The Effects of Management Practices on Grassland Birds— Long-Billed Curlew (*Numenius americanus*)

Chapter G of

The Effects of Management Practices on Grassland Birds

Professional Paper 1842–G

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The Effects of Management Practices on Grassland Birds

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Contents

Acknowledgments	iv
Capsule Statement.....	1
Breeding Range.....	1
Suitable Habitat.....	1
Area Requirements and Landscape Associations.....	5
Brood Parasitism by Cowbirds and Other Species	5
Breeding-Season Phenology and Site Fidelity	5
Species' Response to Management.....	6
Management Recommendations from the Literature	7
References.....	8

Figure

- G1. Map showing breeding distribution of the Long-billed Curlew (*Numenius americanus*) in the United States and southern Canada, based on North American Breeding Bird Survey data, 2008–12.....2

Table

- G1. Measured values of vegetation structure and composition in Long-billed Curlew (*Numenius americanus*) breeding habitat by study.....12

Conversion Factors

International System of Units to U.S. customary units

Multiply	By	To obtain
Length		
centimeter (cm)	0.3937	inch (in.)
meter (m)	3.281	foot (ft)
kilometer (km)	0.6214	mile (mi)
Area		
hectare (ha)	2.471	acre
square kilometer (km ²)	247.1	acre
hectare (ha)	0.003861	square mile (mi ²)
square kilometer (km ²)	0.3861	square mile (mi ²)

Abbreviations

DDE	dichlorodiphenyldichloroethylene
n.d.	no date
ppm	parts per million
spp.	species (applies to two or more species within the genus)
VOR	visual obstruction reading

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The Effects of Management Practices on Grassland Birds—Long-Billed Curlew (*Numenius americanus*)

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Capsule Statement

Keys to Long-billed Curlew (*Numenius americanus*) management include providing large, open, level to gently rolling grasslands with short vegetation, and tailoring grazing regimes to local conditions. Long-billed Curlews have been reported to use habitats with 3–75 centimeters (cm) average vegetation height, less than or equal to 27 cm visual obstruction reading (VOR), 20–71 percent grass cover, 4–50 percent forb cover, 2–12 percent shrub cover, 7–40 percent bare ground, and less than (<) 3 cm litter depth. Descriptions of key vegetation characteristics are provided in table G1 (after the “References” section). Vernacular and scientific names of plants and animals follow the Integrated Taxonomic Information System (<https://www.itis.gov>).

Breeding Range

Long-billed Curlews breed from interior British Columbia and southern Alberta through southern Manitoba; south to central California; and east to southwestern North Dakota, central South Dakota, central Nebraska, western Kansas, northeastern New Mexico, and northern Texas (National Geographic Society, 2011). The relative densities of Long-billed Curlews in the United States and southern Canada, based on North American Breeding Bird Survey data (Sauer and others, 2014), are shown in figure G1 (not all geographic places mentioned in report are shown on figure).

Long-billed Curlew. Illustration by Christopher M. Goldade, U.S. Geological Survey.

Suitable Habitat

Long-billed Curlews use expansive, open, level to gently sloping or rolling grasslands with short vegetation such as shortgrass prairies or recently grazed mixed-grass prairies (Salt and Wilk, 1958; Bent, 1962; Graul, 1971; Stewart, 1975; Johnsgard, 1980; Bicak and others, 1982; Cochran and Anderson, 1987; Shackford, 1987; Eldridge, 1992; Clarke, 2006). They commonly nest in wet and dry prairies and in rangeland and occasionally nest in hayland, fallow fields, or stubble fields (Salt and Wilk, 1958; Bent, 1962; McCallum and others, 1977; Renaud, 1980; Cochran and Anderson, 1987; Shackford, 1994; Dugger and Dugger, 2002; Ackerman, 2007). Long-billed Curlews have been found nesting in cultivated land, such as fall-seeded winter wheat (*Triticum* species [spp.]) or spring-seeded barley (*Hordeum* spp.) (Devries and others, 2010), and will use cropland if native grasslands are not available (Saunders, 2001). Smith and Lomolino (2004) found a preference for shortgrass prairies with black-tailed prairie dog

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2 The Effects of Management Practices on Grassland Birds—Long-Billed Curlew (*Numenius americanus*)

Figure G1. Breeding distribution of the Long-billed Curlew (*Numenius americanus*) in the United States and southern Canada, based on North American Breeding Bird Survey (BBS) data, 2008–12. The BBS abundance map provides only an approximation of breeding range edges.

(*Cynomys ludovicianus*) towns over shortgrass prairies without prairie dogs, fallow crop fields, scrub-sandsage, and Conservation Reserve Program grasslands. Long-billed Curlews occasionally inhabit grasslands enrolled in the Permanent Cover Program in Canada (McMaster and Davis, 1998).

Long-billed Curlews use a variety of vegetation types and prefer somewhat short vegetation. From a range-wide survey of Long-billed Curlews in the United States, Saalfeld and others (2010) determined that the species preferred short-grass prairies and rangeland, with vegetation height ranging

from 4 to 15 cm, within 400 meters (m) of survey stops along roads (excluding interstate highways and roads with two or more lanes). Numbers of curlews were negatively associated with shrub or scrub habitats. Within 800 m of stops, Long-billed Curlews were positively associated with rangeland and hayland and negatively associated with evergreen forests. In Alberta, the strongest predictor of curlew numbers was the percentage of each sampling unit that was native grassland, whereas curlew numbers were negatively associated with the percentage of each sampling unit that was cultivated land

or riparian area (Saunders, 2001). In Nebraska, the species used areas in which 75 percent of the total vertical vegetation density (number of plant contacts with a thin rod inserted vertically into the canopy) was at heights <10 cm, compared to 63 percent in unused areas (Bicak, 1977). Preference for areas in which vegetation density is concentrated near ground level may be important in terms of the feeding behavior of Long-billed Curlews or their ability to see potential predators. In Colorado, the species used shortgrass and mixed-grass prairies and weedy areas more than expected based on the availability of those habitats, and they used agricultural areas (for example, cropland, stubble fields, and bare ground) less than expected; they did not use areas dominated by sand sagebrush (King, 1978). In north-central Oregon, areas of shrubs or areas of downy brome (*Bromus tectorum*) intermixed with patches of Sandberg's bluegrass (*Poa secunda*) were preferred or used in proportion to availability (Pampush, 1980; Pampush and Anthony, 1993). Areas of dense forbs, antelope bitterbrush (*Purshia tridentata*), and bunchgrasses were used in proportion to their availability or were avoided. Bunchgrass habitats used by adults for brood rearing were contiguous with downy brome areas used as nesting sites.

Long-billed Curlews forage in grasslands, cultivated fields, stubble fields, wet meadows, prairie dog colonies, and occasionally along wetland margins (Silloway, 1900; Salt and Wilk, 1958; Johnsgard, 1980; Shackford, 1987; Prescott, 1997). During the incubation period in southwestern Idaho, Long-billed Curlew prey-capture rates were higher in areas with short grass even though prey density was higher in areas with tall grass (vegetation measurements, prey densities, and prey capture rates were not given) (Bicak and others, 1982; Bicak, 1983). Prelaying female curlews in western Idaho foraged in shortgrass pastures within their territories during years when vegetation was short (3.6–9.7 cm tall) (Redmond, 1986). However, during a year when vegetation was dense and tall (12–15.7 cm tall, with areas as high as 40 cm tall) owing to abundant precipitation, curlews flew as far as 10 kilometers (km) from their territories to forage. In south-central Washington, Long-billed Curlews preferred to forage in areas with higher topographic diversity (ridges and small dunes) and higher plant species diversity than in flatter areas with more homogeneous vegetation (Allen, 1980).

Nests often are located near cow dung or other conspicuous objects, possibly for concealment (Silloway, 1900; Bent, 1962; King, 1978; Johnsgard, 1979; Allen, 1980; Cochran and Anderson, 1987; Clarke, 2006). Additionally, nests often are placed on hummocks greater than or equal to 2.5 cm above the immediate surroundings, possibly to improve visibility of predators and to prevent flooding in otherwise level fields (Cochran and Anderson, 1987).

In North Dakota mixed-grass and shortgrass prairies, Long-billed Curlews prefer gently rolling terrain with gravelly soils (Stewart, 1975). In central Montana, Long-billed Curlews nested on dry portions of mixed-grass prairies, which were elevated above their surroundings and located near wet meadows (Silloway, 1900). Long-billed Curlews in Nebraska

nest on upland slopes of native vegetation near moist meadows that are used for foraging (Johnsgard, 1980). Grassy flood plains adjoining a creek provided nesting habitat in south-eastern Colorado (Davis, 1949). In the Oklahoma Panhandle, Long-billed Curlews usually were observed in areas with clay loam soils on <1 percent slopes (Shackford, 1987). In northern Utah, Long-billed Curlew nests were found in irrigated and nonirrigated grass pastures and on alkali flats (Sugden, 1933; Forsythe, 1972; Paton and Dalton, 1994). Nests in that area were built in bunchgrasses, clumps of sedges (*Carex* spp.), stands of inland saltgrass (*Distichlis spicata*), or red saltwort (*Salicornia rubra*) (Forsythe, 1972). In south-central Washington, Long-billed Curlew breeding density was higher in topographically diverse areas, although most nests were placed on somewhat flat ground (neither the proportion of nests nor the slope of the ground was given) (Allen, 1980). Of 59 nests, 37 percent were 30–100 cm from an object (for example, big sagebrush (*Artemisia tridentata*) branches, rocks, dirt mounds, horse manure, metal cans, bunchgrasses), 31 percent were less than or equal to 30 cm from an object, 27 percent were immediately adjacent to an object, and only 5 percent were greater than 100 cm from an object (Allen, 1980). Big sagebrush, antelope bitterbrush, trees, dried tumbleweeds (*Salsola* spp.), dirt mounds, rocks, tree stumps, and fences were used as perches.

Vegetation composition and structure play an important role in nest selection. In 1 of 2 years in South Dakota grazed mixed-grass prairies, Clarke (2006) found no difference among nest sites, brood points, and random points for VOR; coverage of grasses, forbs, and bare ground; and distance to water. Long-billed Curlews selected nest sites similar to random points, with an average of 55 percent grass cover, 47 percent forb cover, and an average VOR of 27 cm. The plant species around nest sites ranged from an average height of 10 to 45 cm. In the second year, nest sites were in shorter vegetation with lower VORs than random points (Clarke, 2006). Nest sites had lower shrub coverage than random points, and slope was steeper at random points than at nest sites. In the second year, nest sites had lower VOR, more bare ground, and less forb coverage than in the previous year, whereas brood points also had lower VOR and grass and forb coverage, but more bare ground. Daily nest survival rates were positively related to average VORs taken at nest sites. Daily nest survival rate was higher at nest sites dominated by forb cover than at nest sites dominated by grass cover. Distance to the nearest manure pile was shorter from nest sites than from random points.

At Crescent Lake National Wildlife Refuge in Nebraska, Gregory and others (2011) found strong evidence for a negative effect of large-scale VOR (mean of 16 samples within 2–25 m from nests) on nest survival, and a weak but negative effect of small-scale VOR (mean of 4 samples within 2 m of nest) and forb cover on nest survival. Bare ground had a weak but positive influence on nest survival. Grass cover, litter cover, vegetation depth, and height of tallest vegetation had no influence. In Wyoming, nest sites within hayfields and pastures were characterized by less bare ground and higher percentage

cover of grasses (values were not given) than random sites (Cochran and Anderson, 1987). Hayfields and pastures with nests had lower percentage of grass cover (mean of 20 compared to 32 percent), greater forb cover (mean of 16 compared to 4 percent), and were drier (45 compared to 3 percent of random locations characterized as “dry”) than hayfields and pastures without nests. In Colorado and Texas, mean vegetation height was 11 cm centered at seven nests and 20.6 cm at 3 m from nests (King, 1978).

In Utah, 10 habitat patches containing nests had shorter vegetation (mean of 5.6 cm) than random habitat patches (mean of 9.0 cm) and had more bare ground 6–15 m from the nest (mean of 34–36 percent) than random patches (mean of 38–39 percent) (Paton and Dalton, 1994). At nest sites, however, vegetation <3 m from the nest was taller (mean of 6.5 cm) than vegetation 6–15 m from the nest (mean of 4.9–5.5 cm). Percentage of bare ground <3 m from the nest was lower (mean of 18 percent) than greater than or equal to 6 m from the nest (mean of 28–39 percent). In north-central Oregon, several vegetation variables differed between nesting areas and non-nesting areas (Pampush, 1980; Pampush and Anthony, 1993). Compared to non-nesting areas, nesting areas had shorter vegetation (24 compared to 29 cm at non-nesting areas), grass with less variation in height, total vegetation with less variation in height, grass with higher vertical density (0.8 compared to 0.2 contacts per 5-cm height increment) in the 25–50-cm height increment, and shrubs with lower total vertical density (0.02 compared to 0.05 contacts per 5-cm height increment). Nest density within study areas was negatively correlated with vegetation height and vertical density; nest density was positively correlated with percentage cover of bare ground and with the evenness of forb height. Depredation of eggs and chicks was high in habitats other than downy brome, possibly indicating that predator densities were higher or nests were more vulnerable in those habitats.

Exotic or invasive vegetation may reduce or improve habitat quality, depending on plant species and region (Dugger and Dugger, 2002). In South Dakota, nest sites dominated by yellow sweet clover (*Melilotus officinalis*), junegrass (*Koeleria macrantha*), green needlegrass (*Nassella viridula*), and buffalograss (*Bouteloua dactyloides*) had 100-percent daily nest survival rate, whereas survival rates were lower at nest sites dominated by Japanese brome (*Bromus japonicus*) and western wheatgrass (*Pascopyrum smithii*) (Clarke, 2006). American vetch (*Vicia americana*), junegrass, and buffalograss represented a higher proportion of species composition at nest sites than at random points. In southeastern Washington, 71 percent of 21 nests were in areas dominated by a mixture of downy brome and Sandberg’s bluegrass and 29 percent were in areas dominated by downy brome alone (Allen, 1980). Nearly all areas containing downy brome and Sandberg’s bluegrass were used for nesting, whereas areas containing solely downy brome were not always used for nesting. Allen (1980) attributed preference for areas dominated by the two plant species to a lower percentage cover of live (7 percent) and dead (65 percent) downy brome in those areas than in areas

dominated by downy brome alone (live: 14 percent; dead: 92 percent). Plant communities dominated by downy brome but containing substantial amounts of tumbleweed mustard (*Sisymbrium altissimum*), as well as other grass communities (for example, wheatgrass communities), were not used for nesting. In north-central Oregon, mean nest density was highest in downy brome and Sandberg’s bluegrass, followed by bunchgrasses, dense forbs and shrubs, and antelope bitterbrush (Pampush, 1980; Pampush and Anthony, 1993). In Colorado and Texas, six of seven nests were in areas dominated by buffalograss and blue grama (*Bouteloua gracilis*), and one nest was in an area dominated by sand dropseed (*Sporobolus cryptandrus*) (King, 1978).

Adults and broods move to habitats surrounding nest sites for cover, shade, and food (Maher, 1973; King, 1978; Allen, 1980; Pampush, 1980; Pampush and Anthony, 1993). After eggs hatch, adults and broods continue to forage in shortgrass and mixed-grass habitats, but they increase their use of areas that have more vegetative cover (for example, cropland, stubble fields, and weedy areas) (Maher, 1973, 1974; King, 1978; Allen, 1980; Pampush, 1980; Pampush and Anthony, 1993), particularly if vegetation is sparse at the nest site (Maher, 1974). In South Dakota, brood habitat contained a greater proportion of sixweeks fescue (*Vulpia octoflora*), Indianwheat (*Plantago* spp.), junegrass, and American vetch than random points in 1 year and a greater proportion of creeping spikerush (*Eleocharis palustris*) and water than random points in another year (Clarke, 2006). Use of areas with tall, dense vegetation in the Texas Panhandle and north-central Oregon may have provided chicks with an important source of shade or concealment cover (King, 1978; Pampush, 1980; Pampush and Anthony, 1993). In central South Dakota, Long-billed Curlews with chicks were reported in grass that was 18 cm tall (Spomer, 1981). In Oklahoma, Long-billed Curlews with young were observed in cultivated fields, shortgrass prairie, and tame grassland (Shackford, 1994).

Proximity to water may be an important factor in habitat selection (Bent, 1962; McCallum and others, 1977; Cochran and Anderson, 1987; Shackford, 1987). From a range-wide survey of Long-billed Curlews in the United States, Saalfeld and others (2010) determined that numbers of Long-billed Curlews were positively associated with wetland habitats within 400 m of survey stops along roadsides. In South Dakota, both nest sites and brood locations were within 500 m of the nearest water source (Clarke, 2006). During a dry year, broods used habitats consisting of a greater proportion of water than random points, and broods were located almost 200 m closer to water than in a year of average precipitation. In the Platte River Valley of Nebraska, Long-billed Curlews nested at higher densities in wet meadows than in upland prairies (Faanes and Lingle, 1995). Within the Nebraska sandhills at Crescent Lake National Wildlife Refuge and surrounding grasslands, proximity of mixed-grass uplands to wet meadows was the most important criterion in nest-site selection (Bicak, 1977). Wet meadows were used for feeding, loafing, and fledging young and were aggressively defended. In southeastern

Colorado, 41 percent of 63 Long-billed Curlew observations were within 91 m of standing water, and 68 percent of observations were within 403 m of water (McCallum and others, 1977). In southeastern Colorado and northwestern Texas, 39 percent of 354 curlew observations occurred within 400 m of stock ponds or irrigation facilities (King, 1978). Shackford (1987) suggested that a drop in the water table in the panhandle of Oklahoma caused Long-billed Curlews to favor areas near irrigated fields over upland, shortgrass sites. In Utah, nests often were placed near the edges of alkali flats of the Great Salt Lake (Paton and Dalton, 1994). In southeastern Alberta, Long-billed Curlews were less common on wet transects (defined as having wetlands intersecting transects along greater than 5 percent of their length) than on dry transects (Gratto-Trevor, 1999). Because curlews are known to return to the same area to nest each year, regardless of whether water is still available, curlews may be found nesting far from water if water sources have disappeared between breeding seasons (McCallum and others, 1977). In Alberta, Sliwinski and Koper (2012) found that Long-billed Curlew abundance decreased by 25 percent within 0.31 km of wetland edges, possibly because vegetation density was highest near wetlands.

Seasonal moisture levels may affect the abundance, distribution, and brood-survival rates of Long-billed Curlews. In an assessment of North American Breeding Bird Survey data for the conterminous United States, O'Connor and others (1999) reported a negative relationship between Long-billed Curlew abundance and the mean annual precipitation and the 30-year average of January temperature. Hartman (2008) evaluated the influence of precipitation on brood and chick daily survival rate in northeastern Nevada. The cumulative precipitation from October of the previous year through May of the current year was included as a variable in analyses because it corresponded to the period of greatest precipitation and time during which snowpack used to irrigate Nevada hayfields in the current year accumulated in the nearby mountains. Brood survival rate was slightly greater in years with higher winter precipitation, and individual chick daily survival rate was greater in wet years.

Area Requirements and Landscape Associations

Territory size is highly variable across the species' breeding range (De Smet, 1992). In southwestern Idaho, curlew densities were positively correlated with size of the management unit and with amount of area within the management unit that contained vegetation <10 cm tall (Bicak and others, 1982). Territory size averaged about 14 hectares (ha) in the most densely populated areas, and there was an unoccupied buffer zone of 300–500 m around the edge of suitable habitat (Redmond and others, 1981). In southeastern Washington, areas with diverse topography and habitat (shrubby areas near the nest sites) supported smaller curlew territories (6–8 ha)

than did open, flat, less diverse habitat, which supported larger territories (20 ha) (Allen, 1980). An increase in the breeding population between years did not result in the reduction of territory size, but rather resulted in an increased use of marginal habitat. Allen (1980) indicated that the existing territories may have already reached a minimum size. In South Dakota, the average 95-percent home range for five territories in 1 year ranged from 70 to 490 ha and ranged from 52 to 100 ha for the brood-rearing period; in the second year, the 95-percent home range for 13 territories ranged from 115 to 2,910 ha (Clarke, 2006).

After eggs hatch, adults and their broods often leave the nesting area. In southern Saskatchewan, one pair of adults with a brood was recorded more than 6.5 km from the nest site 6 days after hatching (Maher, 1974; Sadler and Maher, 1976).

Little information exists about the effect of habitat fragmentation on Long-billed Curlews. Although Long-billed Curlews prefer large expanses of grasslands, the effects of fragmentation on curlews has been poorly studied but is considered a potential threat to breeding populations (Sedgwick, 2006). In Alberta, Sliwinski and Koper (2012) found no effect of road or cropland edges on curlew abundance. In British Columbia, Ohanjanian (1992) determined that breeding Long-billed Curlews used only grassland areas that were greater than 250 m.

Brood Parasitism by Cowbirds and Other Species

No known records of brood parasitism by Brown-headed Cowbirds (*Molothrus ater*) exist (Shaffer and others, 2019). Long-billed Curlews and Willets (*Tringa semipalmata*) will occasionally parasitize each other's nests (Sugden, 1933; Bent, 1962; Dugger and Dugger, 2002).

Breeding-Season Phenology and Site Fidelity

Long-billed Curlews arrive on the breeding grounds from about mid-March through May and depart for the wintering grounds from August to October (Silloway, 1900; Sugden, 1933; Salt and Wilk, 1958; Bent, 1962; Maher, 1974; Stewart, 1975; Allen, 1980; Pampush, 1980; Renaud, 1980; Redmond and others, 1981; Bicak and others, 1982; Paton and Dalton, 1994; Saunders, 2001; Clarke, 2006). In some areas, fall departure may begin as early as June or July (Maher, 1973; King, 1978; Allen, 1980; Clarke, 2006; Page and others, 2014), especially by unsuccessful breeders (Allen, 1980; Paton and Dalton, 1994). Peak breeding season in North Dakota is early May through early June (Stewart, 1975). A single renesting attempt following depredation of a first clutch was observed in south-central Washington (Allen, 1980). The

second nest also was depredated following completion of the clutch. Clarke (2006) reported that one of four radio-marked pairs with a failed first nesting attempt renested in 1 year; the second nest was placed 332 m from the original nest. Six of 13 pairs renested in a second year, with two of those renesting twice, and renest distance ranged from 0.9 to 6 km from the original nest. In Nevada rangeland and hayfields, Hartman and Oring (2009) reported a high proportion of renesting after initial nest attempts, but no cases of double brooding.

Historically occupied sites are reused by curlews every year, and some individual birds may reuse the same territories from year to year (McCallum and others, 1977; Allen, 1980; Redmond and Jenni, 1982, 1986; Cannings, 1999). In South Dakota, 15 of 26 radio-marked adults returned to their breeding site of the previous year; nests were placed 0.1 to 1.1 km from previous nest sites (Clarke, 2006).

Species' Response to Management

Burning can improve habitat for Long-billed Curlews by removing shrubs and increasing habitat openness (Pampush and Anthony, 1993). During the breeding season after a fall range fire, there was a 30-percent increase in the estimated curlew breeding density in western Idaho (Redmond and Jenni, 1986). However, in central South Dakota mixed-grass prairies, curlew density did not differ between fall-burned and unburned pastures (Clarke, 2006).

Haying can be used to provide the short vegetation preferred by nesting curlews (Cochran and Anderson, 1987). In Nevada, hayfields provide suitable habitat for nesting Long-billed Curlews by providing optimal brood-rearing habitat that results in high chick survival (Hartman, 2008). Long-billed Curlews preferred nesting in tame hayfields and open rangeland more so than in shrub-desert rangeland (Hartman and Oring, 2009). Hayfields were irrigated from melting snow, grazed with as many as 4 cattle per ha until early May, and then hayed in mid- to late July; rangeland and shrub-desert plots received low-intensity cattle grazing of <0.25 cattle per ha (Hartman, 2008). Mammal predation accounted for most nest failures, but raking of irrigated hayfields, trampling by cattle, cattle-induced nest abandonment, and flooding owing to irrigation also contributed to nest failures. No chicks were lost to mowing or other ranching activities (Hartman, 2008). Broods that hatched in rangeland moved to hayfields within days of hatching, and no chick mortality was attributed to agricultural activity (Hartman and Oring, 2009).

In Wyoming hay meadows, ranchers traditionally scattered cow dung from fall- and winter-pastured cattle using branches, logs, or harrows (Cochran and Anderson, 1987). This practice, termed "dragging," was detrimental to nesting birds because curlews often built nests near cow dung. The practice generally has declined since the 1960s but still can be common locally. In north-central Oregon, alfalfa (*Medicago sativa*) fields were used for foraging as long as vegetation

remained <30 cm tall (Pampush, 1980; Pampush and Anthony, 1993). In Alberta, however, Long-billed Curlews did not use haylands (Prescott, 1997).

Grazing can be beneficial if it provides suitably short vegetation, particularly during the prelaying period (Bicak and others, 1982; Cochran and Anderson, 1987). In Colorado, Montana, Nebraska, North Dakota, South Dakota, and Wyoming, Long-billed Curlews preferred lightly grazed areas with aridic ustoll and aridic borollic soils and heavily grazed areas with typic ustoll soils (Kantrud and Kologiski, 1982). In southern Alberta, Long-billed Curlews used only continuously grazed mixed-grass pastures and were absent from mixed-grass pastures grazed in early summer, spring-grazed tame pastures, and deferred-grazed (grazed after July 15) mixed-grass pastures (Prescott and others, 1993). In Nebraska, curlews were present on grazed areas and were absent from ungrazed areas (Cole and Sharpe, 1976). In Colorado, curlew response to grazing over large areas of mixed-grass and shortgrass prairies was variable, but response to grazing in shrubsteppe habitats was negative (Bock and others, 1993). In Wyoming, nests in areas that were grazed during the incubation period had lower hatching success rates than nests in ungrazed areas (Cochran and Anderson, 1987).

In central South Dakota mixed-grass prairies, curlew density was not related to American bison (*Bison bison*) or cattle density (densities ranged from 0 to 223 bison per square kilometer [km²] and from 0 to 42 cattle per km²), and there was no difference in curlew densities between pastures grazed by bison, by cattle, or ungrazed pastures (Clarke, 2006). However, risk of nest trampling was dependent on livestock density. In 1 year, 3 of 15 nests were trampled by bison, with nest trampling starting at a bison density of 218 bison per km². In the second year, 5 of 27 nests were trampled by bison, and 3 of 27 nests were trampled by cattle, with nest trampling starting at 77 bison per km² and 33 cattle per km². Daily nest survival rates were negatively related to density of bison grazed in pastures containing nests. Sugden (1933) cautioned that sheep are more likely to trample nests than cattle. Of 119 nests in western Idaho, 4.2 percent were lost to trampling by livestock (Redmond and Jenni, 1986). Of 25 nests that failed owing to ranching operations in Nevada, such as from raking and trampling, 18 were in irrigated hayfields (Hartman, 2008). Ten nests were trampled by cattle: 7 of 94 nests in hayfields and 3 of 30 nests in rangeland.

In southwestern Idaho, Long-billed Curlews preferred recently grazed areas and avoided areas that had not been grazed within the past year (Bicak and others, 1982). Rotational and deferred grazing may provide suitable habitat, but year-long grazing was not recommended. Areas grazed by sheep alone or sheep and cattle had higher densities of curlews than did areas grazed by cattle alone. Pastures that included sheep in the grazing regime had more area of short grass (32 percent of area sampled <10 cm tall) than pastures grazed by cattle alone (19 percent of area sampled <10 cm tall). Curlew density was negatively correlated with height and vertical density of vegetation, and height of vegetation was negatively

correlated with grazing intensity and animal stocking rates. Sheep, however, were less likely than cattle to follow established routes through the grassland, and thus sheep trampled and reduced the amount of dead vegetation to a greater extent than did cattle. Neither cattle nor sheep could graze dense stands of perennial wheatgrasses, such as crested wheatgrass (*Agropyron cristatum*), to a height that was suitable to curlews. In northwestern South Dakota, Long-billed Curlews were seen in pastures with cattle as well as in unoccupied pastures, but no curlews were observed in pastures with sheep (Timken, 1969).

Long-billed Curlews prefer grazed prairies but will forage and occasionally even nest in cropland, including fallow fields, forage crops, and grain crops (McCallum and others, 1977; Pampush, 1980; Renaud, 1980; Cochran and Anderson, 1987; Pampush and Anthony, 1993; Saunders, 2001; Devries and others, 2010). However, Renaud (1980) reported that Long-billed Curlews avoided large cultivated areas in Saskatchewan. In the Platte River Valley of Nebraska, conversion of upland prairies to cropland had a negative impact on curlews through the destruction of nesting habitat (Faanes and Lingle, 1995). Long-billed Curlews in the Oklahoma Panhandle frequently used areas with a mix of shortgrass pastures and cropland, which often was planted to wheat (Shackford, 1987). In Alberta, Long-billed Curlews were more common in mixed-grass prairies than in cultivated areas (Owens and Myres, 1973). In central South Dakota, Long-billed Curlew adults were observed in a bare, disked field (Spomer, 1981). The only two nests found in cropland during a 3-year Oklahoma study were destroyed by agricultural operations (Shackford, 1994). Researchers suggested that Long-billed Curlews may experience better nesting success in wheat fields than in fields that are being prepared for plowing. Cochran and Anderson (1987) suggested that, although hayfields in Wyoming that had been cultivated may provide suitable vegetation and bare ground, they lacked elevated mounds and hummocks preferred for nesting. Nests in hayfields and pastures that were fertilized had lower success rates than nests in unfertilized fields, presumably because of disturbances caused by mechanical field operations.

Pesticides can be detrimental to Long-billed Curlews (Blus and others, 1985). Three Long-billed Curlews suffering convulsions or displaying erratic behavior were collected in northeastern Oregon. One male curlew appeared to have died of dieldrin poisoning (5.9 parts per million (ppm) tissue fresh weight) and another of chlordane poisoning (4.8 ppm fresh weight heptachlor epoxide and 4.4 ppm fresh weight oxychlordane). The third, a female, may have sustained lethal injuries as a result of impairment from poisoning (2.2 ppm fresh weight heptachlor epoxide and 2.7 ppm fresh weight oxychlordane). Seven eggs collected in the same region all contained 4.26 ppm fresh weight of dichlorodiphenyldichloroethylene (DDE), and some (numbers not given) contained low concentrations of polychlorinated biphenyls and chlordane metabolites. Blus and others (1985) suggested that concentrations of contaminants in the eggs were too low to influence

the reproductive success of Long-billed Curlews substantially. Peakall (1976) reported that one individual from Alberta had 14 ppm wet weight of DDE and 0.05 ppm of polychlorinated biphenyls.

Management Recommendations from the Literature

Preventing conversion of upland prairie to cropland is important in maintaining suitable habitat for Long-billed Curlews during the breeding season (Faanes and Lingle, 1995). To maintain healthy breeding populations, Saalfeld and others (2010) emphasized the importance of providing grassland habitats of short stature, free of woody plants, and embedded in a landscape dominated by other grasslands. Habitat areas need to be at least three times as large as a Long-billed Curlew territory, which averages about 14 ha, because the species requires an unoccupied buffer strip 300–500 m wide around the boundary of a territory (Redmond and others, 1981).

Tall, dense residual vegetation should be removed before the prelaying period (March to April) so that adults do not have to leave their territories to forage (Redmond, 1986; R.L. Redmond, University of Montana, written commun. [n.d.]). Removal of residual vegetation from previous growing seasons is especially important after years of above-normal precipitation. Burning may improve habitat in some areas by reducing shrub coverage and increasing habitat openness (Redmond and Jenni, 1986; Pampush and Anthony, 1993). Haying and grazing can be used to provide the short vegetation and reduced vertical plant density preferred by nesting curlews, but these disturbances should be timed so that short vegetation is available early in the season and active nests are not destroyed (Cochran and Anderson, 1987).

In west-central Wyoming, it is not advisable to drag hayfields to break up cow dung; Long-billed Curlews prefer to nest near cow dung (Cochran and Anderson, 1987). However, in Idaho, curlews did not show a preference for nesting near cow dung, and R.L. Redmond (University of Montana, written commun. [n.d.]) suggested that dragging may be acceptable if it occurs after the breeding season when eggs or chicks are no longer vulnerable. Hayfields in Nevada have high conservation value because they provide optimal brood-rearing habitat and thus, high productivity (Hartman and Oring, 2009). The practice of irrigation may be necessary to create the vegetation growth needed for brood-rearing habitat, yet may cause some nests to be flooded, so care must be taken (Hartman, 2008). In Nevada, land raking should be completed before the peak of nest initiation, which is late April (Hartman, 2008). Removing cattle from hayfields earlier than mid-April might alleviate some nest failures caused by cattle trampling and disturbance. Coyote control may be the single best factor in increasing curlew populations. In Nevada hayfields, predation, especially by large mammalian predators such as coyotes, was the greatest cause of nest failure (Hartman and Oring, 2009). In the

final year of the study, nest success (52 percent) was more than twice the average from the previous 3 years after the removal of six coyotes from one of the focal ranches.

Grazing is beneficial in providing the short vegetative structure preferred by Long-billed Curlews, although timing and intensity of grazing treatments may need to be adjusted to environmental conditions and biological factors (Bicak and others, 1982; Cochran and Anderson, 1987; Bock and others, 1993; Clarke, 2006). For northern mixed-grass prairies, Clarke (2006) recommended reducing grazing pressure from April 10 to June 25 to reduce nest trampling by livestock. This recommendation may mean reducing cattle density below 33 cattle per km² and bison density below 220 bison per km², and, during years of drought or following a fire, reducing bison density below 77 bison per km². Grazing during the curlew incubation period should be avoided; in Wyoming, nests in areas that were grazed during incubation had lower hatching success rates than nests in other areas (Cochran and Anderson, 1987). Native grasslands need grazing to provide shorter cover for broods, but not too short so as to limit use for escape cover and shade; moderate grazing provides the patchy vertical distributions required for chicks to survive (Clarke, 2006). Rotational and deferred grazing may provide suitable habitat, but year-long grazing is not recommended (Bicak and others, 1982).

Curlews may nest in cropland, and where they have been known to do so, agricultural producers can incorporate fall-seeded crops, such as winter wheat and fall rye (*Secale* spp.), into their rotations to provide cropland habitats with reduced disturbances for nesting curlews (Devries and others, 2010).

Breeding habitat and nesting curlews should be protected from detrimental human activities, such as vehicular use, researcher disturbance, and shooting (Sugden, 1933; Redmond and Jenni, 1986). In Saskatchewan, abandonment of breeding sites by Long-billed Curlews was attributed to researcher disturbance (Maher, 1973, 1974).

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Table G1. Measured values of vegetation structure and composition in Long-billed Curlew (*Numenius americanus*) breeding habitat by study. The parenthetical descriptors following authorship and year in the “Study” column indicate that the vegetation measurements were taken in locations or under conditions specified in the descriptor; no descriptor implies that measurements were taken within the general study area.

[cm, centimeter; %, percent; --, no data; ≤, less than or equal to; <, less than; spp., species (applies to two or more species within the genus)]

Study	State or province	Habitat	Management practice or treatment	Vegetation height (cm)	Vegetation height-density (cm)	Grass cover (%)	Forb cover (%)	Shrub cover (%)	Bare ground cover (%)	Litter cover (%)	Litter depth (cm)
Ackerman, 2007 (nests)	North Dakota	Mixed-grass prairie, tame grassland	--	2.8–13.1	7.4–10	--	--	--	--	--	0.1–0.5
Allen, 1980 (nests)	Washington	Tame grassland	Idle	≤20 ^a	--	--	--	--	--	--	--
Bicak and others, 1982	Idaho	Shortgrass prairie, tame grassland	Grazed	<10	--	--	--	--	--	--	--
Clarke, 2006 ^b (nests)	South Dakota	Mixed-grass prairie	Grazed	13	10.2–27.0	45.6–55.1	10.8–46.9	0–0.03	8.5–36.2	--	--
Clarke, 2006 ^b (broods)	South Dakota	Mixed-grass prairie	Grazed	12	10.4–20.3	34.6–59.4	5.3–10.8	0.1–1.1	16.1–53.2	--	--
Cochran and Anderson, 1987 (study plots)	Wyoming	Tame grassland	Multiple	--	--	71.4 ^c	10.1	--	9.3	--	--
Cochran and Anderson, 1987 (study plots)	Wyoming	Shortgrass prairie	Multiple	--	--	57.9 ^c	7.8	--	22.7	--	--
Cochran and Anderson, 1987 (nest fields)	Wyoming	Shortgrass prairie, tame grassland	Multiple	--	--	19.9	15.5	--	--	--	--
Cochran and Anderson, 1987 (nests)	Wyoming	Shortgrass prairie, tame grassland	Multiple	--	--	61	--	--	7	--	--
Gregory and others, 2011 (nests)	Nebraska	Mixed-grass prairie	--	5–75	0.5–6.8	--	--	--	--	--	0–2.3
King, 1978 (nests)	Colorado, Texas	Multiple	Grazed	11	--	--	--	--	--	--	--
Pampush, 1980	Oregon	Multiple	Grazed	25–33	--	30–53	4–20	2–12	26–40	--	--
Paton and Dalton, 1994 (nests)	Utah	Multiple	--	6.5	--	--	--	--	18	--	--
Redmond, 1986	Idaho	Shortgrass prairie	Grazed	3.6–15.7	--	--	--	--	--	--	--
Spomer, 1981 (broods)	South Dakota	Mixed-grass prairie	--	18 ^d	--	--	--	--	--	--	--

^aHeight of Sandberg’s bluegrass (*Poa secunda*) and downy brome (*Bromus tectorum*).

^bThe sum of the percentages is greater than 100%, based on methods described by the authors.

^cValue includes grasses, sedges (*Carex* spp.), and rushes (*Juncus* spp.).

^dGrass height.

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