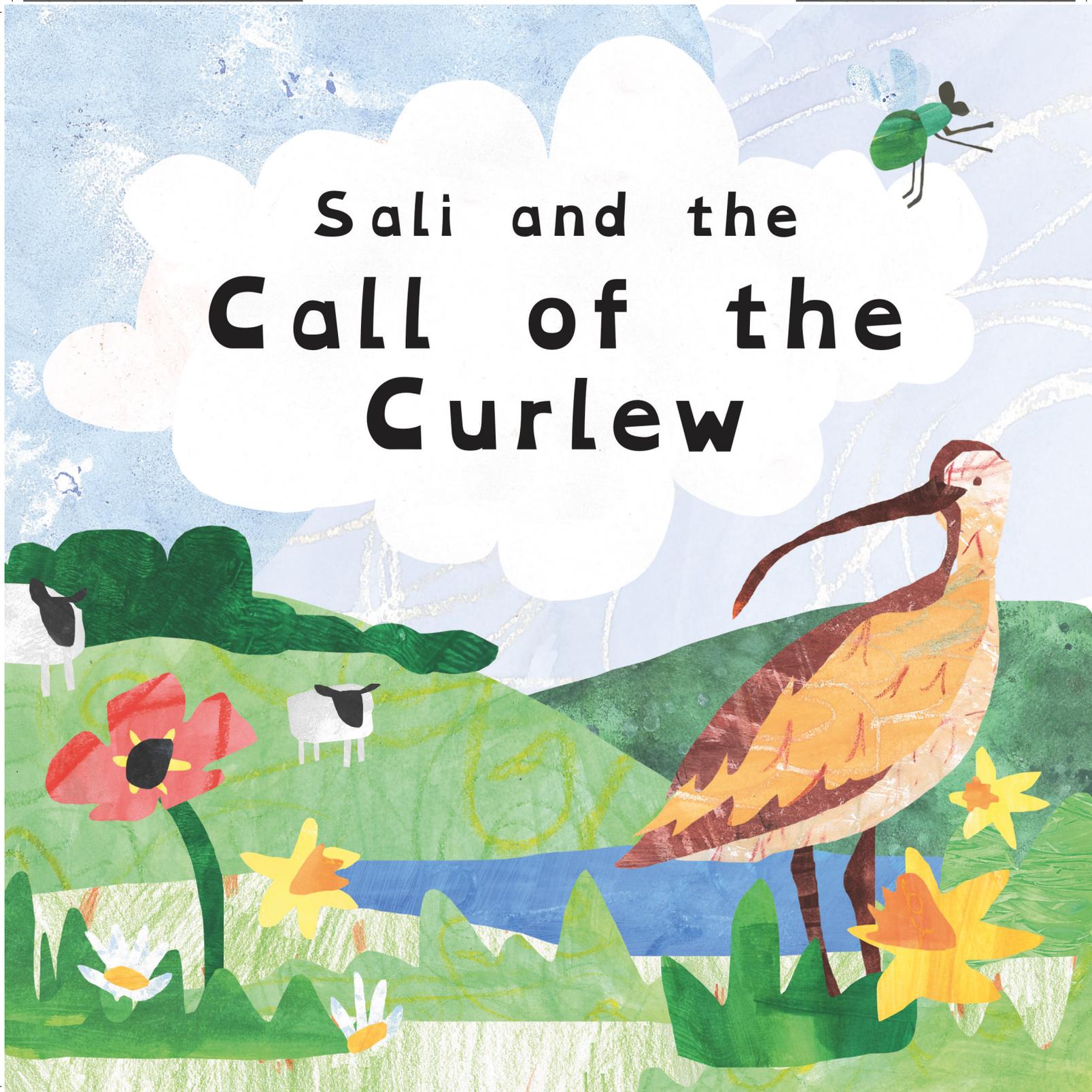




Sali and the Call of the Curlew







The Eurasian Curlew is one of Wales's most iconic yet threatened bird species.



Curlew are the UK's largest wading bird with a distinctive long, down-curved bill and bubbling call. Typically found in open moorlands, wet grasslands and upland pastures, the curlew was once a common sight across the Welsh uplands and farmland but numbers have plummeted.

Despite laying four eggs every year, they are only managing to raise about one chick every four years. This is too low to keep the population stable and at the current rate, curlews will be extinct in Wales by 2033.

This book will take you on a journey with Sali and her Taid as they work together to help curlews on their farm. Along the way, you'll discover why these birds are so important and how you can make a difference too!

Curlew and People Officer, Sam Kenyon





"Curlee, curlee!"

Sali hugged her Taid's arm as they listened to the curlew's call floating on the wind.

"Another season gone... just one chick fledged, Sali bach" said Taid quietly.

"I wish there were more" Sali replied. "But at least one little chick grew strong and took flight."





"She's faced so many dangers already" said Taid. "But now she's on her way. If she's lucky, she'll have a long, healthy life ahead of her."

Together, they watched the curlew rise into the sky, her mottled brown feathers glowing in the late summer sun, her long, curved bill silhouetted against the bright blue sky.





As autumn came, the leaves danced in the breeze, falling from the trees and the nights turned cold and crisp.

"It's so quiet without Pegi's call on the farm" Sali sighed one morning.

"Now that the harvest is finished" said Taid, zipping up his coat against the slight chill, "how about we go for a drive to the seaside?"



Sali's eyes lit up. "Will there be ice cream?"

"We'll see about that" Taid chuckled. "Go tell your Mam where we're off to."





Sali raced across to the farmhouse to tell her Mam and Dad.



She spent lots of time with her Taid. She loved his stories, the way he cared for the animals and how he always noticed the wildlife on the farm, from the swallows in the barn to the owls in the old trees.





At the seaside, a river sparkled silver, winding its way through soft banks of sand and mud.

Sali paused, holding her ice cream cone, as a rolling, bubbling call rose above the breeze, so familiar it made her heart leap.

"Listen!" she gasped. "It's a curlew! Do you think it could be Pegi Pig Hir and her chick?"

"It might be!" Taid smiled, scanning the shore.





Among the flock of waders, a tall bird stood proudly, her mottled brown feathers catching the light, her long, curving bill unmistakable.

"It's her, I just know it" Sali whispered. "It's our Pegi Pig Hir!"

"And her chick will be with her too!" said Taid.





Sali grinned with excitement. "Next year, will we have lots of curlews at home?"

"Some of these birds come from faraway lands" said Taid. "They stop here to feed on worms and tiny shrimp in the mud. But most won't travel up to our hills to nest like Pegi does, which makes us very lucky to have her."





Sali licked the last of her ice cream thoughtfully.

Pegi had always returned to Fferm y Nant, for as long as Sali could remember. She couldn't imagine the countryside without her.





Winter took hold of the land. The fields lay cold and wet and the hills wore a blanket of frost. Taid's tractor rumbled into the yard, thick spirals of mud flying from its wheels.

Sali was waiting. "Taid" she asked, "is there anything we can do to help more curlews nest here next year?"



Taid paused. "Hmm" he said with a twinkle in his eye. "Let me see..."

Taid always had good ideas.





"I'll clean out the old pond and add some new shallow pools" said Taid, steering the tractor across the field. "Curlews need damp ground to feed on. Then I'll thin out the rushes and trim the hedges. That way, foxes and crows won't be able to sneak up and take the eggs or chicks. We could plant more wildflowers too!"



Sali sat beside him in the tractor, gently bouncing as they worked. She loved seeing the change in the seasons and being with Taid as he cared for and worked the land.





A few days later, at her village school, Sali's teacher asked "What should our next class project be about?"

"How about something to do with the environment?" called out one child.

Sali's hand shot up. "Curlews need our help! My Taid says it's hard for curlews to raise their chicks in the fields these days. There are so many struggles for them and that's why we don't see as many as we used to."



"Curlews..." the teacher smiled. "What else do we know about them?"



"The Welsh name is Gylfinir" said one boy, "it describes their long bills".

"My dad calls them Chwibanwr" added another, "because of their whistling call!"

"My Nain says Aderyn y Glaw, the bird of the rain" said a girl, "because the curlews sing more when rain is on the way!"



"Great!" said the teacher. Curlews it is!"

Sali smiled to herself, she would always call her curlew Pegi Pig Hir, Welsh for Peggy Long Beak.



The children had lots of wonderful ideas for their curlew project.

"We could put up signs on the footpaths to remind people to keep their dogs on leads" said one. "It would protect the nests on the ground and stop birds from being chased!"

The ideas kept coming faster and faster.





"A blacksmith could craft curlew sculptures to perch on the bridleway gates, reminding people to tread carefully and stick to the paths."

"We could plant a meadow at school so there are more insects for the curlews to feast on!"

"And the baker could make curlew-shaped cookies for us to sell at the summer fair, so everyone learns about our project!"



"Great! Let's get cracking!" said the teacher with a smile.





As winter rolled into spring, daffodils were still blooming around the farm and the evenings grew lighter. Sali sat at Taid's big kitchen table, busy decorating curlew-shaped cookies.

Suddenly, she heard a familiar call outside, "Curlee, curlee!" She jumped up and ran to the window.

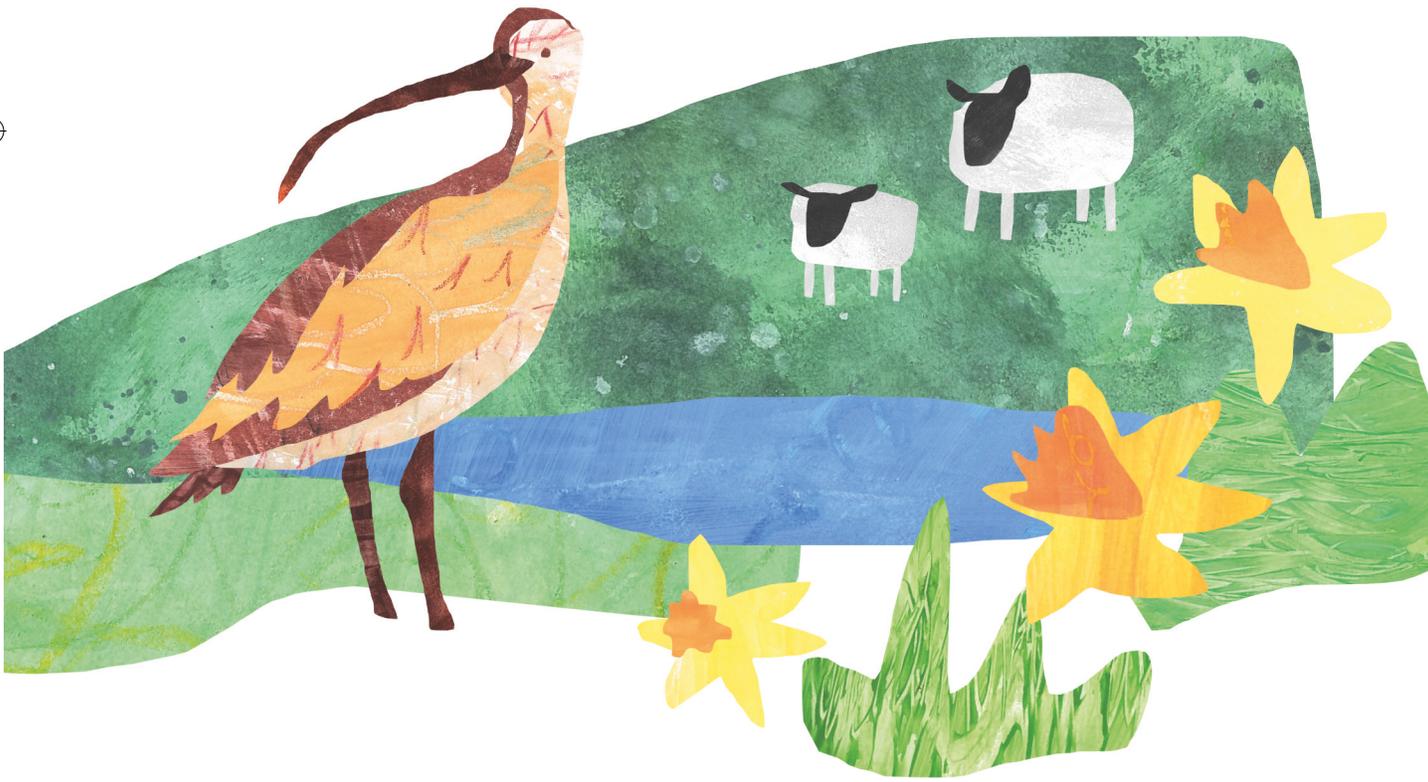




"Taid! They're back!" she cried. Together, they hurried out to the fields.

Two curlews had landed near the grazing sheep.

"It's Pegi, I'm sure of it!" said Sali, watching the long bill dip deep into the earth. "And she has a mate!"





Before long, the hedgerows turned white with blossom and the air was filled with the bubbling calls of the two curlews.

“With a bit of luck, they’ll be wanting to nest soon, probably in the same field as last year” said Taid. “The damp grass, heavy with dew, helps them find food easily and the open patches munched down by sheep give the birds a clear view to spot any sneaky predators.”





Over the next few weeks, Sali tiptoed quietly around the edge of the field, but she still couldn't find a nest. "Taid... why are the nests so hard to find?" she wondered.

"They're hidden in small scrapes on the ground" Taid explained. "Their mottled brown feathers help them blend perfectly with the grass and rushes. Legend says that St. Beuno blessed the curlews to help keep their nests safe."

"St. Beuno was very wise" said Sali softly.



"I think we should fence off that part of the field to keep them safe" Taid said with a knowing smile.



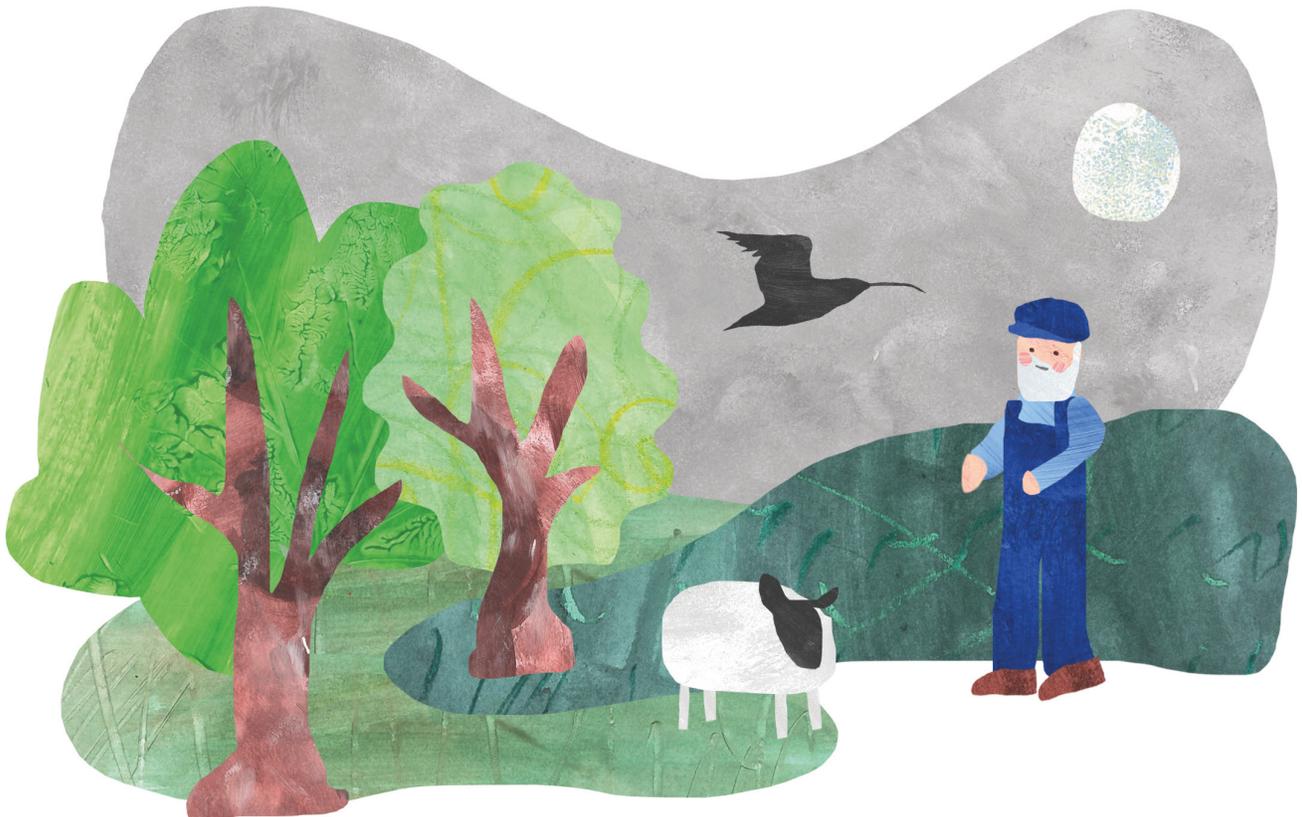


As Taid had predicted, Pegi nested very close to where she had the year before. They caught quick glimpses of Pegi, who had grown even more secretive and quiet. They watched her mate move slowly and carefully through the grass, before disappearing into the tall green rushes.

"I think they have a nest!" said Taid, his voice full of excitement.



Late one night, Taid was out checking on his flock. Suddenly, he heard Pegi's alarm call, a sharp, frantic whistle echoing across the fields. He held his breath, hoping the nest was safe.



Night-time was a dangerous time for Pegi, alone on the nest while her mate rested out on nearby moorland.

In the morning, they peered carefully over the low hedge into the field. It looked as though the nest must still be there, all was settled and quiet.



"Let's wait to cut the meadow until the chicks have fledged" said Taid.

"Will you have enough fodder for the cows and sheep?" asked Sali.

"We'll manage, Sali bach" Taid replied with a reassuring smile.



Summer moved in gently across the valley. The lambs were growing fast and the sweet smell of freshly cut grass drifted in from the fields beyond the nest.



Around the pond, flowers bloomed. Beetles scurried around Sali's feet as she walked. Grasshoppers sprang into the air, while silvery spider webs stretched between the rushes, glinting in the sun.





Then, on a warm July morning, Sali burst into the farmhouse. "Taid! Taid! Quick! Come and see! There are chicks!"

They hurried to their usual hiding spot by the hedge. Three tiny chicks wobbled on long, gangly legs but they managed to follow Pegi, who showed them how to probe the grass with their bills to find insects.

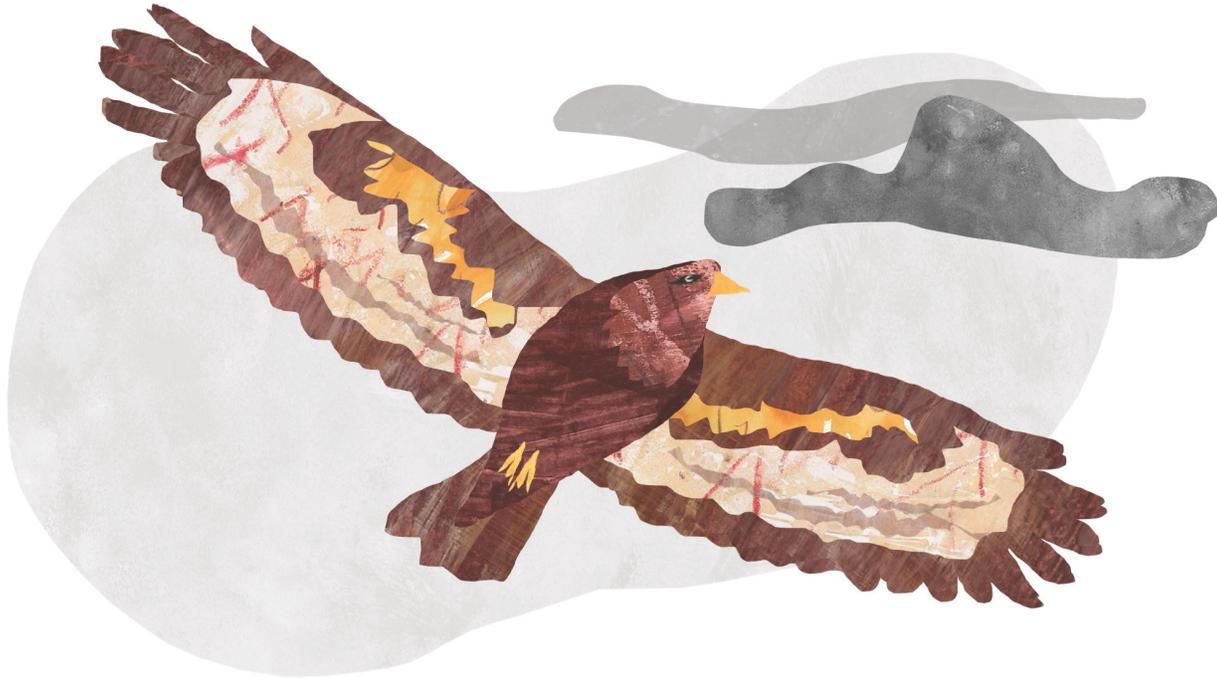
"Look's to be plenty of food for them" said Taid. "It's a good start!"





Sali watched from her hiding spot as often as she could. She loved watching the little chicks grow stronger.

One afternoon, a dark shadow glided overhead... it was a buzzard circling high above. Then, in a flash of feathers and fierce, piercing cries, Pegi's mate swooped up from the meadow. He darted and dived, chasing the buzzard away.



A moment later, one of the chicks popped its head above the grass. Sali let out the big breath she hadn't realised she was holding!





As time passed, the chicks grew quickly.

"Look, Taid! The first chick is flying!" Sali beamed as she watched it lift into the sky, wings wide and strong. She loved seeing them feeding, exploring and growing stronger every day.

"It won't be long before they head back to the coast" said Taid.



And soon, the time came. The year had turned and the air felt cooler. Sali and Taid stood side by side, watching as the three young curlews took to the sky.

"We've done better this year" said Taid proudly.

"We might have even more next year!" Sali replied. "It would be amazing to hear the call of the curlew in some of the other fields too."



Taid smiled warmly. "That would be something special Sali bach."



About Curlew Connections Wales

Curlew Connections Wales is a conservation project working to protect the rapidly declining Eurasian Curlew in Wales.

The team helps look after curlews by keeping their nests safe, managing their habitats and supporting farmers, land managers and volunteers who want to make a difference. They also share knowledge and skills with local communities so that more people understand and care about these amazing birds.

By working together, we can help curlews survive and hear their bubbling calls in the Welsh skies for generations to come.



Gary Jones Wildlife Photography







Sali has always loved the bubbling call of the curlew on her Taid's farm. But each spring, fewer and fewer curlews return. With Taid's help, Sali learns how small changes can make a big difference, and together they set out to help more chicks take flight to the skies each year.

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