

CURLEW WATCH

Burhinus grallarius

(Bush Thick-knee, Southern Stone Curlew or Bush Curlew)

Fact Sheet - November 2011

"Big thanks must go to the volunteers who have supplied us with valuable information about the curlew. Their observations and past research have been compiled together to provide the contents of this information sheet. We hope you enjoy reading this information sheet and perhaps consider, or continue, to participate in this survey."

Identification

About 54 – 59 cm in length, an 82 – 105 cm wingspan. Weight, male 670 g and female 625 g. Long legs, cryptic plumage, forehead buff, white chin and throat, crown nape and hind neck, grey and finely streaked blackish, large yellow eyes, thin white eye ring, black eye stripe through neck, upper parts have black streaking over a grey – brown, while under parts are buff – white. Bill is black. Legs vary from cream to olive buff.

Will avoid rainforest or heavily timbered areas but may roost at fringes. In the Redland Shire they can be found on the Bay islands and even suburbs. Recreational areas, farmland and institutional grounds, particularly if there adjacent or on site wooded areas make suitable habitat. They are even found near and around households. Some have become quite accustomed to human presence and in some instances take advantage of hand feeding or unguarded pet food.

Distribution and numbers

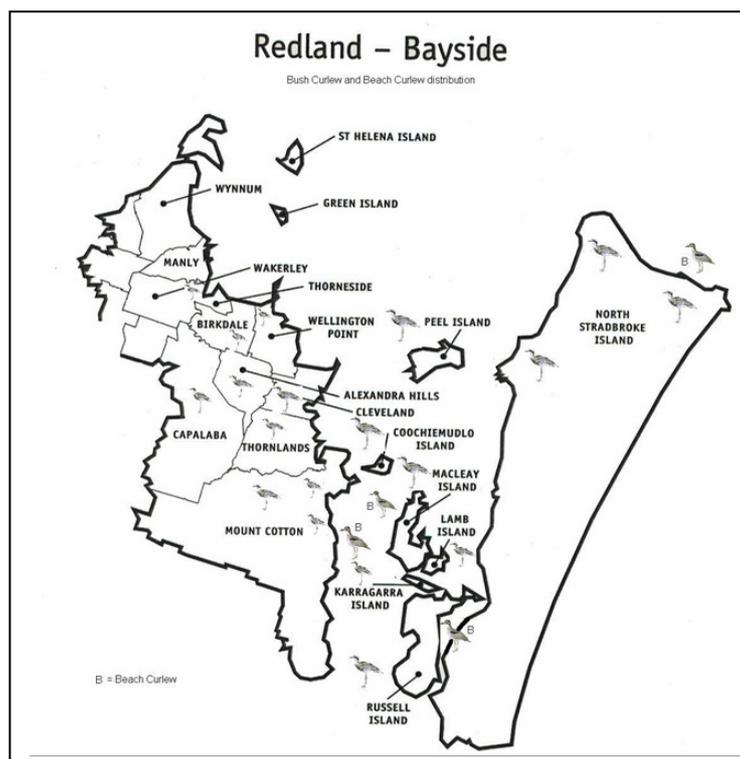
Victoria Point, Redland Bay, Alexandra Hills, Macleay Island, Coochiemudloo Island, North Stradbroke Island, Peel Island, Russel Island, Karragarra Island, Thornlands, Ormiston and **Cleveland (Ross Creek and a number of parklands.)** The Bay islands support good populations, particularly Peel Island as it's devoid of feral predators.



There is a **grey** and **rufus** morph. The **grey morph** is described above. The Rufus morph is found in Northern Australia. The Rufus morph has boldly streaked Rufus brown upper parts. Neck browner, forehead Rufus brown, breasts, flanks and upper belly Rufus brown. The Redlands Curlew is the grey morph.

Habitat

A ground dwelling bird liking lightly timbered open forests and woodland and persist most often where there a well-structured litter layer and fallen timber debris Records show swampy paddocks, mangroves and salt marshes are also utilised.



Breeding

Curllews breed readily in the Shire when conditions are right, two nesting seasons usually but sometimes three between June to December. Nesting sites are known in Victoria Point, Redland Bay, Macleay Island, North Stradbroke Island, Alexandra Hills, Coochiemudlo Island and Cleveland.



Typical 'nest'

Nests are built on the ground. They are nothing more than a piece of ground that has had the leaf litter scraped away. Sometimes on bare ground or amongst stones, often under trees, amongst sticks and leaf litter. Eggs are rounded oval to elongate oval, with colour varying with surrounds. The clutch size is usually two. Interval between broods has been estimated to be between 63 – 65 days and also 103 – 134 days. Very young birds are broadly striped black and white, when adopting the freeze position they look like black and white melons.

Food sources

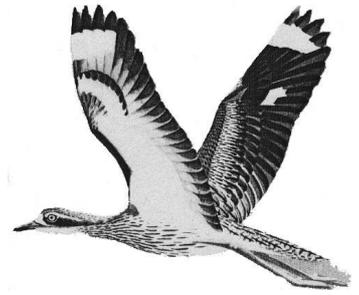
Mainly insects, molluscs, spiders, frogs and lizards. We have observations of dog and cat food being exploited, as have human handouts.

Social organisation and behaviour

Found singly, pairs, families (1 – 3 young), or in small flocks. Usually shy but there is plenty of evidence from observers of birds becoming quite tame around human habitation. Feeding is generally done alone except when one adult is feeding with young. They are monogamous and are together for the year and probably pair for life. Both birds are involved in incubation, defence and raising of young. Female will generally incubate during the day, while the male does the night shift. Breeding birds feed near nest but some recorded observations have shown off duty birds to stay 0.4 – 1.6 km away. Movement away maybe related to depleted food sources.

Movements

Sedentary when breeding, however, there may be local movement after breeding. Birds banded as part of an ongoing study on Coochiemudlo have shown birds dispersing between



Coochiemudlo, mainland sites and also other islands. This suggests that the birds from different locations and islands around Moreton Bay may mix at least a little. There are records of birds congregating into small flocks after breeding. These flocks may roam over 100 km² and we do have reliable observations from the Redlands highlighting this behaviour still continues.

Calls

They make eerie wailing calls at night. This is often heard when two or more birds come together at territory boundaries. Birds have heard to make whistling sounds when seen in small flocks. Other calls include shrieks, growls, gurgles, clucks and chuckles. Whistles have been heard when summoning chicks, while soft gurgle sounds have been noted to be made by male in warning a female of an approaching observer. Some birds have made a hissing sound when humans have approached too closely.

Threats

The Curlew (grey morph) is under serious threat; in NSW and Victoria they have been decimated. However, the Redlands represents one area where they still exist in good numbers.

Threats include the loss of habitat and natural food sources, un-supervised domestic pets, foxes, lawn mowers, unwary walkers in parks. As curlews rely on their cryptic camouflage for protection, their natural habit is to freeze rather than take flight. Not a good defence mechanism against dogs, cats, cars or vandals.

What can you do? If you see a cat or dog nearby, warn the owner politely or if no owner, chase the animal away. If the nest is in a park or well-walked area, try to protect the nest site with a brightly coloured tape and advise Redland Council Indigiscapes staff on ph: 3824 8611).

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