



## #SPECIES OF THE YEAR

### Slender-billed curlew

#SPECIES OF THE YEAR 2026  
The Slender-billed curlew  
(*Numenius tenuirostris* Vieillot, 1817)

**TAXONOMY:** Class Birds (Aves), Order Charadriiformes, Family Scolopacidae, Genus *Numenius*.

**HISTORY:** The species was discovered and scientifically described by the French ornithologist Louis Pierre Vieillot in 1817 based on several preserved bird skins collected in Egypt before 1797. The species has been identified from late Pleistocene bone remains found in Binagada (Apsheron Peninsula, Azerbaijan), Balme de Glos (France), Grotte des Romains (France), Sarakenos (Greece), Balla (Hungary), Buca d'Equi (Italy), Grotta dei Fanciulli (Italy), and Comiso (Italy). A fragment of a lower jaw, identified as *Numenius phaeopus/tenuirostris*, was found in Bulgaria in the Nanin Kamak cave near the village of Muselievo.

**DISTRIBUTION:** A migratory species that once bred in the steppe zone of the Northern Hemisphere (southwestern Siberia and northern Kazakhstan), and wintered in the warmer southern regions of the temperate zone – the southern part of the Balkan Peninsula, western Asia Minor, Cyprus, the Nile Delta, the Mediterranean coast of northwest Africa (mainly Morocco and Tunisia), and the coasts of the Arabian Peninsula. During migration, it was encountered across a broad front from southwestern Russia to northern Italy. Very little is known about the extent of its breeding range.

**HABITAT:** Preferred breeding habitats included marshy areas (saline marshes, estuaries, coastal brackish lagoons, and inland swamps), often overgrown with bulrushes, as well as low hilly areas with scrubland consisting of small willows and birches.

**DIET:** Like other curlews, it fed on a variety of small invertebrates (snails, earthworms, millipedes, small crustaceans, and slow-moving insects).

**REPRODUCTION:** It bred in small colonies in dense vegetation on dry areas near marshes. The nest was built on the ground from soft grasses. The clutch consisted of up to four eggs.



**EXTINCTION HISTORY:** The first records of the species' drastic population decline date back to the mid-20th century, by which time it was already too late for its conservation. In the early 1960s, flocks of up to a hundred birds were observed during migration. From 1990 to 1999, data for Europe did not exceed 100 birds. The last confirmed breeding of the species was in 1924, and the last sighting occurred in 1995. In Bulgaria, in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, it was found along the Black Sea coast in numbers up to 80 individuals, and around Sofia – up to 40 individuals. It was observed at coastal lakes, the Dobruja coastline, Sofia, the Thracian Plain, near Pleven, and along the Maritsa and Iskar river valleys. During the 1930s, it was a rare but regular migrant, especially in the Burgas region. After 1946, it became very rare during migration and wintering (with a maximum population of 4-7 birds), mainly along the Black Sea coast – the wetland areas near Burgas, Shablensko Lake, and Durankulak Lake. A bird from Atanasovsko Lake was ringed in 1981. On October 10, 2025, the slender-billed curlew was officially declared extinct by the IUCN for 2024, as a decade had passed without a single credible sighting of the species worldwide.

**REASONS FOR EXTINCTION:** Overhunting in wintering areas; habitat destruction – plowing of steppes and draining of wetlands, converting them into agricultural land for cereal crops.

#### MUSEUM REPRESENTATION

**IN BULGARIA:** Two museums in Bulgaria hold a total of 7 specimens of the species – the National Museum of Natural History in Sofia and the "Nature" Department of the Regional Historical Museum in Burgas. The former holds 4 specimens from Bulgaria, collected between 1890-1914, and 2 specimens from European Turkey from 1892-1895. Two of the birds found in Bulgaria come from the Sofia region – the villages of Mramor and Kubratovo. The specimens from Turkey were purchased by King Ferdinand I from the French consul in Constantinople, Count Amédée Alléon. They are from Istanbul and Makriköy (now Bakirköy). The specimen in the Burgas museum was prepared by taxidermist Alexander Prostof, who shot the bird on March 22, 1951, in the "Poda" area near Mandrensko Lake.