

## The Corncrake (*Crex crex*) in Armenia \*

Martin S. Adamian & Daniel Klem, Jr.

### 1. Distribution

Occurs in the north from Pyuneeq east to Dilijan and Mt. Chingilidagh south to Artavaz and Jirvez in central Armenia. Occurs primarily in mountain steppe habitat (up to 3000 m) in wet meadows, hay fields, forest glades, alfalfa (*Medicago*), and clover (*Trifolium*) fields. During spring migration, may also be found in irrigated orchards of the semi desert region.

### 2. Occurrence and Abundance

Breeding bird. Rare. May be much more widespread but is seldom recorded. Earliest recorded spring date is 5<sup>th</sup> May 1964 – although species probably arrives in late April; latest date of fall departure is September 1939. Single birds were observed near Jirvez on 16<sup>th</sup> May 1963 and 5<sup>th</sup> May 1964 (MSA). A male was calling in a subalpine meadow (2000-2300 m) on Mt. Chingilidagh on 17<sup>th</sup> May 1995 (AS). A single bird was recorded near Pyuneeq on 18<sup>th</sup> May 1995 and two were observed near Artavaz on 20<sup>th</sup> May 1995 (KA). A bird banded in Kuwait, 1280 km distant, was recovered in Armenia in September of the same year as banded (Ilyichev 1985, MSA). Records without abundance data include: 12<sup>th</sup> May 1989 near Nor Guyugh, and 19, 25 and 28<sup>th</sup> June 1969 at the Composers' House in Dilijan Preserve.

### 3. Food

Feeds primarily on worms, larval and adult insects, and seeds of wheat (*Triticum*), wild

grasses (Poaceae), and other plants (DAL 1954).

### 4. Breeding

Pair Bond Monogamous. Bonds are formed upon arrival at the breeding territory in late April to early May. Nest Site and Nest In dense grass on dry ground; constructed in late April or early May (MSA, Dal 1954). The nest is loosely constructed of dry and fresh grass with a large amount of dead leaves added. Two nests were found at Dilijan Preserve in June 1969 in a relatively we, grassy forest glade (MSA). One of the nests was located in a shallow depression and the cup built up to 1.5-2.0 cm. Nest measurements are: outer diameter = 18.0 cm (2) 18.0-18.0 cm; inner diameter = 11.3 cm (2) 10.6-12.0 cm; cup depth = 4.3 cm (2) 2.0-6.6 cm (MSA). Eggs Oval; pale blue to dirty clay, wreathed with reddish brown and dark brown lines, spots, and elongated irregular marks. Violet spots may underlay other markings. Length = 36.1 mm (17) 34.0-39.0 mm; width = 25.7 mm (17) 24.4-26.9 mm; weight = 11.6 g (17) 8.0-12.8 g (MSA). A single egg is approximately 9 % of adult female weight. Clutch = 7-10; one clutch per season. Egg laying begins in early May. Females are reluctant to leave the nest, and do so only when approached closely. Young Subprecocial. In a nest, all nine eggs pipped on 27<sup>th</sup> June and young hatched the following day; in another nest, the eggs were pipped on 26<sup>th</sup> June 1969, and young hatched on 27<sup>th</sup> June. At hatching, nestlings are covered with soft dense dark brown down. If approached, females adopt a defensive posture, covering the brook with half-spread wings and extended neck.

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\* From: Handbook of the Birds of Armenia. - American University of Armenia: 205-206.

#### 4. Measurements

	Male	Female	Source <sup>1</sup>
Total Length	249 (2) 246-252	-	S
Wing Length	138 (2) 134-148	-	S
Wing Length	-	126 (1)	F
Tail Length	53 (2) 52-55	-	S
Bill Length	21 (2) 21-21	-	S
Bill Length	-	15 (1)	F
Tarsus Length	41 (2) 39-42	-	S
Weight	-	125 (1)	F

<sup>1</sup>S = Sosnin, Izmailov, 1928-1929, Yerevan. F = Melikian, 1989, Nor Gyugh.

Martin S. Adamian  
 Institut of Zoology  
 Armenien National Academy of Sciences  
 Yerevan  
 Armenia

Daniel Klem, Jr.  
 Department of Biology, Muhlenberg College  
 Allentown  
 Pennsylvania USA

#### References

DAL (1954): xxx

#### 5. General Notes

Behaviour Shy and secretive, staying in dense cover and reluctant to fly. When flushed, flies slowly with sluggish wing beats and dangling legs and feet for only a short distance before dropping back into dense vegetation. Runs quickly, changing direction often. When calling stretches neck forward and turns from side to side causing the song to resonate variably. Primarily calls at dawn, dusk, and throughout the night. It may be found in forest glades, but not in the forest itself. Periodically raises head above vegetation, and may occasionally perch on low structures. Conservation and Management Globally Vulnerable and declining; classified as Endangered in Armenia due to its rarity and lack of recent records. Suggested Research Highly recommend regular surveys in May and June for calling males as a method of assessing the breeding population. Methods of agricultural harvesting that reduce killing or injury are also needed.