



Corncrakes

Latin: *Crex crex*

Irish: Traonach

Summer Visitor

Corncrakes are visitors to Ireland, travelling a distance of 10,000km from sub-Saharan Africa (Zambia, Mozambique, Tanzania and Madagascar). Coming to Ireland to breed, they arrive during April and leave again in September to return to Africa for the winter. When they arrive here the males hide in long grass and call out their familiar sound to attract a mate. Once they find a mate, the female will lay its first brood in late May and another again in late July. By the time September arrives, the young chicks have grown big enough to fly back to Africa with their parents for the winter.



Corncrakes are famous for their distinctive call. The *crex-crex* sound has been compared with two cheese-graters rubbing together. They are very secretive birds and it is more likely that you will hear their call than see them. When in flight, they look weak and floppy and dangle their legs. They prefer to run through thick cover. Corncrakes are omnivores (see page 5), their diet consists mostly of animal food, with a small amount of plant material.

Conserving the Corncrakes

Corncrakes were once a very common summer visitor to Ireland but are now threatened with global extinction. Having adapted to nesting in open farmland, the most likely place for a corncrake to build a nest is in a meadow. Due to intensive farming practices, nests were destroyed and corncrakes were driven out of their habitat. This resulted in a huge drop in the population. In Ireland, corncrakes are mainly found in small numbers in a few areas – the Shannon Callows, north Donegal, west Kerry and western parts of Mayo and Connaught. Great efforts are now being made to try and preserve the corncrakes' habitats. Since 1991, BirdWatch Ireland (with funding from the National Parks & Wildlife Service) have been running the Corncrake Conservation Project. They are trying to protect the existing breeding corncrakes by encouraging farmers to sensitively manage corncrake meadows.



Fact File

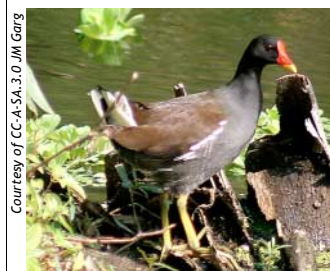
Colour: Blue-grey colour on the face, neck and breast and a streaky brown back.

Length: 27-30 cm

Diet: Insects, spiders, invertebrates, seeds and grass.

Habitat: Grasslands during the breeding season and winter.

No. of eggs: 6-14.



The Relatives

Corncrakes belong to the Rallidae Family, the same family as Moorhens, Coots and Water Rails. All of these species live in wetland habitats and are more commonly found in Ireland than the Corncrake.

Top left: Moorhen; Bottom left: Coot; Top right: Water Rail.