

Northern Ireland

Photos taken under licence at Portmore Lough by James O'Neill

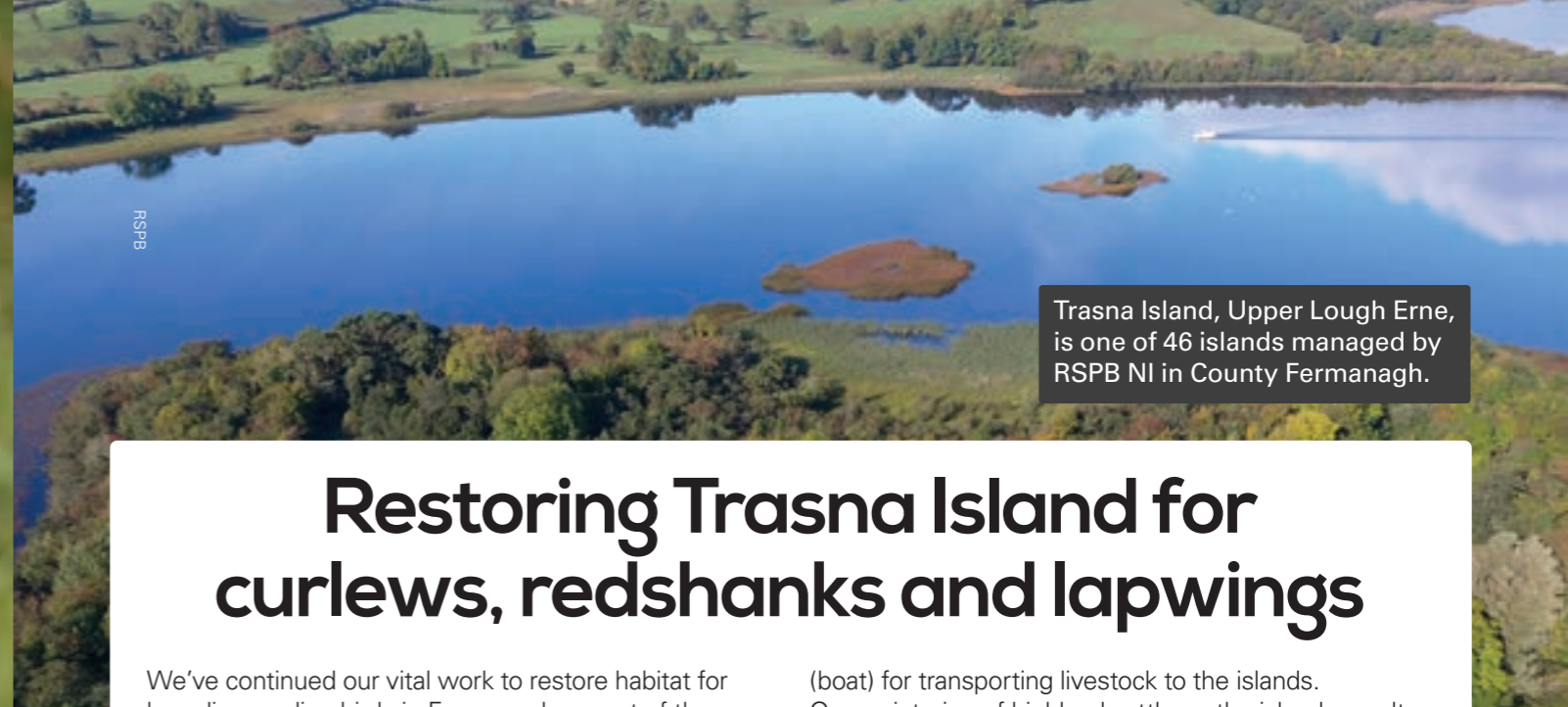


This young curlew hatched from one of the rescued eggs.



The RSPB NI team supported each other magnificently over the past year. Through the Revive our World campaign, the public challenged the Northern Ireland Executive, calling for a green recovery to address the nature and climate emergency. On reserve conservation recommenced as restrictions eased and we showcased our work virtually at NI Science Festival and via livecam from Belfast WOW during Big Garden Birdwatch.

Joanne Sherwood
Director, RSPB Northern Ireland



Trasna Island, Upper Lough Erne, is one of 46 islands managed by RSPB NI in County Fermanagh.

Restoring Trasna Island for curlews, redshanks and lapwings

We've continued our vital work to restore habitat for breeding wading birds in Fermanagh as part of the Lough Erne Landscape Partnership project, funded by the National Lottery Heritage Fund, despite the difficulties caused by Covid-19.

We acquired Trasna Island in 2016, the 46th island to be managed by the reserve team. However, it has been unmanaged for many years.

Our research uncovered pictures from 1920, which showed it was an open, farmed landscape. This is an ideal habitat for breeding curlews and lapwings. We aimed to restore the island and removed four hectares of trees and scrub from the shoreline, to boost the hopes for these breeding wading birds and to make it look more like the old photographs.

Co-operation Across Borders for Biodiversity, a major project made possible through the EU interreg programme, enabled us to procure a new cot

(boat) for transporting livestock to the islands. Over-wintering of highland cattle on the islands results in a mixed mosaic of grass lengths, creating ideal nesting habitat for curlews and redshanks.

We have also acquired a Soucy Track tractor. The low ground pressure track system allows us to mow soft rush on wet ground.

While large machinery has allowed us to deliver large-scale projects on Trasna and White Island South islands, fine-tuning the habitat for breeding wading birds requires work by hand - using loppers and pruning saws. We used brush cutters to establish areas of short grass for nesting lapwings.

Combining large machinery and hand-held equipment provides an ideal balance, and benefits a variety of species on the RSPB's most westerly nature reserve.

Peatland blaze curlew rescue

Our Portmore Lough nature reserve became a safe place during a rescue mission to save five curlew chicks. Curlews are one of Northern Ireland's most endangered species, which have declined by 82% since 1985. Last summer, Lough Neagh Landscape Partnership staff realised that two clutches of curlew eggs were at risk of being destroyed by peatland fires on the southwest shores of Lough Neagh.

A dozen devastating fires had removed vital nesting habitat for adult curlews, and destroyed essential food supplies for the unhatched ground-nesting chicks.

For the first time ever on the island of Ireland, the Lough Neagh Landscape team worked with the

Northern Ireland Environment Agency to acquire a licence to remove the fragile eggs from their natural habitat, to maximise their chances of survival.

The eggs were placed in an incubator and, following hatching, transported to our reserve at Portmore Lough, which is managed for curlews and other wading birds. Working with our Partnership colleagues, the chicks were kept secure in a purpose-built pen in a field of rushy pasture, and released as soon as they were able to fly and survive independently.

We hope they will continue to thrive and breed in the Lough Neagh landscape.