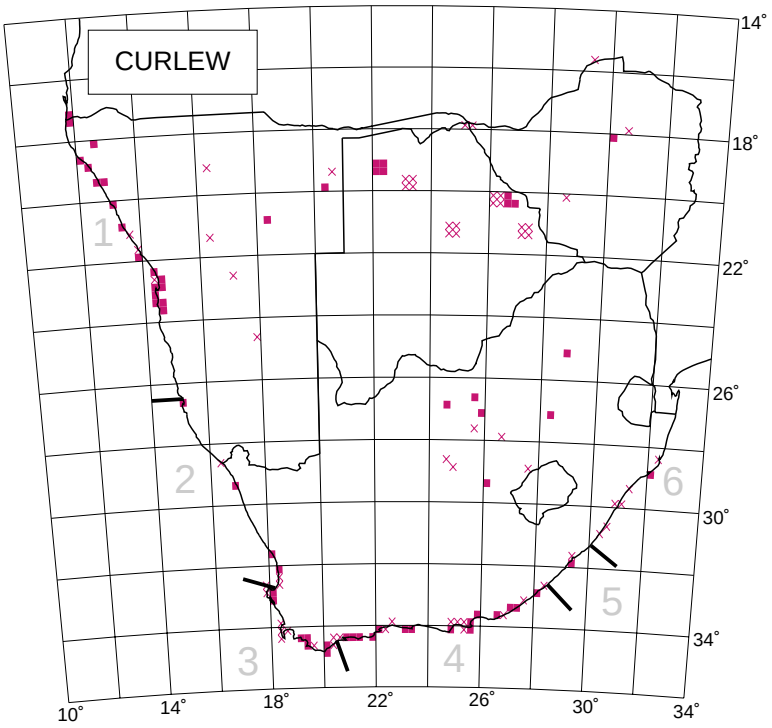
Curlew

Grootwulp

Numenius arquata



Recorded in 120 grid cells, 2.6%
Total number of records: 1023
Mean reporting rate for range: 5.0%

The Curlew breeds in steppe, forest-steppe and the southern taiga (Rogacheva 1992). The race that visits southern Africa is largely *N. a. orientalis* which breeds east of the Urals in western and central Siberia. This race migrates also to eastern Africa, southern Asia as far east as Japan, and is a vagrant in Australasia (Hayman *et al.* 1986; Lane 1987; Rogacheva 1992). Nominate *arquata* breeds west of the Urals and migrates mainly to western Europe, with some birds going as far south as Mauritania; there are no definite records for southern Africa (Clancey 1980b; *contra* Cramp *et al.* 1983).

It is a migrant to coastal wetlands, with more regular occurrences in the interior than the congeneric Whimbrel *N. phaeopus*. The distribution is concentrated on the coastlines of the southern Cape Province, Langebaan Lagoon to Berg River estuary (3318AA–3218CC), and Sandwich Harbour to Walvis Bay Lagoon (2314AD–2214CD).

The southern African coastal population of 500 Curlews (Summers *et al.* 1987a) is probably a good estimate of the total population size, because there are few birds inland. The population size of the race *orientalis* is unlikely to exceed 100 000 (from Rose & Scott 1994).

Curlews and Whimbrels may be confused. Among other features, the Curlew's bill is three times longer than its head; the Whimbrel's only twice as long (Maclean 1993b).

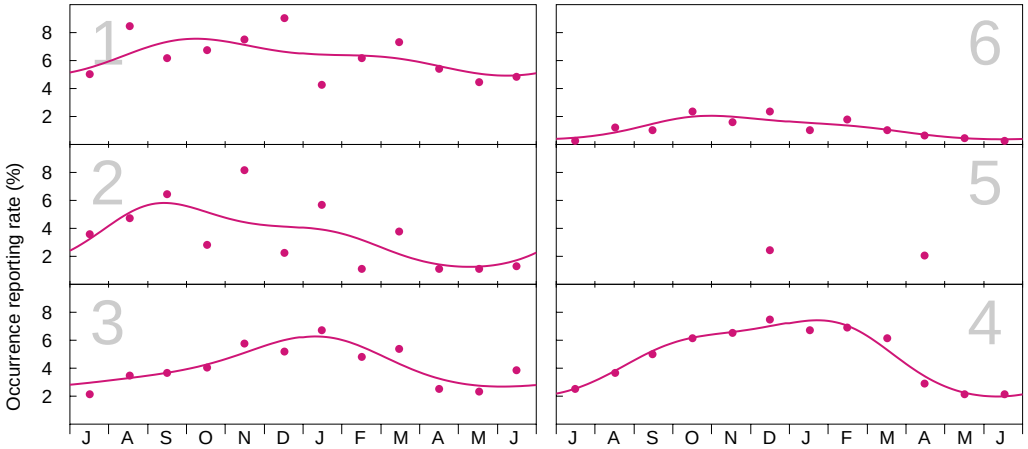
It is wary and generally found only on estuaries which are both large and little disturbed. In southern Africa, the preferred habitat is intertidal sandbanks and mudflats.

Six have been ringed, but there are no recoveries to demonstrate either the migration route or the breeding area. The latter is inferred from subspecific considerations to be Siberia. As with other large species of wader, Curlews regularly stay during the austral winter in southern Africa; as a result, the seasonality analysis provides no information on migration phenology. Count data (e.g. Shewell 1950) show arrival in August and departure in March.

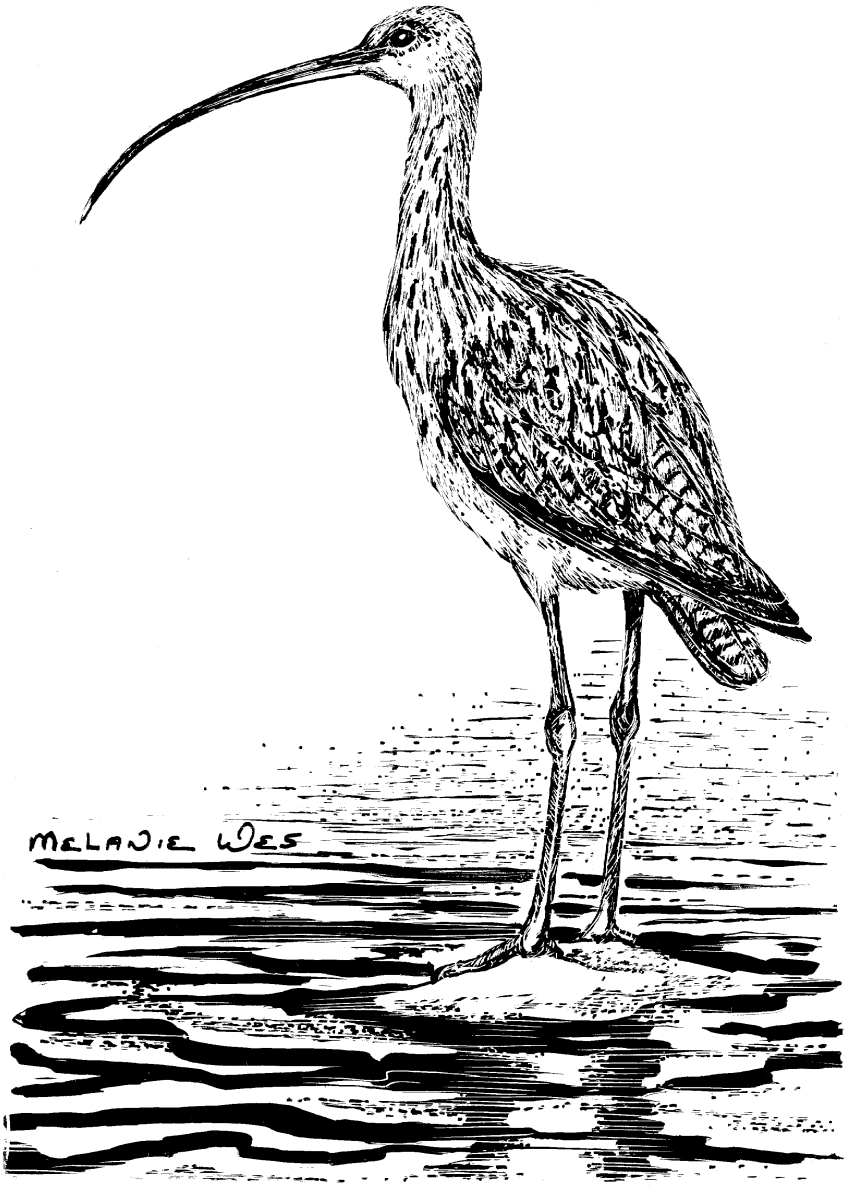
Archibald & Archibald (1950) observed two adults with what they perceived to be a chick at the estuary of the Swartkops River (3325DC) on 24 August 1950. This is the only report of breeding by a Palearctic wader in southern Africa (Hockey & Douie 1995).

It has become less abundant since the beginning of the 20th century; at that time, according to Stark & Sclater (1906), it was commonly found along the coast and was much more plentiful than the Whimbrel. Wood (1916) described the Curlew as numerous in most estuaries. The decline appears to be due mainly to factors operating on the breeding grounds: Rogacheva (1992) stated, 'In the past decades, suitable habitats have become rather significantly changed as a result of intensive development in the south of Central Siberia, and consequently the species has become rare in many areas.' This is the likely breeding area for the Curlews that migrate to southern Africa.

L.G. Underhill



Models of seasonality for Zones. Number of records (top to bottom, left to right):
Occurrence: 150, 47, 298, 394, 2, 77.



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