

Actions to take if you believe you have seen a Slender-billed Curlew



5 points to remember

- Be careful not to disturb the bird.
- Try to take photographic images, ideally digitally, even via a mobile phone through a telescope. Please also try to make sound recordings of calls.
- Take detailed notes. (See below for key details.)
- Contact key local experts (ideally from national rarities committee or BirdLife International Partner) to come and verify your record and help photograph the bird. (Contact details are available from www.slenderbilledcurlew.net).

Adult Slender-billed Curlew. Morocco. Pic: C. Gomersall.

- Report sighting to the Slender-billed Curlew Working Group (see panel on left).

Essential information to note

Date: Please describe the bird(s) as fully as possible, referring to the field characters used to distinguish the Slender-billed Curlew(s) from Eurasian Curlew *Numenius arquata*, eastern form of Eurasian Curlew *N. a. orientalis* and from Whimbrel *N. phaeopus*. Please also give any details of moult. Describe any calls.

Number of birds:

Location: (include name of nearest town and GPS co-ordinates or grid reference).

Observer(s): full names, addresses, e-mail and phone numbers.

Distance: your distance from the bird(s) in metres. If the bird was with any other waders, please report which species.

N.B. Please also report any probable Slender-billed Curlews you have seen in the past, but not yet reported, and also places and dates searched without any Slender-billed Curlew records.

This document will be available in other languages.

For further reference images, sound recordings of calls, and details on steps to take in searching for Slender-billed Curlews, please visit:

www.slenderbilledcurlew.net



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To facilitate the rapid reaction of experts to help verify record and undertake conservation action, please immediately send a report (including digital images, sound recordings or any other evidence) to:

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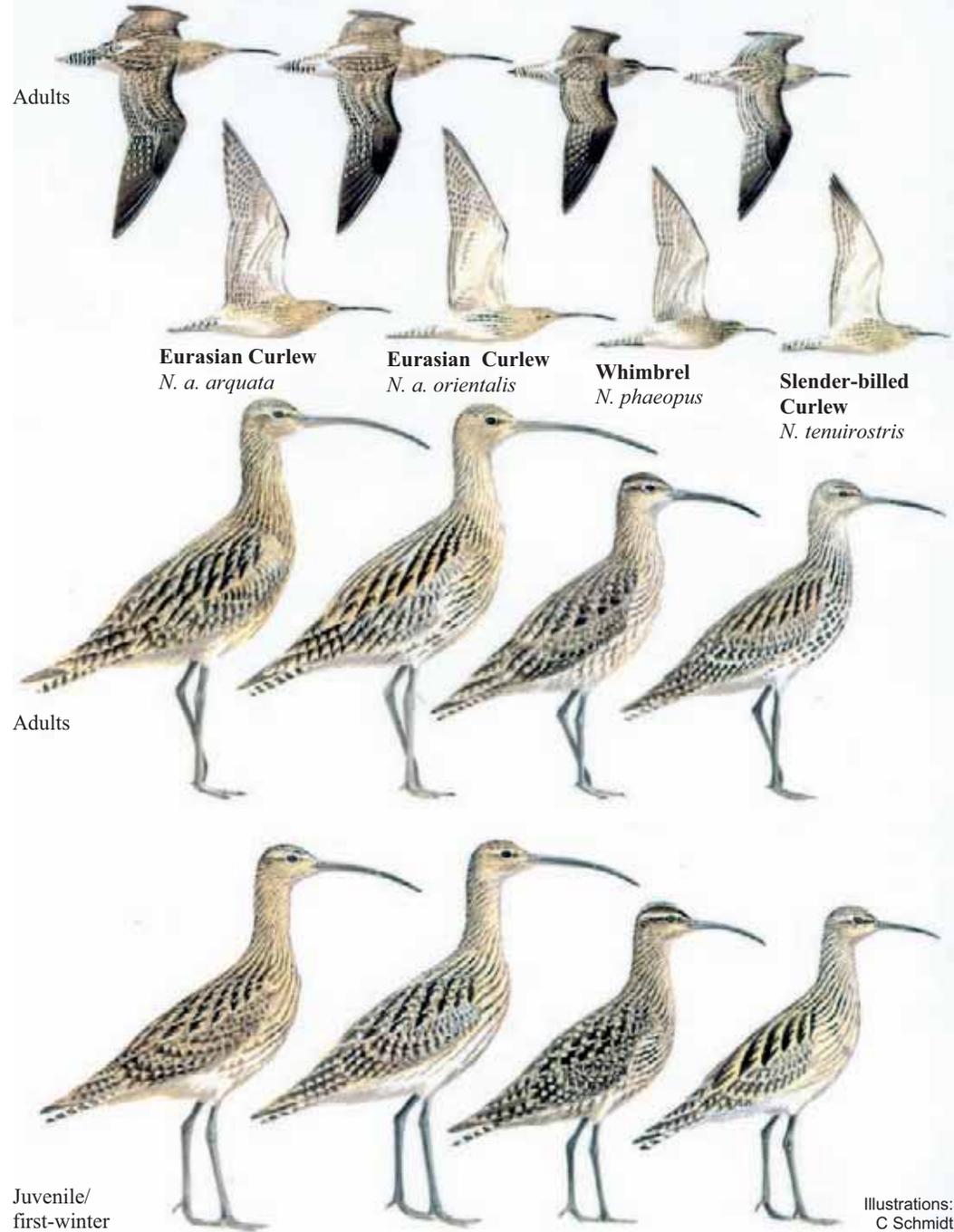
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A toolkit for finding Slender-billed Curlews

The Slender-billed Curlew quest – the greatest European birding challenge



Juvenile/
first-winter

Illustrations:
C Schmidt

The challenging art of Slender-billed Curlew identification

The Slender-billed Curlew is the rarest bird in Europe, North Africa and the Middle East, its population perhaps numbering fewer than 50 individuals.

It is critically endangered with global extinction. A 'last push' is now on to find the Slender-billed Curlew before it is too late.

Birdwatchers are urged to remain vigilant when checking curlews, and to organise birdwatching holidays and expeditions to likely Slender-billed Curlew sites.

Identification:

Slender-billed Curlews may be distinguished from Eurasian Curlew and Whimbrel using the features below.

Within the species, females are usually larger and heavier, and have longer bills.

Bills of juveniles are much shorter in summer and will attain final length only in their first autumn. Freshly-moulted feathers are darker and show stronger contrasts than older, faded ones.



Juvenile Eurasian Curlew, probably *orientalis*, showing very limited number of cross-barred feathers. Observers need to look carefully to see these feathers. But bird was large with long bill. Ukraine. Pic: S. McElwee

Calls:

Some calls are Eurasian Curlew-like, but shorter and higher pitched. Two others are distinctive of Slender-billed Curlew:

- a short 'kew-ee', presumed to be an alarm call, given in flight;
- Eurasian Curlew-like immediately followed by 6-7 very short notes 'ti-ti...' becoming progressively higher in pitch and

reminiscent of certain larger raptors. The Eurasian Curlew-like part of the call is softer, sweeter, faster and higher in pitch, consisting of four identical 'cour-lee' calls, with 0.25 seconds pause in between, second syllable distinctly higher in pitch than first. The tittering part of the call is higher pitched than the distinctive 'bi, bi, bi, bi, bi, bi' of the Whimbrel.



From skins of LWL-Museum für Naturkunde Münster. H-O Rehage.

European curlew species at a glance	Slender-billed Curlew (SBC)	Whimbrel (WH)	Eurasian Curlew (EC) <i>N. a. arquata</i> / <i>N. a. orientalis</i>
Size	Small. (Bill tip to tail tip 360-410mm).	Length: 400-460mm.	Much larger than SBC, length 500-600mm. Wing length also much longer.
Bill shape and structure	Always has fine, sharp tip. Perhaps the best identification feature. Slender, much narrower and less deep at base than EC. Can be evenly curved or straighter at base, with curve towards tip.	Evenly curved, but more abruptly downwards towards the tip, with extreme tip blunt, not sharp.	Variable, many evenly-curved, but others straighter at base with distal portion curved. Tip shows distinctive narrowing, then expansion; so blunt-tipped like WH. Many <i>N. a. orientalis</i> have very deep, strong-looking bills, especially females.
Legs	Dark grey. Shorter and darker than EC.	Dull, bluish-grey. Length similar to SBC.	Much longer than SBC and WH. Paler blue-grey in colour.
Tail	White with four or five relatively-thin dark bars.	Banded, with brown and off-white bars of equal width.	Variable. Usually a brownish wash over central feathers. Others vary: off-white, white, or brownish-white with dark bars of variable width.
Under-body markings	No cross-barred feathers on breast, flanks or belly at any age. Adults are spotted on pale back-ground. Spots vary in shape. Upper breast finely streaked. First-summer birds show spotting on flanks. Juveniles show pale-buff suffusion across breast and flanks, with fine dark streaks down to lower belly.	Adults have streaked upper breast. Often looks dark; much darker than SBC or EC. Lower breast and flanks show some cross-barred feathers. Juveniles can look more spotted, like SBC, but see head pattern. Larger <i>N. p. alboaxillaris</i> looks paler than nominate <i>N. p. phaeopus</i> .	Look carefully at breast markings and flanks. Most have a number of cross-barred feathers, some have only a few (see figure opposite), but these feathers are <i>always present</i> .
Under-wings	Always shows white under-wing coverts and axillaries. Only a dark wedge on under-primaries.	Not very pale. Much dark barring, except for <i>N. p. alboaxillaris</i> , which has much paler underwings, but still has striped head.	Variable. Some birds showing dark barring on pale background and some white under-wing coverts (especially <i>N. a. orientalis</i>).
Upper-wings	Dark outer primaries, often contrast with pale shaft on outermost primary. Pale secondaries show more white.	Darker upper wings than SBC and EC; more uniform. <i>N. p. alboaxillaris</i> paler.	Upperwings similar to SBC, perhaps less contrast, with darker secondaries.
Crown marking	Brown, finely streaked, dark. Sometimes shows a very thin, central crown stripe, not conspicuous.	Very distinctive: two thick, black to medium-brown lateral crown stripes. One above each eye, and running across the crown.	Plain brown with fine, dark streaking, sometimes has thin crown stripe, like SBC.