020 targets set by the Convention on Biological Diversity, that “substantial changes to environmental policy across all levels of government are required” (Mace et al. 2018; Lim 2021; Ewing, et al., 2023).

O’ Donoghue noted (2019) that some populations of this bird are already on the verge of “extirpation”. Any form of disrupted environment is likely to impact negatively on these shy birds. Indeed, a study of these birds in a protected zoo environment by Rose et al. (2022), found negative impacts on them from sounds and increased human activity.

There are many negative impacts upon the natural environment that the planners are aware of – such as this impact upon endangered birds and loss of good agricultural land. With all that we have learnt about these harmful outcomes, it would be an ecological travesty to allow this scheme. Also, pertinent to this, I would remind the planning inspectorate of the negative impact upon the mental health and wellbeing of all concerned residents and people local to these areas, due to such negative impacts from this scheme. This negative impact upon people from the loss of the Curlew is borne out in a study in Wales (Goodall, et al., 2023) where there was a much-needed community consultation on the light of the Curlew’s. Between 79% and 99% of the respondents agreed on issues some of which I have listed here:

- 99% of respondents agreed that curlew is an important species for Welsh culture and heritage, holding an important place in the hearts and minds of Welsh rural communities.
- 93% of respondents stated that the survival of curlew as a breeding bird in Wales was very important to them.
- 94% of respondents stated that urgent curlew recovery work in Wales is very important.
- 99% of respondents thought that curlew recovery work would have wider benefits to additional species.
- 98% of respondents felt that conservation funding should be prioritised for curlew recovery in Wales.

And, from this report, lastly, I quote from the Welsh Poet Dylan Thomas, who features Curlew’s in several of his poems:

‘The White Giant’s Thigh’:

“Through throats where many rivers meet, the curlews cry Under the Conceiving moon, on the high chalk hill” Dylan Thomas.

Linda Homan.

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