

Corncrake

Research Institution: NPWS

Project Investigator: The NPWS Corncrake Conservation Committee

Undertaken across Ireland, primarily in West Connacht and Donegal.

Project Background

When it comes to modern agriculture and its relationship with nature, the Corncrake (*Crex crex*) has long featured as a species of concern. The Irish Corncrake population, as in various other countries, declined remarkably with the modernisation of agriculture, particularly the advent of silage cutting with early harvest dates. Conservation efforts in Ireland stem back to at least 1993 and have primarily revolved around paying farmers with Corncrake on their lands to delay harvests until the birds have reared their young. Action plans have been published, setting out goals and objectives in terms of stabilising and increasing the availability of suitable habitat and subsequently the breeding population itself.

Corncrake conservation measures for the most part concentrated on delayed mowing and “inside-out” cutting to avoid and minimise risks posed by silage harvesting. In more recent years, these measures have been supplemented by the creation of Early and Late Cover to provide refuge for the birds before and after meadow cover is available. Predator control has also featured in recent years, with Foxes, Mink and Crows being targeted. The NPWS Corncrake Grant Scheme and the NPWS Farm Plan Scheme have been the primary sources of financial support for landowners to deliver conservation measures for the Corncrake. These schemes have served as useful pilots to inform the Green-Low Carbon Agri-environment Scheme (GLAS), which has a dedicated measure for Corncrake.

Obviously it is essential to know where the Corncrake are breeding if conservation efforts are to be targeted most appropriately. Towards this end, NPWS undertake national surveys annually, with fieldworkers operating in local areas. The assistance of local landowners and of eNGOs like BirdWatch Ireland is a central part to a collaborative conservation effort.

Overall Aim

To determine where Corncrakes are breeding in Ireland

To determine how many Corncrakes are breeding in Ireland, allowing population trends to be assessed over time

To save Corncrake nests and young

To create new habitat for Corncrakes

Projected benefits of the research project

Halting the decline of the Corncrake population, which had suffered drastically prior to conservation efforts. See the graphs presented here for Corncrake population trends, including since conservation efforts began in 1993.

