

CORNCRAKE UPDATE – 22 August 2008

The last calling Corncrakes of this season, barring any further reports, were heard at Lurgacloy, on the Mullet, on 8 August and at Corclogh West, on the Mullet, on 10 August. (Last year, one was heard on Inishbofin on 26 August – the latest ever record on the West.)

Mowing has proceeded slowly, delayed by all the wet weather, with fields still standing in all areas, providing late cover and so good opportunities for survival of late broods, so long as they haven't succumbed to an untimely downpour – a drenching in the first day or two after hatching can prove disastrous. I haven't seen any chicks or adults during any mowing attended, nor found any remains, which is a good sign. Generally, so long as the meadows are mown centre-out (Corncrake-friendly), any birds in the field should escape safely and unseen into neighbouring fields.

One of the few reports received of young came from holidaymakers Ian and Mary Riley, who stay in the cottage at Glebe, Termoncarragh, every year (possibly one of the best birdwatching holiday rents in the West, being beside the BirdWatch meadows, with Chough nesting in most years on the Glebe ruins, although not this year, and Scotchport and the cliffs of Doonamo nearby). On 4 August they flushed an adult Corncrake with four or five young from their garden, the young birds described as fluttering, suggesting they were about five or six weeks old and on the edge of full flight. (At seven weeks they can fly perfectly, at which point they set off for Africa, leaving the adults to moult before following them several weeks later.) One chick of about two weeks old was also spotted crossing a lane at Corclogh on 7 August.

The wet weather has, unsurprisingly, given rise to flooding in the Shannon, where with just 4 calling males confirmed this year, it was hoped we might for once get a dry summer. The only hope is that hatching was complete before the floodwaters rose, and that the young have been able to make their way to higher ground.

Tim