

## DESCRIPTION OF RESIDENCE FOR THE ESKIMO CURLEW (*Numenius borealis*) IN CANADA

Section 33 of the *Species at Risk Act* (SARA) prohibits damaging or destroying the residence of a listed threatened, endangered, or extirpated species. SARA defines residence as: “a dwelling-place, such as a den, nest or other similar area or place, that is occupied or habitually occupied by one or more individuals during all or part of their life cycles, including breeding, rearing, staging, wintering, feeding or hibernating” [s.2(1)].

The prohibition comes into effect immediately upon listing for all threatened, endangered, and extirpated species on federal lands, and for species under pre-existing federal jurisdiction on all lands. Species under pre-existing federal jurisdiction are aquatic species (a wildlife species that is a fish, as defined in section 2 of the *Fisheries Act*, or a marine plant, as defined in section 47 of that Act) or migratory birds protected under the *Migratory Birds Convention Act*. SARA also contains a provision to prohibit the destruction of non-federal species’ residences on provincial, territorial, and private lands by way of an Order by the Governor in Council (GIC), if the Minister of the Environment recommends it necessary to do so [s.34(2), 35(2)].

The following is a description of residence for the Eskimo Curlew (*Numenius borealis*), created for the purposes of increasing public awareness and aiding enforcement of the above prohibition. As a migratory bird protected under the MBCA, the Eskimo Curlew is under federal jurisdiction and thus the residence prohibition is in effect on all lands where the species occurs. Eskimo Curlews are known to have one residence – the nest.

### Species Information:

**Common Name** – Eskimo Curlew

**Scientific Name** – *Numenius borealis*

**Current COSEWIC Status & Year of Designation** – Endangered (1978, 1999)

**Occurrence in Canada** – In Canada, the Eskimo Curlew is only known to have bred in the Northwest Territories and Nunavut, but may have also bred in the Yukon Territory<sup>1</sup> (Fig. 1). The birds have also been recorded in Newfoundland/Labrador, Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, Prince Edward Island, Quebec, Ontario, Manitoba, Saskatchewan, Alberta, and possibly British Columbia during spring and fall migration.

**Rationale for Designation** – Enormous decline from 1870s to 1980s; occasional possible sightings with the most recent occurring in the mid-1990s<sup>1</sup>.

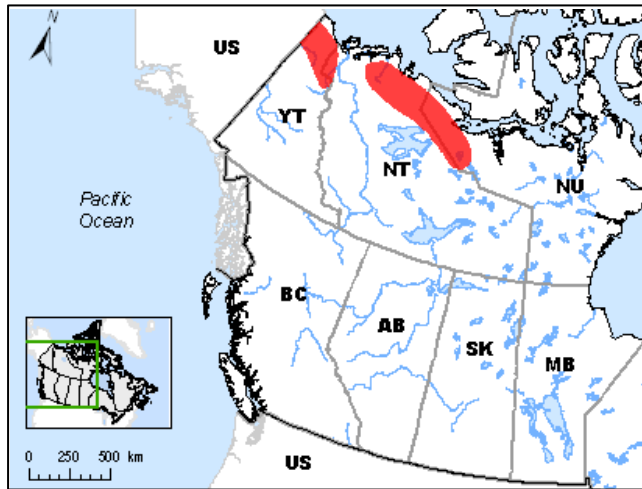


Figure 1. Known and potential historic breeding areas of Eskimo Curlews.

## 1) The Nest

### Physical Appearance and Context

Any place used as a nest by Eskimo Curlews is considered a residence. Nesting has been verified for only two sites in the Northwest Territories and Nunavut: the base of Bathurst Peninsula in Anderson River area, and the region of Amundsen Gulf/ Coronation Gulf/ Coppermine River. The birds also likely bred in the ‘Barren Grounds’ throughout much of the Northwest Territories, possibly in the Yukon and Alaska, and perhaps into the Chutchi Peninsula, Russia<sup>2,3,4</sup>. No evidence of nesting has been verified for 136 years<sup>5</sup>.

As in most other shorebirds, nests were merely a scrape (bowl-shaped depression) in the ground<sup>1</sup>. Clutch size was normally four eggs, young presumably precocial (able to walk around and feed themselves from day of hatch, leave nest with parents within day or two of hatch), similar to other North American shorebirds. The birds were presumably monogamous, as in other Numeniini, with incubation shared by both sexes<sup>2,3</sup>. As in other northern shorebirds, reneesting was probably uncommon, and only one brood was raised per season. Age of first breeding is unknown but likely delayed, possibly to three years, as in Whimbrel<sup>2,6</sup>.

Known breeding habitat consisted of upland tundra, the treeless dwarf shrub, graminoid tundra complex of the Northwest Territories and Nunavut, and grassy meadow habitat (polargrass, arctic bluegrass, birch, sedge, cottongrass and *Dryas*)<sup>2,4</sup>.

### Function

Nests are essential to the laying, sheltering, incubation, and hatching of eggs.

### Damage or destruction of the Residence

Any activity that destroys the function of nest would constitute damage or destruction of the residence. This would include, but is not limited to, preventing access to the nest, moving,

taking or otherwise disturbing the eggs, destroying the nest, or changes to the microclimate of the nest (such as to the amount of light or internal temperature).

### **Period and Frequency of Occupancy**

The nest should remain a residence from the time of construction of the nest until the chicks hatch and leave the nest. Nests were apparently initiated from mid to late June, and hatched from early to mid-July<sup>1</sup>. Young likely leave the nest within a day or two of hatch.

### **Additional Protection**

In addition to the federal *Species at Risk Act*, the Eskimo Curlew and its nest has been protected under the *Migratory Bird Convention Act* since 1916. Part of the historic breeding range in Canada is protected in the Anderson River Migratory Bird Sanctuary. Probably breeding habitat is also protected in the Kendall Island Bird Sanctuary in the Northwest Territories. The birds are protected in Ontario, by the *Ontario Endangered Species Act* of 1971. In all provinces and the Yukon Territory, the birds are further protected through provincial Wildlife Acts. The Eskimo Curlew is also covered under the *Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora* (CITES) and the *Convention for the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals* (Bonn Convention), with further protection in non-breeding areas through the 1940 Convention on Nature Protection and Wildlife Preservation in the Western Hemisphere.

### **References**

- <sup>1</sup> Gratto-Trevor, C. 1999. Status Report of the Eskimo Curlew *Numenius borealis* in Canada. Committee on the Status of Endangered Wildlife in Canada. Ottawa.
- <sup>2</sup> Gill, R. E., Canevari J. P., and Iversen E. H. 1998. Eskimo Curlew (*Numenius borealis*). Birds of North America No. 347. In *The Birds of North America*, No. 219. A. Poole and F. Gill, eds. The Academy of Natural Sciences, Philadelphia, and the American Ornithologists' Union, Washington, D. C. 28 pp.
- <sup>3</sup> Gollop, J. B., and C. E. P. Shier. 1978. Status report on Eskimo Curlew *Numenius borealis* in Canada. Committee on the Status of Endangered Wildlife in Canada, Canadian Nature Federation, 75 Albert Street, Ottawa, Ont. K1P 6G1. 53 pp.
- <sup>4</sup> Gollop, J. B., T. W. Barry, and E. H. Iversen. 1986. Eskimo Curlew: a vanishing species. Special Publication No. 17 of the Saskatchewan Natural History Society, Box 1121, Regina, Sask. S4P 3B4.
- <sup>5</sup> Bond, M. W. 1965. Did a Barbados hunter shoot the last Eskimo Curlew? *Audubon Magazine* 67: 314-316.
- <sup>6</sup> Skeel, M. A., and E. P. Mallory. 1996. Whimbrel (*Numenius phaeopus*). In *The Birds of North America*, No. 219. A. Poole and F. Gill, eds. The Academy of Natural Sciences, Philadelphia, and the American Ornithologists' Union, Washington, D. C. 28 pp.