

# To record or not to record?

why it is so important to record the species on your land

We have a problem. What is more, it is a problem that is not going anywhere unless we take steps to solve it. It is all about recording what we find in the countryside.

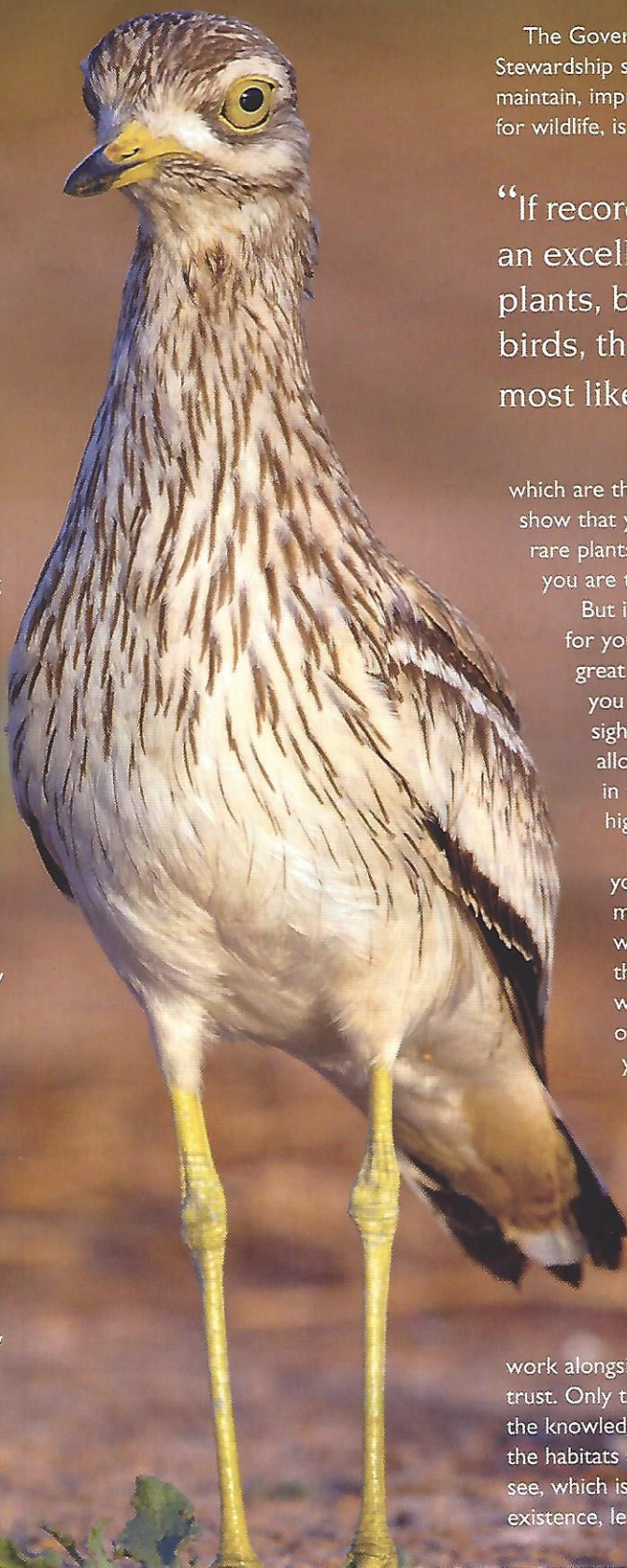
I spend much of my time talking to landowners, land managers, keepers, and as often as not, many of them have an in-built fear of both the public and officialdom, knowing exactly what species they have on the piece of land that they oversee.

They are worried about the consequences of rare or endangered species being found and reported, resulting in information that all can observe. Might this lead to hundreds of 'twitcher' types being found wandering around, attempting to find this special species, or could the area now be designated somehow, resulting in more red tape? Worst of all, might legislation ensue which stops them from managing the land as they wish?

Is this anxiety unfounded or do they have some grounds to support this belief? For many years, farmers in the Brecklands of Norfolk worked closely alongside conservationists to encourage the rare stone curlew in one of its remaining strongholds in this country. This approach worked well and the population reached 250 pairs in 2000. Then in 2001, an area of 14,000 hectares of arable land was suddenly designated a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) because of its importance to the stone curlew. Many farmers questioned the need for this legislation and all the regulation that it brought with it, when things had all seemed to be moving along so well. Some felt betrayed.

I'm sure also, that we have all heard of a newt here or a bat there, holding up huge construction plans and costing vast sums of money to mitigate the impact of the work carried out; well it can frequently happen at a farm level too when trying to implement 'improvements'.

Now, don't get me wrong – I'm at the front of the queue when it comes to protecting wildlife and their habitats, but here is the dilemma.



The Government's Countryside Stewardship scheme that funds farmers to maintain, improve and create new habitats for wildlife, is now very targeted at areas

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which are the richest in wildlife. If records show that you have an excellent suite of rare plants, butterflies and birds, then you are the most likely to be funded.

But if the small number of records for your area show nothing of any great importance, perhaps because you have kept the more unusual sightings to yourself, or not allowed surveys to be carried out in the first place, then funding is highly unlikely.

Now, I'm sure a number of you will be thinking 'well, land managers can't have it both ways can they?' I have to say that I have some sympathy with this view, but on the other hand, what business do you know, that would merrily volunteer information which might result in added regulation or indeed stop progress altogether?

My overriding interest in all this is to see wildlife across our country thriving. The greatest way to achieve this is to work alongside land managers to gain their trust. Only then can we set about imparting the knowledge about how to look after the habitats and species which they oversee, which is so fundamental to their very existence, let alone their success.