



Blue-listed species

are considered vulnerable because they have characteristics that make them particularly sensitive to human activities or natural events.

Long-billed Curlew

Numenius americanus

At a Glance

The Long-billed Curlew is the largest shorebird in British Columbia. An adult weighs about 800 to 900 grams and measures 50 to 60 centimetres from the tip of its bill to the tip of its tail. The bill itself is about 19 cm long. Females have longer bills and slightly larger bodies than males. The curlew's wingspan can be as wide as one metre. Its plumage is sandy brown, with cinnamon-coloured underwings that can be seen when it is flying. The curlew gets its name from its loud, unmistakable call, a trilling "curleeeeeeeuuu." It also makes other sounds, such as a whistling "kli-li-li-li."

Home Sweet Home

Long-billed Curlews nest in open, dry grasslands with short vegetation that is less than 30 cm high. Areas with trees or other tall objects are avoided. Each pair defends a territory that is about 15 to 24 hectares in size. The nest is no more than a shallow scrape in the soil. It may be lined with a few scraps of dry vegetation or a little cow or rabbit dung.

This is the Life

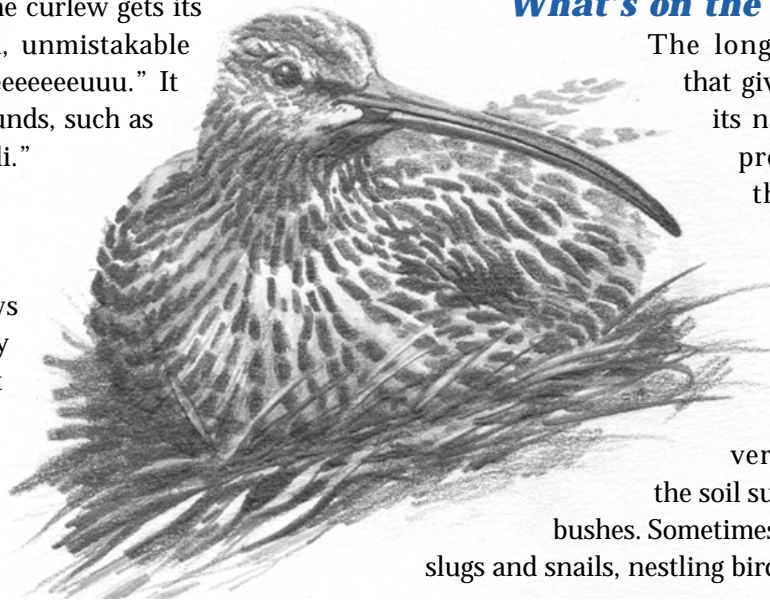
Males attract females with elaborate, undulating flight displays around the perimeter of their territories. After mating, the female lays three to five eggs. Both the eggs and the birds themselves

are camouflaged, to protect them from predators like coyotes.

Within a few hours after hatching, the young are able to run around. The nest is abandoned within 24 hours. When danger approaches, the parents sound an alarm call telling the chicks to "freeze" and hide. Meanwhile, the parents and neighbouring birds dive from the skies and gang up on the intruder to drive it off.

What's on the Menu?

The long, slender bill that gives this species its name is used to probe deep into the burrows of insects and other small creatures. Long-billed Curlews also pick small invertebrates from the soil surface and from bushes. Sometimes they eat toads, slugs and snails, nestling birds and berries.



Where and When

During the breeding season, Long-billed Curlews can be found from the southern Canadian prairies and the interior of B.C., down to Texas and Utah. As early as July, they migrate south to the southern US, Mexico and Guatemala where they spend the winter. They return north to breed in March and April. In B.C., they breed on the grasslands west of Williams Lake, as well as in the Okanagan, Similkameen and Nicola valleys,



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NO KIDDING!

To avoid detection when threatened on the nest, the Long-billed Curlew lies flat on the ground with its neck stretched out. Sometimes a curlew will stay so still on the nest that a person could walk right up to it.



The Long-billed Curlew usually builds its nest near, or even against, objects lying on the ground. Nests have been found close to fallen branches, piles of cow or horse manure and even a discarded five-gallon can. This probably helps to camouflage the adults. Or it may just help the parents remember where the nest is!



You can use Long-billed Curlews as weather vanes. When resting, they point their heads into the wind.



Long-billed Curlew pairs sometimes share their nests with another female. One pair even shared their nest with a Willet, which is a different species altogether!



In the early part of the century, the Long-billed Curlew, which was then quite common, was hunted for its wings. The wings were sold for 74 cents each in 1900, mainly to be used for decorating ladies' hats.



the East Kootenay region and other areas. Some breed as far north as Quesnel. A few birds are seen along the B.C. coast during migration, although they do not breed there. The total number of Long-billed Curlews breeding in the province is probably only a few hundred pairs.

How They're Doing

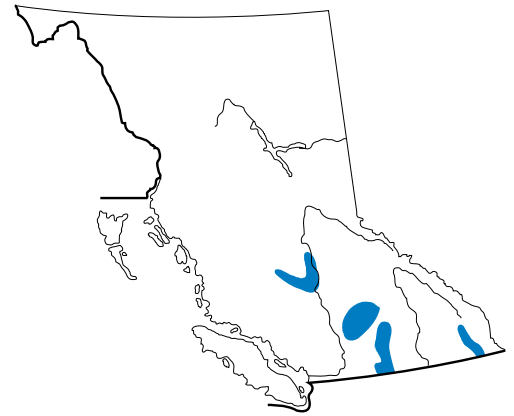
Before they were legally protected in the early 1900s, Long-billed Curlews were decimated by hunters along the Atlantic coast. They were eliminated from many parts of their range by the expansion of agriculture on the plains and prairies in the 1930s. Today, habitat loss continues to threaten this species. Moderate grazing by cattle and sheep may actually help the Long-billed Curlew by preventing grass from growing too tall. However, use of land for crop farming or urban development removes or breaks up the large areas of undisturbed grassland the Long-billed Curlew needs, and these activities are increasing. Loss of habitat and declining numbers have earned this vulnerable species a place on B.C.'s Blue List. It has already disappeared from most parts of eastern Canada and the eastern United States.

The Committee on the Status of Endangered Wildlife in Canada (COSEWIC) has designated this species as Vulnerable.

How We're Helping

A few pairs of Long-billed Curlews nest in protected areas in B.C., such as parks and reserves. Stewardship programs that will help them survive on private land are also being developed with the co-operation of ranchers. Long-billed Curlews and their eggs are protected by the British Columbia Wildlife Act and the federal Migratory Birds Convention Act.

Present breeding distribution of the Long-billed Curlew in British Columbia



How You Can Help

Human disturbance is one of the factors that may be reducing the number of Long-billed Curlews. People should keep away from nesting habitat and, especially, should not drive off-road vehicles across these areas. Report sightings of these birds and their nests to the Conservation Data Centre in Victoria, but be sure to provide exact information. The location, date, number of birds and habitat must be noted. It is also helpful if the birds' behaviour is described.

You can find out more about the Wildlife Branch and Conservation Data Centre at:

<http://www.env.gov.bc.ca/wld/>

Conservation Data Centre
Resources Inventory Branch
Ministry of Environment, Lands and Parks
P.O. Box 9344 Stn Prov Gov
Victoria, B.C. V8W 9M1

Wildlife Branch
Ministry of Environment, Lands and Parks
P.O. Box 9374 Stn Prov Gov
Victoria, B.C. V8W 9M4



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