

NATIONAL PARKS & WILDLIFE SERVICE

CORNCRAKE FARM PLAN SCHEME (CFPS)

Terms & Conditions (2018)



**An Roinn Cultúir,
Oidhreacht agus Gaeltachta**
Department of Culture,
Heritage and the Gaeltacht

MAIN POINTS OF THE NATIONAL PARKS & WILDLIFE SERVICE

CORNCRAKE FARM PLAN SCHEME (CFPS)

Background

The Corncrake (An Traonach) was once a very common sound and sight across the Irish countryside. With many changes across the landscape, particularly with the intensification of agriculture, the Corncrake population crashed massively and the birds can now only be found in a small number of very special and unique places. This is much to the credit of the land managers in these areas. The Corncrake requires continued help from farmers in these areas, if it is to have a habitat where it can successfully rear young when it makes the long journey from Africa to breed here each Summer. The National Parks & Wildlife Service offers incentives to farmers to create and manage habitat for Corncrakes and this document outlines the main points of what is known as the NPWS Corncrake Farm Plan Scheme.

What you have to do

Nominate a plot or plots for the Corncrake.

Choose measure 1 and/or 2 in combination with measure 3 and/or 4.

Measure 1 to create and maintain a suitable area of Early and Late Cover Plots

Measure 2 to maintain and enhance existing areas as ELC

Measure 3 undertake a Corncrake friendly mown grassland management regime

Measure 4 undertake a Corncrake friendly grazed grassland management regime

Setting aside a part of the plot(s) as Early and Late Cover (ELC) for the Corncrake gives the birds somewhere to hide when they arrive in Spring. Creation or maintenance of such areas increases the chance of a Corncrake coming to your farm. While a participant is free to withdraw from the scheme during the tenure of the plan, the ELC created must remain intact for a five year period from the time the plan is signed.

A Corncrake friendly mowing regime means you delay mowing until 15 July on nominated plots. However if a Corncrake nest is recorded in or within 250m of these lands then delay mowing until

20 August or 01 September (you are paid more if you delay mowing until 01 September where there is a Corncrake present; the rates of payment are below). When mowing, it must be done in slowly and centre out to allow the birds the opportunity to escape from the mower.

How much you get paid

Note: 1 hectare (ha) is roughly 2.5 acres

Measure 1

Measure 1a Spread over the five year plan payment will be available to successfully create an ELC plot(s) at the following rates:

- €1.75 per m² for the first 0.1 ha
- €1.50 per m² is payable for areas greater than 0.1 ha (noting that the maximum area payable under this Measure is 0.5ha)

Measure 1b this is a yearly payment to cover the costs of maintaining the newly created ELC plot. It is payable at Measure 2 rates (see below).

Measure 2

A per hectare rate is payable annually for the maintenance and enhancement of existing ELC plots – provided the required cover is present throughout the breeding season of each year (i.e. Late April to Late September). The rates are as follows:

Up to 0.1 ha	@ €880 per ha
0.11 – 0.25 ha	@ €440 per ha
Greater than 0.26 ha	@ €275 per ha

If ELC is not established to a satisfactory standard (in terms of available cover) by the thirds of the plan, payment for Years 4 and 5 may be withheld. One-to-one advice is available to each

participant from the farm planner who will have experience in the methods of establishing Early and Late Cover.

Measure 3

A per hectare rate is payable annually for the delayed mowing of the nominated fields

- Delayed until 15 July: €275 per hectare
- Delayed until 20 August: €450 per hectare
- Delayed until 01 September: €510 per hectare

Measure 4

A per hectare rate is payable annually for the delayed grazing of the nominated fields

- Delayed grazing until 15 July: €275 per hectare
- Delayed grazing until 20 August: €450 per hectare

DETAILS OF THE CFPS

Measure 1. Creation of Early and Late Cover Plots (ELC)

The aim of this measure is to create and maintain areas which will provide vegetation cover for the protection of Corncrakes early and late in the season.

What this will achieve

This measure, carried out adjacent to the nominated fields selected for Corncrake-friendly mown or grazed grassland management, will provide cover for Corncrakes arriving back from wintering grounds in April and May and also will provide shelter late in the season when most of the surrounding grassland has been cut and/or grazed. This is because Corncrakes require vegetation which is at least 20cm (8 inches) high for the entire breeding season.

The creation of the ELC plot(s) is to be undertaken in Year 1 of the 5 year agreement. In exceptional circumstances and dependent upon specific agreement with NPWS an ELC plot can be created in Year 2 of the plan.

Requirements

1. This measure must be carried out adjacent to lands nominated for Measures 3 and/or 4.
2. Existing areas of suitable vegetation which meet the required standard in the required location can be extended to create the minimum patch size required
3. Ideally each individual ELC plot should be at least 0.1 ha (e.g. a 15m wide strip along the length of a 67m field).
4. Approximately 5% of the total area entered into the CFPS should be under ELC management. This should be undertaken in one discrete area. However this may not be possible on some farms and other arrangements may be accommodated.
5. For all new ELC areas created in year one of the five year plan the following requirements apply:
 - (a) No grazing is permitted from 01 January until 30 September in the ELC, except with prior agreement, where for example it may be required to address rank vegetation structure.
 - (b) At other times (i.e. 01 October – 31 December) grazing must not exceed 0.5 farm LU/ha. Deviations from this may be required but is subject to agreement between the farmer and NPWS.

7. (c) Cutting of the area may only be undertaken with the prior written agreement of NPWS.
8. The ELC plot must be fenced off to a standard sufficient to ensure that the prescribed grazing levels will be adhered to (to be detailed in plan).
9. The combined maximum area per application for ELC creation is 0.5ha.

ELC creation

New early cover areas can be created during autumn/winter months or in early spring when Corncrakes are not present on their breeding grounds. Depending on local soil conditions and what type of tall vegetation is available locally, farmers should aim to create patches of tall vegetation, using the appropriate method below

Nettles

Dig up and collect rhizomes from existing areas. Mix the rhizomes with farmyard manure, ideally in at equal proportions by volume and spread the mixture over the site to a depth of approximately 15cm, but generally not less than 12 cm.

Umbellifers

Collect seeds of cow parsley or hogweed and establish through planting seeds in a prepared area in the autumn. Animal dung or farmyard manure will provide important nutrients.

Reed canary grass

Stands of reed canary grass can be created by transporting soil containing rhizomes riverbanks and other wet areas to prepared areas in autumn. This species does best in damp areas, but competition from grasses should be kept to a minimum.

Iris

Dig up and collect iris from existing beds. Mix the iris rhizomes with farmyard manure, ideally in equal proportions by volume and spread the mixture over the site to a depth of

approximately 15cm, but generally not less than 12 cm. To aid the establishment of the iris, the site should normally be in a damp condition for a significant proportion of the year.

Other

We are also open to trialling other vegetation which may provide suitable cover including Oats, Triticale, Winter Barley, Phacelia, etc.

Rate of support

Measure 1a relates to the cost of creating the ELC – payment will be available to successfully create an ELC plot(s) at the following rates:

- €1.75 per m² for the first 0.1 ha
- €1.50 per m² is payable for areas greater than 0.1 ha (noting that the maximum area payable under this Measure is 0.5ha)

The location extent and fencing requirements of the ELC plot is subject to agreement between the farmer and NPWS.

After initial payment all subsequent payments are to be made on foot of an inspection carried out by an NPWS official or an agent acting on their behalf ensuring that the ELC plot is in a satisfactory condition (following successful application of FYM and seeds/rhizomes along with the appropriate fencing).

Measure 1b this is a yearly payment to cover the costs of maintaining the newly created ELC plot. It is payable at Measure 2 rates (see below).

Measure 2: Maintenance and Promotion of existing Early and Late Cover plots

The aim of this measure is to manage areas which will provide vegetation cover for the protection of Corncrakes, their eggs and fledglings, throughout the breeding season, in particular the early and late stages when available cover is scarce. This will only apply to areas which meet the requirements outlined below on entry into the CFPS.

What this will achieve?

This measure carried out adjacent to lands under Corncrake-friendly management, will help to maintain the conditions for Corncrakes to breed successfully. It will benefit Corncrakes arriving back from wintering grounds in April and May and also provide shelter late in the season when most of the surrounding grassland has been cut and/or grazed.

Requirements

- 1 This measure must be carried out adjacent to lands nominated for Measures 3 and/or 4.
- 2 Each individual area must be at least 0.1 hectares
- 3 Approximately 50% (but not less than 30%) of the area must comprise suitable early cover vegetation (to include nettles, hogweed, cow parsley, reed canary grass, iris, cereals, etc.). This may require application of farmyard manure and seeds/rhizomes in some years to encourage growth of required species early in the year. Advice will be available from NPWS during the farm plan formulation stage.
- 4 Rush must be at densities of no more than 30% and any encroaching scrub (e.g. briars) should be controlled on an annual basis as per plan.
- 5 Grazing is not permitted from 01 January until 30 September inclusive except with prior written agreement. Grazing in October may be required to prevent the area becoming too rank and to provide additional nutrients to stimulate growth of early cover vegetation. Grazing levels and timings are subject to agreement between the farmer and NPWS.
- 6 Cutting of the ELC area may only be undertaken with the prior written agreement from the NPWS official or an authorised agent of NPWS
- 7 The combined area of existing and created early and late cover for Corncrakes managed under a single agreement cannot exceed 5 hectares.
- 8 A maximum of 5 ha of suitable land will be allowed into this option.
- 9 While a participant is free to withdraw from the scheme during the tenure of the plan, the ELC created must remain intact for a five year period from the time the plan is signed.

Rate of annual support

A stepped per hectare rate is payable annually for the maintenance and enhancement of existing ELC plots – provided the required cover is present throughout the breeding season of each year. The rates are as follows:

Up to 0.1 ha	@ €880 per ha
0.11 – 0.25 ha.	@ €440 per ha
Greater than 0.26 ha	@ €275 per ha (noting that the maximum area payable under this Measure is 5ha).

If ELC is not established to a satisfactory standard (in terms of available cover) by the thirds of the plan, payment for Years 4 and 5 may be withheld. One-to-one advice is available to each participant from the farm planner who will have experience in the methods of establishing Early and Late Cover.

Measure 3. Mown Grassland

The aim of this measure is to provide protection for Corncrakes during the main part of the breeding season.

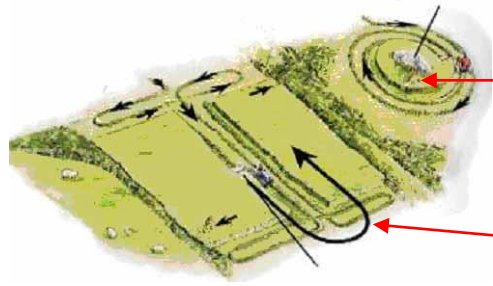
What this will achieve?

This measure will create or maintain the conditions necessary for Corncrakes to nest and raise broods, including the provision of tall vegetation cover throughout the summer.

Requirements

1. This measure must be carried out in combination with the creation and maintenance of at least one ELC plot (Measure 1) and/or in combination with the maintenance and promotion of existing ELC plots (Measure 2).

2. Provide meadows with tall vegetation (>20 cm, 8 inches) suitable for Corncrakes to nest and raise broods (approximately 50% or more of the meadow should meet this requirement by early May). Stock shall be excluded from these areas from 15 March onwards or in particular areas where growth is slow, at a date advised by the farm planner and agreed by NPWS and the plan participant. The meadow shall not be cut or topped before the dates shown below.
3. Other field operations requiring the use of tractor machinery (fertilising, rolling, spraying, etc.) shall not be permitted from 20 April until the prescribed date of mowing. In exceptional years where weather conditions have hampered the application of fertiliser or have resulted in very poor growth, derogations may be granted in writing from NPWS. Field operations that do not require the use of tractor machinery (such as hand application of fertiliser) are permitted.
4. If you are informed by an NPWS official or an agent acting on behalf of NPWS that a Corncrake has been recorded in or within 250m of a nominated meadow that is entered into the CFPS, the meadow is deemed to be *active* for that particular breeding season. This meadow must not be cut until at least 20 August. A further measure of delaying the mowing date until 01 September can be opted for instead. However this option should be agreed at the plan stage and not during the breeding season.
5. Plan participants with Corncrake on or near (within 250m) of lands included in the NPWS Farm Plan are eligible for a “bonus” payment of 20% additional payment for that year, justified on the basis of transaction costs in dealing with NPWS and adapting farming plans to accommodate for a later harvest.
6. Generally these meadows should be cut/topped every year with the crop removed by 01 October.
7. A 1.8m/6ft margin must be left along each of the two long sides of the field. This is to provide an escape refuge during mowing. The margin can be grazed or mown after 15 September. Generally margins should be cut / topped or grazed down at least one year in three (as detailed in the farm plan). A contiguous of ELC can replace the need for such a margin.
8. To minimise the risk of injury to young birds, all active fields must be cut in a Corncrake friendly manner. The aim should be to prevent the creation of islands of uncut hay or silage and the line of cutting from the middle outwards should leave an escape route through the uncut margins. Note that in some circumstances the ELC if appropriately sited (i.e. along the edge of the meadow) may reduce the need for leaving an uncut margin.



*Mowing towards rocky knoll
to leave a sizeable refuge
area of unmown grass*

*Cut from the centre out in a slow
(low gear) manner*

Rate of annual support

- Delayed mowing until 15 July: €275 per hectare
- Delayed mowing until 20 August: €450 per hectare
- Delayed mowing until 01 September: €510 per hectare

Bonus payments (for the meadow area) will be provided to plan participants where Corncrakes breed within 250m of planned lands.

Measure 4. Grazed Grassland

Where it is not possible (or desirable) to mow meadows, this measure will support the management of grazed grasslands to encourage suitable conditions for the benefit of breeding Corncrake.

What this will achieve?

By limiting and managing grazing, the grazed grassland measure will promote the growth of vegetation of suitable structure and species composition to provide sufficient tall vegetation which will provide cover throughout the summer to allow Corncrakes to nest and raise broods successfully.

Requirements

1. This measure must be carried out in combination with the creation and maintenance of at least one ELC plot (Measure 1) and/or in combination with the maintenance and promotion of existing ELC plots (Measure 2).
2. The pasture field should be contiguous with the ELC plot. The pasture should contain a high proportion (approximately 50%, but not less than 30%) of vegetation that is both likely to be taller than 20 cm (8 inches) by early May and be suitable for Corncrakes if left ungrazed (e.g. iris, nettles, cow parsley or reed canary grass). Areas with rush could be selected where it occurs as patches and where the density is not above 30%. Areas of ungrazed grass or rush matted with dead vegetation remaining from previous seasons will not qualify as suitable tall vegetation
3. Minimum area to be included is 0.5 ha. Farm livestock must be removed from areas entered under this measure before 15 March or in particular areas where growth is slow, at a date advised by the farm planner and agreed by NPWS and the plan participant..
4. Other field operations requiring the use of tractor machinery (fertilising, rolling, spraying, etc.) shall not be permitted from 20 April until the prescribed date of grazing. Field operations that do not require the use of tractor machinery (such as hand spraying) are permitted.
5. If the pasture is deemed to be active (i.e. Corncrake recorded calling from within the field or within 250m) by an NPWS official or an agent acting on behalf of NPWS, then livestock are not permitted to graze until 20 August. Farm livestock may be returned after this date, although livestock density must be no more than 1.4 LU per ha until 15 September.

Rate of annual support

- Delayed grazing until 15 July: €275 per hectare
- Delayed grazing until 20 August: €450 per hectare
- Bonus payments (for the meadow area) will be provided to plan participants where Corncrakes breed within 250m of planned lands.

Interaction with other schemes

Besides the NPWS Farm Plan Scheme for Corncrakes, the National Parks & Wildlife Service administers what is known as the Corncrake Grant Scheme (CGS). The CGS is generally an ‘ad hoc’ or once off payment, should a Corncrake breed in your field or in the immediate area and you will be requested to delay mowing. This contrasts with the Farm Plan Scheme in that with the Farm Plan Scheme, there is more certainty in planning forward for land management and payments, over a

five year period. A landowner/farmer cannot receive payments from NPWS for both the Farm Plan Scheme and the Corncrake Grant Scheme, unless in specific circumstances and with prior agreement e.g. where a landowner with a Farm Plan has Corncrake breeding on a field of his/hers he/she could only be paid CGS if he/she is requested to delay grazing/mowing on a field that is not being paid on under the Farm Plan Scheme.

In addition, the Department of Agriculture, Food & the Marine (DAFM) administer the Green Low-carbon Agri-environment Scheme (GLAS), which has a measure for Corncrakes. Rigorous checks will be undertaken, to ensure that specific parcels of land are not already subject to the requirements and payments of a GLAS plan. If it is discovered that a participant in the NPWS Farm Plan Scheme has also participating in an agri-environment scheme administered by Department of Agriculture, Food & the Marine, the NPWS will seek the repayment of all funds paid out to date in the NPWS Farm Plan Scheme. NPWS Farm Plan Scheme participants wishing to apply for an agri-environment scheme administered by Department of Agriculture, Food & the Marine must first declare their intention to do so, in writing, to Agri-Ecology Unit, North King Street, Dublin 7 (D07 N7CV) or Agri.Ecology@chg.gov.ie.

Results Based Payments for the NPWS Farm Plan Scheme for Corncrake

NPWS will introduce a results based approach to paying for Corncrake habitat from 2020 onwards. This means that the higher the quality of habitat produced, the higher the payment, and vice versa. Score cards are currently in development and will be explained to the plan participants in advance of roll-out. Scores will be linked to the area, height and structure of ELC and the ecological integrity of meadow habitat.