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Wader Quest Articles



SUPPORTING SHOREBIRD CONSERVATION

Registered Charity (England and Wales)
1183748

Wader Quest Objectives:

To raise public awareness about, and to promote an understanding and appreciation of, waders or shorebirds (birds of the sub order Charadrii and to include the family Turnicidae, as defined by the Handbook of Birds of the World Volume 3 del Hoyo, Elliott and Sargatal eds 1996).

To raise funds, which, at the discretion of the Board of Trustees, is to be used to make small grants or carry out appeals for wader conservation projects worldwide.

To promote for the benefit of the public the conservation and protection of waders or shorebirds and improvements of their physical and natural habitats.

To advance the education of the public regarding the conservation and protection of waders or shorebirds and their natural habitats.

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Intermountain Bird Observatory Long-billed Curlew Project Update - Heather Hayes

It has now been over a decade since the Intermountain Bird Observatory (IBO) began delving into the lives of the charismatic Long-billed Curlew. Our project began in 2009 with the initial objective of assisting the Idaho Department of Fish and Game in simply monitoring a local population of nesting curlews in southwestern Idaho. But after the discovery of a fatally shot curlew lying in the road during the first day of surveys, we were about to learn there would be nothing "simple" about the dangers these shorebirds face.



Male (tagged) on left and female on right- protecting chicks that are hidden in the grass
- Heather Hayes

Our long-term monitoring efforts coupled with historical research have revealed an alarming local decline of curlews on public lands across southwestern Idaho. In particular, curlews breeding within the Long-Billed Curlew Habitat Area of Critical Environmental Concern (ACEC) in Middleton, Idaho have sustained an estimated population decline of ~95% since the late 1970's. Currently, our data suggests there are less than 100 breeding individuals remaining within the ACEC. This is especially devastating as this area used to hold the densest known breeding population of Long-billed Curlews in the United States!

As with any migratory species, threats can be found range-wide throughout their entire annual life cycle. For nesting curlews, threats include predators, human disturbance, changes in agricultural practices, habitat



Fatally shot Long-billed Curlew - Stephanie Coates



Intermountain Bird Observatory Long-billed Curlew Project Update - cont'd

loss, as well as illegal shooting. They may also face additional issues revolving around water, including changes in agricultural practices and drought while on the wintering grounds.

In 2013 we began deploying satellite transmitters on breeding curlews in SW Idaho to better understand when and where curlews are at greatest risk. With support from many incredible partnerships and collaborations, we have expanded our satellite tracking program into other areas of Idaho and 5 additional western states. We've deployed transmitters on individuals in Montana, Wyoming, New Mexico, and California, and have also helped Birds Canada with deployments in British Columbia. In total, we have deployed satellite transmitters on around 100 curlews (!) and partners have deployed another 25+ in other regions.

With the use of this technology, we discovered that illegal shooting was one of the driving factors behind SW Idaho's population decline. This region is known as a recreationist's paradise due to the amount of public lands available for people to enjoy. But unfortunately, recreational activities pose serious risks to the ground-nesting curlews that also utilize this habitat for breeding. When curlew chicks are about to hatch, adults become aggressively protective in



Hatching Curlew chick - Stephanie Coates



Fitting curlew with satellite transmitter Jackson Fork Ranch
- Lily Bailey

contrast to their incubation behaviour of sitting quiet and tight to the nest. As they take to the air alarm calling and dive-bombing approaching threats, they become easy targets for unethical shooters. From 2013-2018, 7 of the 16 curlews outfitted with transmitters on public lands had been illegally shot - resulting in the loss of almost half of our tracked SW Idaho birds.

With funding support from the Bureau of Land Management (BLM), we launched an intensive outreach and education campaign that includes school programs, Hunter Education course presentations, and the establishment of an illegal shooting working group involving local law enforcement and many other agencies and organizations. We've continued to work with many partner organizations to try to find solutions, and are also working with many collaborators to

publish a peer-reviewed article on the mounting evidence for illegal shooting of curlews and many other protected species. In light of the current restrictions of public outreach events due to COVID-19, we successfully re-directed our outreach efforts to a virtual platform. This has allowed the unique ability to not only reach across state lines but also the globe with our messaging.

Our satellite tracking study has also led to many exciting discoveries and 2020 provided us with a trifecta of surprises! To kick off the season, IBO Research Director Jay Carlisle headed to the coast of California in February to join colleagues from Audubon Canyon Ranch, Smithsonian's Migratory Connectivity Project, and the Coastal Bend Bays and Estuaries Program to attempt to tag some wintering birds to hopefully solve the mystery of where these coastal-wintering curlews breed, as none of our breeding study birds had yet been tracked to the coast. When spring migration began, we discovered their migratory routes led both to breeding territories in higher elevation areas of Idaho (!), one in far southern Idaho just across the border from



'CA Curlew Crew' trapping wintering coastal curlews. Limantour Beach on Pt Reyes National Seashore Feb 2020. (No masks / pre-pandemic.) Collaborative trapping effort of Intermountain Bird Observatory Audubon Canyon Ranch, Smithsonian's Migratory Connectivity Project, and the Coastal Bend Bays and Estuaries Program. Jay Carlisle (left), David Newstead (middle), and Nils Warnock (right) - Neil Clipperton

Intermountain Bird Observatory Long-billed Curlew Project Update - cont'd



One of our males from the new 2020 breeding study site in the West Central Mountains on Father's Day (Leg band MV, named 'Dozer') in Morro Bay, CA- our first ever curlew to head to the coast- just days after he landed from his southbound migration - Petra Clayton

years of tracking ~100 curlews and without an established connection between curlews breeding in Idaho and those wintering on the California coast, 2020 produced 4 such birds – all breeding in areas we had yet to work in.

To round out the 2020 trifecta of migratory discoveries, a newly tagged bird from SW Idaho was the first from this population, our most studied with 20 individuals tagged to date, tracked to Mexico! While this curlew overwinters in the central Baja, all other SW Idaho birds can be found spending their winters in the Central and Imperial Valleys of California, ~80% and ~20% respectively.

We invite you to track the flock! Head to the [IBO website](#) to access the curlew profile page and our satellite tracking map that gives you 24/7 access to the location of your favourite curlew. Want to be social? 'Like' us on Facebook at our page [The Curlew Crew](#) for all the latest updates.

Nevada and the other in eastern Idaho.

The next exciting research discovery came from our new study site up in Idaho's West Central Mountains. Of the three tagged birds, two of them migrated to Morro Bay on the coast of California making them the first tracked breeding adults from any of our research study sites throughout the Intermountain West to migrate directly to coastal California to overwinter! Thus, after 7



'Labarynth' LT The first Curlew from SW population to migrate to Mexico
- Heidi Ware Carlisle



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