

Basic Fieldcraft



CURLEW
RECOVERY
PARTNERSHIP
ENGLAND

1. Introduction

This factsheet is primarily aimed at inexperienced fieldworkers who are undertaking fieldwork activities for the first time. It aims to provide guidance relating to the preparation of field gear, basic health and safety, survey preparation and basic fieldcraft skills. Note that the CRP and its partners may be able to help with connecting Curlew fieldworkers to experienced individuals or groups, in order to provide training and useful advice about local conditions.

2. Pre-fieldwork preparation

To ensure a safe and productive time in the field, it is important to be prepared prior to starting fieldwork. The sections below cover optical equipment, in addition to basic fieldwork health and safety, and how to behave in the field to minimise disturbance and maximise your time. Information on clothing, footwear and other useful field equipment can be found in the Appendices.

3. Optical equipment

Binoculars and spotting scopes are essential and field monitoring cannot realistically be undertaken without them. A minimum requirement is a good pair of binoculars, but a spotting scope will likely be of equal importance, especially when monitoring from a distance. If there is any doubt regarding the suitability of your optics, check with an experienced fieldworker before you start.

- **Binoculars** – a magnification of 8x or 10x is ideal, along with an objective lens size of 32 mm or 42 mm. Binoculars with an objective lens smaller than 30 mm are likely to be too small and harder to use in low light conditions, whilst binoculars with an objective lens larger than 42 mm are likely to be too heavy and bulky.
- **Spotting scope** – a scope with an objective lens of 60–80 mm is ideal. The choice of a fixed magnification (e.g. 30x) or zoom (e.g. 20–60x) eyepiece will be a personal one but a zoom eyepiece will be essential if colour-ring reading from a distance is required.
- **Tripod** – essential if using a spotting scope. A lightweight model similar to the [Velbon Sherpa 200](#) will be sufficient. Big, heavy tripods are not recommended if the fieldworker will be covering large distances.
- **Window mount tripod/bean bag** – if using a vehicle then a window mount tripod or bean bag will be required for the spotting scope.

4. Health and Safety Procedures

- **Risk Assessment** – before setting foot in the field the potential hazards and risks that fieldworkers may encounter should be assessed via a Risk Assessment. All individuals should read, understand and sign it prior to commencing fieldwork. If new risks arise during the fieldwork, then the Risk Assessment should be updated accordingly.
- **Lone working/remote working** – if working alone or in remote and/or isolated areas, fieldworkers should use the ‘buddy’ system in which the fieldworker informs a ‘buddy’ of their location of work, arrival time and estimated time on site before heading into the field. This can be done via a text message or phone call. After finishing on site they should inform their ‘buddy’ of their safe arrival back home.
- **Communicating your location** – fieldworkers may also want to use the [‘what3words’](#) smartphone app. The app has divided the world into 3 m squares, each with a unique three-word combination. This can then be used to direct people to your exact location if required, which can be incredibly useful in areas where there are no obvious landmark features. It is also advisable to identify your nearest A&E department, access points to your fieldwork location, and the time required to get there.

5. Survey preparation

- **Contact land managers** – this should be done before every visit unless there's an agreement with the land manager to do otherwise (see Land Manager Liaison Factsheet).
- **Check weather forecast** – surveying in rain and strong winds should be avoided. If rain showers are forecast it may be possible to work around these. Use your judgement and if in doubt liaise with an experienced fieldworker. Do not undertake any fieldwork that will disturb nesting Curlew in poor weather, and wait for vegetation to dry before visiting a nest to avoid leaving a trail.
- **Plan a survey route** – it is a good idea to have a pre-planned survey route before getting into the field. It can be useful to mark the route on the maps prior to beginning your survey. Once in the field these routes can be amended and adapted if habitat features do not allow the planned route to be followed.
- **Spare maps and survey sheets** – before a survey visit, ensure you have spare maps, survey sheets and writing equipment to take into the field. This is important as maps and writing equipment can be easily lost during a survey.
- **Charge all electronics** – ensure all electronic equipment is fully charged and spare batteries are packed; store batteries in original packaging or a hard container that doesn't allow positive and negative terminals to meet and short-circuit (causing sparks and/or heat).

6. In the field

There are a number of basic fieldcraft skills that will improve fieldworkers' chances of getting good observations of Curlew without impacting on the natural behaviour of the birds; these include:

- **Keep noise to a minimum** – avoid all unnecessary noise whilst in the field. If you're working with a co-fieldworker, keep your voices down and limit conversation to the bare minimum when observing Curlew. It is best to keep ringtones muted and instead have phones on vibrate. If using walkie-talkies keep the volume down to the bare minimum.
- **Move slowly and methodically** – when walking through a survey area, moving slowly and methodically will reduce your detectability and limit the amount of noise you make. Fast and erratic movements will draw attention to yourself, reducing your ability to monitor Curlew effectively.
- **Use habitat features as screens** – use available habitat features such as hedges, trees and grassy hummocks to blend into the environment and avoid raising your silhouette above the skyline where at all possible.
- **Ensure accurate note taking** – keep a regular note of your location so you can record your sightings on your maps accurately (this is most important in areas with little in the way of reference points). A smartphone mapping app (e.g. Google or Ordnance Survey maps) can be very useful here.
- **Annotate your maps and survey sheets in detail** – this is a good habit to maintain but is especially important if you are sharing the monitoring work with other fieldworkers. Aside from the Curlew observations, other useful information to record includes vantage point locations, changes to land use, livestock in fields, field/land ownership and predator sightings.



Appendix 1. Clothing and footwear

- Fieldworkers should ideally wear clothing that blends in with the landscape, with dark colours (dull greens, browns and blacks) being best. Bright and colourful clothing should be avoided.
- Clothing that is excessively noisy (e.g. certain rain jackets) should be avoided, especially if you're attempting to get close to the birds.
- A lightweight, windproof and waterproof jacket is a necessity, waterproof trousers are useful but optional.
- A hat, scarf and gloves are useful additions to your field kit early in the season (February–March) when it can still be cold. Later in the season (April–July) a sun hat with securing strap will be necessary.
- Multiple layers are better than thick outer layers – if you get hot you can easily take layers off and pack them away. A base layer (e.g. merino wool) is a good option as it is lightweight and warm.
- Footwear will depend on habitat, season and the amount of ground to be covered by the fieldworker. Stout, waterproof walking boots are ideal if the ground isn't too wet, especially if long distances are to be covered. Where it is wet, wellington boots should be worn. Later in the season when it is drier, sturdy walking shoes may be preferred.
- Where the vegetation is long, gaiters can be used to keep your legs dry (especially early in the day when dew is on the ground), and are also useful for keeping ticks out – wearing long light-coloured trousers can also facilitate early detection of ticks.

Appendix 2. Other useful field gear

- **Backpack** – big enough to accommodate field gear (20–30 litres usually sufficient), and make sure it is adjusted to fit correctly once loaded.
- **Recording sheets and site maps** – essential for recording field observations. Whatever method you use, ensure that it is standardised across the monitoring area and between surveyors.
- **Clipboard** – essential for storing recording sheets and maps. A [Weatherwriter](#)[®] is ideal as it protects from rain and can be used to store writing equipment.
- **Writing equipment** – pens or pencils (the latter more reliable in wet weather). Ensure sufficient spares.
- **Mobile phone** – minimum requirement is a basic phone, a smartphone is preferable (see below) .
- **First aid kit** – small portable kit for emergency use in the field.
- **Foil blanket** – for emergency use.
- **Sunscreen** – Factor 30+.
- **Food and drink** – sufficient for the duration of the survey.
- **Alcohol hand gel** – for use before eating and handling gates to reduce risks associated with COVID-19.
- **Insect repellent and tick removal device** (the latter particularly important in areas prone to ticks and Lyme's Disease).
- **Handheld GPS unit** – for recording GPS coordinates of locations of interest (e.g. nest sites).
- **Smartphone** – with relevant apps downloaded (e.g. maps, GPS, what3words). Also for contacting landowners and colleagues and for emergency use.
- **Spare batteries** – for handheld GPS (if using).
- **Portable charger/power bank** – for recharging smartphone (if using).
- **Camera** (if not using smartphone) – for photographing items/locations of interest.
- **Whistle** (for emergency use) – for attracting attention.