

MAYO CORNCRAKE UPDATE

10 July 2012

As our Summer progresses into the now familiar dull and wet period, its no surprise that the Corncrakes appear to have wrapped-up their calling season early. Very few are now being heard, however for anyone wanting to get one last listen before the season is over, Aghany near Roonagh pier is the place to go. As many as six were reported still calling there last week, and even in quite unsuitable conditions late last night I heard two calling continuously, one against the other. They were 400m apart, about 1km east of the pier, and clearly audible from the roadside. Night-time is best, although one may hear the odd burst of calling even during the day.

Another good spot nearby for late-calling Corncrakes is Inishbofin (Galway), where four were heard loud and clear late last week, and one was being seen (and heard) cracking snail shells at Rusheen, East End. Elsewhere, ones may still be heard occasionally on the Mullet, around Carne football pitch and in Corclogh West, although they have mostly gone quiet on the peninsula

Its also no surprise that the mowing of meadows has been delayed due to the wet weather, favouring those Corncrakes nesting in fields not already protected through the farmer agreeing to sign-up to the mowing-delay scheme. The uptake on the conservation measures remains strong, with 100% of farmland entered into the NPWS grant scheme in quite a few areas on the Mullet and Connemara islands, although early silage remains an issue in SW Mayo. So long as the hatchlings can survive the inclement weather (and despite the wet, it has been considerably warmer this year compared to last, so far, which should improve their chances), losses overall to early mowing should be even more limited this year. Of the fields mown to date and either attended during cutting or searched soon after, no signs of destroyed Corncraake nests or other remains have as yet been found.

So this year's count looks like being a little down on last year, locally and nationally, mainly due to some particular areas where the birds failed to return to, such as Tory island, where only seven or eight were counted (compared to 24 only a few seasons ago), and on the south of the Mullet, where only one was counted where last year there were seven. Yet, numbers increased in other areas, particularly in South-west Mayo, where, despite the early silage harvest, between seven and nine were counted, compared to just two last year.

The final tally for this year's Corncraake population awaits analysis of all records, but it looks like there will be between 42 and 45 in West Connacht, down from 48 last year, and about 80 in Donegal, down from 86 last year, with one in the Shannon Callows (as last year) and one in Cork.

Many thanks to all who got in touch with a Corncraake report this year. Over 80 reports have been received thus far to the Corncraake hotline in the West, helping to locate and protect this season's nesting birds. To those who took the time to get in touch, your help and interest was very much appreciated.

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