

EURASIAN CURLEW (CURLEW) | *Numenius arquata*

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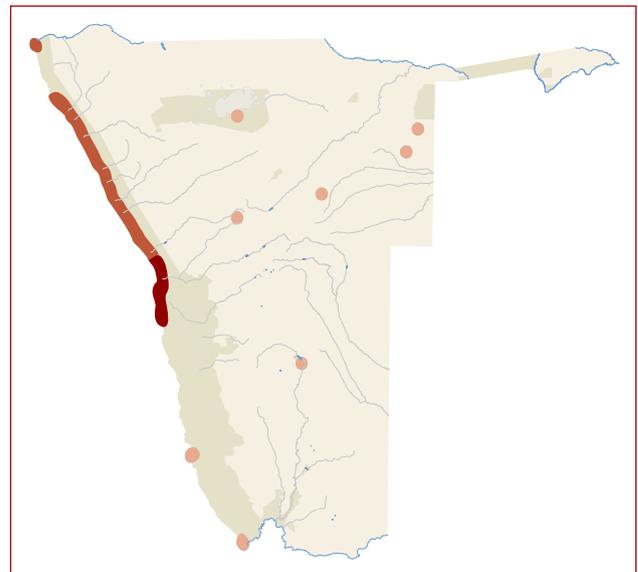
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| Conservation Status: | Near Threatened |
| Southern African Range: | Namibia, Botswana, South Africa, Zimbabwe |
| Area of Occupancy: | 26,600 km ² |
| Population Estimate: | Up to 500 individuals |
| Population Trend: | Decreasing regionally |
| Habitat: | Coastal bays, lagoons, intertidal mudflats, salt-marshes, inland wetlands, rivers |
| Threats: | Breeding habitat loss and degradation, disturbance, pollution |



DISTRIBUTION AND ABUNDANCE

This large wader with a strikingly long and decurved bill breeds in the boreal, temperate and steppe regions of Europe and Asia (Jensen & Lutz 2007), from Britain to Siberia and north-west China, and disperses widely during winter, from north-west Europe to southern Africa and as far east as Japan (IUCN 2012a). The majority of the species breeds in Europe and belongs to the subspecies *N. arquata arquata* (Jensen & Lutz 2007). Most, if not all, visitors to southern Africa are likely to belong to *N. arquata orientalis* and originate from western and central Siberia, east of the Urals (Underhill 1997, Nagy *et al.* 2012); some individuals, probably non-breeders, remain in southern Africa throughout the year (Underhill 1997, del Hoyo *et al.* 1996). The global population numbers more than one million individuals (Wetlands International 2006), and includes between 25,000 and 100,000 individuals



of *N. arquata orientalis* (Nagy *et al.* 2012). The largest concentrations of Eurasian Curlews in southern Africa are found in Namibia at Walvis Bay Lagoon and Sandwich Harbour, and at Lake Oponono, where 155 were counted in January 2002 (Kolberg 2013b), occupying an area of about 26,600 km², and along the south-western coast of South Africa, from Langebaan Lagoon to the Berg River estuary (Underhill 1997). Small numbers also occur in Botswana and Zimbabwe. Roughly 500 individuals are thought to winter in Namibia and South Africa (Summers *et al.* 1987, H Kolberg pers. comm.).



ECOLOGY

Birds migrate south to their wintering grounds between July and November, departing again between February and May (del Hoyo *et al.* 1996). In their southern African wintering grounds they prefer coastal bays, lagoons and estuaries, with intertidal mud- and sandflats, mangroves, salt-marshes and coastal meadows (del Hoyo *et al.* 1996). Small numbers occasionally frequent inland wetlands and rivers. Unlike the smaller Common Whimbrel (Whimbrel) *N. phaeopus*, the Eurasian Curlew is rarely seen along open shores (Hayman *et al.* 1986). They mainly forage on worms, crabs, mollusks and larval insects, and occasionally on vegetable matter, small vertebrates and eggs, by either deep-probing in intertidal mud or damp soil or by jabbing at prey (Hayman *et al.* 1986, Turpie 2005a). Birds are usually solitary, but may roost in small groups (Jensen & Lutz 2007).



THREATS

Most of the threats to the species relate to their breeding grounds and include alteration, loss, fragmentation and degradation of habitat, particularly due to afforestation and agriculture intensification; these changes have contributed to the significant decline in breeding success observed over the last decades in several European countries (Jensen & Lutz 2007). The Eurasian Curlew is also threatened by disturbance at mudflats, pollution and land reclamation (del Hoyo *et al.* 1996, Kelin & Qiang 2006). In Namibia, pollution and disturbance linked to coastal town and harbour expansion, and increasing industrialisation near its key wintering areas could pose a future threat.



CONSERVATION STATUS

Despite being widespread and relatively abundant, the Eurasian Curlew has been classified as globally *Near Threatened* because of a decline in some key populations and an estimated global overall decrease of 20% to 30% in the last three generations (IUCN 2012a). Numbers in southern Africa have declined during the last century (Stark & Sclater 1906, Wood 1916), although population



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trends have not been quantified (Nagy *et al.* 2012). The global and regional declines therefore warrant a listing of *Near Threatened* in Namibia. It is also considered *Near Threatened* in South Africa (Taylor *et al.* in press). The species is listed in Annex 2 of the Agreement on the Conservation of African-Eurasian Migratory Waterbirds (AEWA) and in Appendix II of the Convention for the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals (CMS). Namibian Parks and Wildlife legislation should afford it *Specially Protected* status.



ACTIONS

Most Eurasian Curlews in Namibia occur within protected areas, but even these areas are not immune to increasing disturbance and pollution levels related to escalating harbour traffic, industrialisation, coastal town expansion and tourism activities. Monitoring of population numbers of Eurasian Curlews along Namibia's central coast should be continued to allow reliable estimates of population size and trends. Concentrations of heavy metals in muds in the vicinity of Walvis Bay need to be monitored and contained, particularly during harbour dredging activities, to prevent heavy metal contamination of their food sources. The banning of any form of pollution entering coastal waters around Walvis Bay and ensuring the means to efficiently contain any accidental spills are essential conservation measures for this and numerous other wetland birds that use this area. The threat of siltation in the Walvis Bay region, and its effect on wader feeding ecology, must be addressed. An international Eurasian Curlew management plan focuses on conservation issues and actions pertaining to range states within the European Union (Jensen & Lutz 2007), but aims to encourage other range states to also apply the conservation management recommendations listed there.