

## **Grassland & Farmland Species – Lewis Macdonald**

Hello, I am Lewis Macdonald, formerly Member of the Scottish Parliament for Aberdeen Central and later for the North East region. While I was an MSP, I was also the Nature Champion for the curlew.

The call of the Eurasian Curlew, or whaup, is unmistakable. For many upland farmers and crofters, that song represents the start of Spring, as curlew return to breeding grounds in upland grasslands and farmlands, heath and moorlands across Scotland.

Grasslands and farmlands cover a significant part of the land area of these islands. They are home to many different species as well as the beloved curlew; these species have lived side-by-side with human settlement for many centuries, sustained by traditional farming methods and the habitats they provide.

There have, however, been alarming declines in many of these species over the past eighty years. Once common - like the call of the curlew - the song of the skylark, the rasping cry of the corncrake, and the distinctive pee-wit of the lapwing are heard rarely now, and in many places not at all.

These declines can be attributed to changes in agricultural practices, such as the increased use of chemicals on the land, and to depletion of semi-natural habitats. These species cannot thrive if safe nesting and feeding grounds are no longer there.

The loss of many of Scotland's unimproved grasslands is also of great importance for bees and other pollinators, including rare species of butterfly like the northern brown argus and the small pearl-bordered fritillary. Grasslands also harbour many rare plants, like the lesser-butterfly orchid, and a myriad of colourful and eccentric grassland fungi such as waxcaps.

By protecting and restoring our grasslands and supporting nature-friendly farming, we can preserve the unique and delicate ecosystems they sustain, and future generations of farmers and crofters can continue to enjoy the call of the curlew in the Spring.