

## A California Riceland Success Story

This sizeable shorebird, a federal Species of Conservation Concern, frequents California rice fields and can occur in large flocks. Rice fields provide a bounty of food options, which are expertly collected by the bird's impressive curved bill.



## LONG-BILLED CURLEW

*Numenius americanus*

### Current and past population data and region's population objectives:

Overall estimate for the species' entire range is roughly 139,000-183,000 for North America (U.S. and Canada). A broad-scale survey of curlews in the Central Valley in August 2009 tallied about 21,000 individuals, of which 13 percent were in the Sacramento Valley. Anecdotal evidence suggests, however, that the proportion of birds in the latter region likely increases substantially in late fall or early winter after the post-harvest flooding of rice fields. The Southern Pacific Shorebird Conservation Plan's objective is to increase the number of wintering curlews in the Central Valley.

### Information regarding each species' benefit to rice growers:

No known documented benefit to growers, but it is possible that birds forage on invertebrate pests in rice fields in winter, which may keep pest numbers down in the summer rice-growing period.



## SPECIES IN FOCUS

Prepared by:



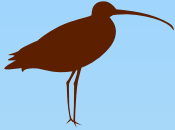
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PRBO Conservation Science

# LONG-BILLED CURLEW

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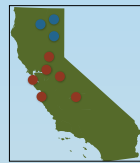
## Appearance



**Size:** 20–26 in  
**Weight:** 17-34 oz

Largest shorebird in North America. Has extremely long, dark and pink bill that curves downward; long, blue-grey legs; and cinnamon-brown, marbled plumage, which is darker on upperparts and lighter and less marbled on underparts. Female is slightly larger than male.

*Bills of females are significantly longer than those of males.*



## Range

Curlews can be found in the lowlands of California (Central Valley, coast, etc.) in every month of the year, though their main period of occurrence is July

through March. Non-breeders can occur through the summer (breeds in the state in northeastern California).

## Habitat



Nests in short grass and mixed-grass habitats of the Great Plains, Great Basin and intermontane valleys of western U.S. and southwestern Canada. During spring and fall migration, uses a variety of habitats including rice fields, grasslands, wetlands and agricultural fields. In the Sacramento Valley highest use in winter appears to be in rice fields. Flocks converge on nighttime roosts in shallow water or in fields. During mid-day, birds can roost in fields, but also at wetlands, evaporation ponds, etc.

## Food/feeding



On grassland breeding grounds, forages by pecking and probing for terrestrial insects, although foraging methods during this time have not been well documented. During winter and migration, probes long bill deeply in firm mud for marine crustaceans, benthic invertebrates and some small vertebrates in coastal areas. Foraging methods in the Central Valley have not been well documented.

## Behavior

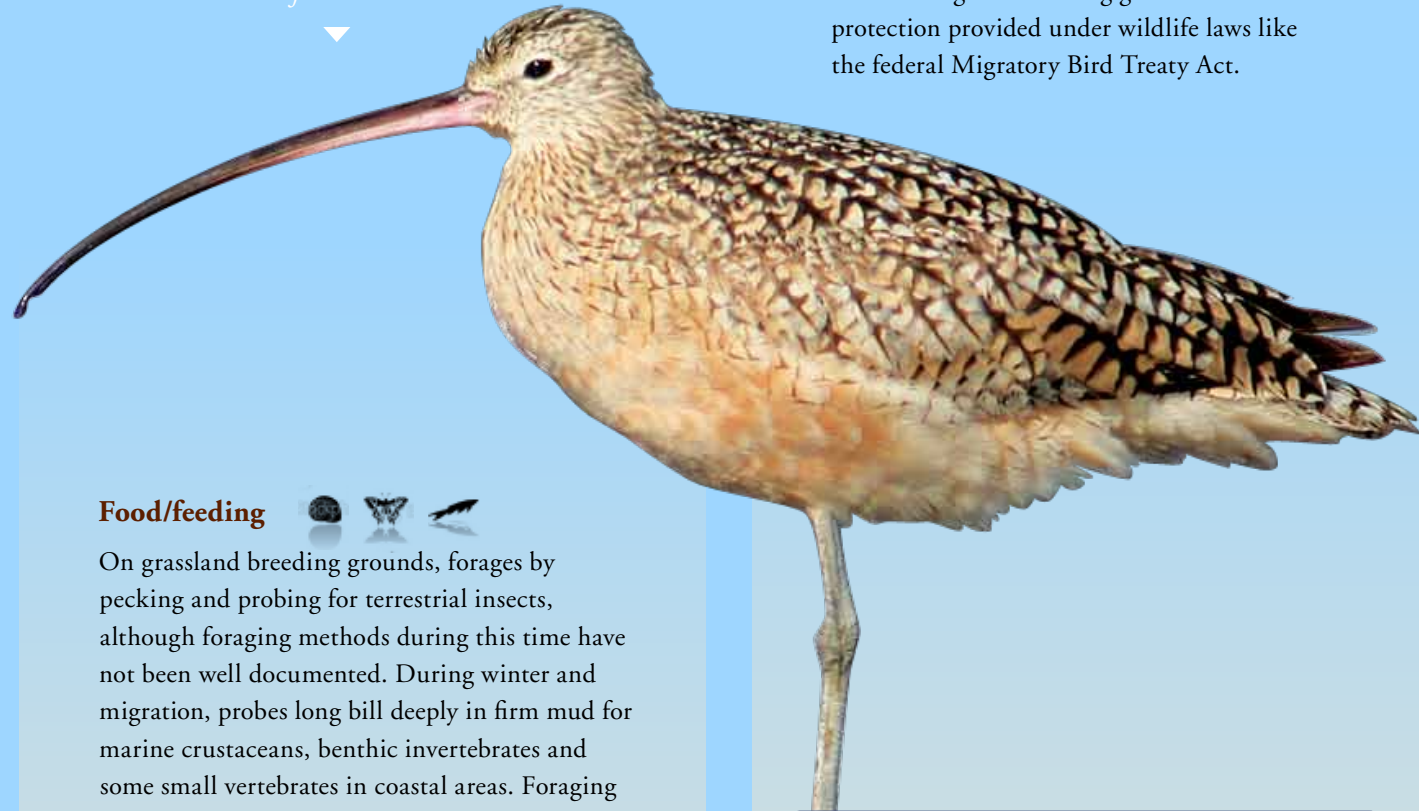


Curlews in the Central Valley are found in small to very large groups, though birds in the same field will spread out when foraging. Flocks can be over 1,000 birds. These can occur in migration or winter and when foraging in fields in the daytime or when resting in daytime or nighttime roosts.

## Conservation Status



Under the U.S. Shorebird Conservation Plan, the Long-billed Curlew is a species of federal concern; reflecting population declines, low population size, and threats it faces on the nonbreeding and breeding grounds. General protection provided under wildlife laws like the federal Migratory Bird Treaty Act.



## Benefits of rice cultivation to species/group

Flooded and non-flooded rice fields provide feeding habitat in winter.

## Additional benefits of adjacent managed wetlands to species/group

Provide winter feeding and roosting habitat.