

CORNCRAKE UPDATE – 27 September 2008

Mowing was much delayed this year by the wet conditions, to the benefit of our western Corncrakes, none of whom were found to have been caught in mowing machines this season. There were very few other sightings of young this year in the West.

At East End, Inishbofin, a dead one-day old chick was found in a garden on 3 July and an older juvenile Corncrake recovered from a wire fence, in which it had become entangled, nearby and on the same day. One adult and one juvenile were found dead on Inishturbot on 12 July, having been killed by two cats introduced to the island to control the rabbits.

One brood of Corncrakes was reported seen twice at Tonamace, on the southwest side of Termoncarragh Lake, with a hen and seven or eight young encountered in a cabbage patch here on 16 July and then probably the same adult with at least five or six young in aftergrass 200 metres from the first sighting five days later. At Glebe, near Termoncarragh, an adult with four or five fluttering juveniles (probably 5 to 6 weeks) were seen on 5 August.

Three juveniles of about four weeks old were reported seen at Westquarter, Inishbofin, on 8 September. This was welcome news, as the male which had been calling at Westquarter for two weeks in early July had been recovered dead, killed by a feral cat, on 27 July.

One juvenile was reported seen in a garden at Corclogh West, on the Mullet, on 10 September, and the contractor reported seeing what may have been an adult Corncrake escaping after the opening swarts were mown at French-hill crossroads, Castlebar, on 22 September.

Corncrakes may still be encountered throughout October and have been seen as late as December, however for the most part they will already have set off for Africa before the end of September.

*"A vanishing speck in those inane dominions,
Single and frail, uncertain of her place.
Alone in the bright host of her companions,
Lost in the blue unfriendliness of space."*

(A D Hope)

Although the Corncrakes have gone, they've left behind them lots of paperwork, which somebody has to do. Fieldworkers will also be busy with making early cover patches, fencing and arranging mowing or grazing of rank meadow and cover, as well as working on Donegal islands to control rabbits on Inishbofin, mink on Inishmeane and cats on Tory.

In total, there were 199 reports of Corncrakes to the West Connacht hotline this summer, the most there's ever been. Very many thanks to everyone who took the time to get in touch and pass-on details of Corncrakes heard.

TJG