

## CORNCRAKE UPDATE – 18 July 2008

With the census period over, this year's tally, yet to be finalised, looks like being 42 calling male Corncrakes in the West, a 12% increase on last year, and the eighth season in succession in the West where numbers have risen or at least remained stable.

Late calling birds may still be heard, for instance at Surgeview and Fallmore villages, at the southern tip of the Mullet, and at Roonagh, west of Louisburgh. Four birds are reported to have been heard on Inishturbot, Clifden Bay, last week, where only three were confirmed during the census. One is still calling in Westquarter village on Inishbofin, although the other five birds here are now mostly quiet. One has been reported heard again near French-hill crossroads, Castlebar, having not been heard since the end of May, suggesting this one has been here the whole time and must surely have raised both first and second nests in the area. Three were heard still calling against each other on Oyster Island, off Rosses Point, up until last week. For the most part, however, the Corncrakes are now tending to call less frequently, and many are going quiet entirely.

The Corncrake census over, attention now turns to completing and closing the grant scheme for the season, and then focusing on the mowing of grant-delayed fields, which begins on 1 August, weather permitting. To date, 86 farmers and contractors have signed agreements to delay mowing or grazing and/or carry out Corncrake-friendly mowing around this year's calling Corncrakes in the West.

Several more fields were mown last week on the Mullet, including two cut Corncrake-friendly at Ardowen, with nothing seen or found. In a separate mowing of playing fields at the back of the convent in Belmullet town, a Corncrake was reported flushed by the mower, and it seems all too likely that, unbeknownst to the mower or the Corncrake project, there was a bird nesting here. It transpires that another probable breeding territory at Tallagh, near the water towers in Belmullet, was also mown in early July. This bird wasn't picked up in census visits, nor reported until after the event.

Nationally, the latest figures from Donegal suggest a drop on last year's 104, with 91 confirmed to date, perhaps as a consequence of the very wet summer last year, the worst of which we missed here in the West. Similar declines have been recorded by the RSPB on some of their Hebridean strongholds for the species. Nevertheless, it is hoped the good uptake on protection measures by local farmers this year should guarantee a good return to traditional sites next year.