

The Corncrake (*Crex crex*) in Finland

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1. Introduction

Corncrake used to be a common and widespread bird in Finland in the early 20th Century. Its breeding range extended from southern Finland to the 66th degree latitude. From a population of tens of thousands, corncrake has dramatically come down to about 600 calling males in the 1990's.

2. Development of knowledge about the corncrake in Finland

The species has been closely monitored in recent decades but hardly any studies have been carried out. For research history of Finnish bird fauna, see copies of Väisänen et al, 1998.

3. Distribution and important areas of corncrake population

Nowadays most corncrakes occur in southeastern Finland and only a few are heard above the 64th degree latitude. Almost all corncrakes call in man-made habitats, fields or meadows. In natural habitats corncrakes are sometimes heard on wet meadows near lakes. Not enough is known about the habitat selection in Finland to state with certainty the most important types of meadows used by the corncrake.

4. Size and development of national corncrake population

4.1. Size of national corncrake population

The population size in Finland is currently 600 singing males with a minimum of 500 and a maximum of 1000 in some years. As all records of corncrakes are collected nationwi-

de, this can be regarded as a very good estimate (scale 3).

4.2. Development of population

Finland had a strong population in the beginning of 20th century (tens of thousands). The decrease started in the 1920's and became stronger in the 1930's and 1940's. Since the 1960's there seems to have been a slight increase. This slight increase may still occur in the 1990's although the data has only been analysed until 1995.

The current population trend is fairly stable with large annual, more or less cyclic fluctuations. Our overall population size is still very small compared to that of early 1900's.

The main reason for the crash in the 1920's through 1940's is obviously the changes in the agriculture. The harvesting of silage happens earlier but the main reason probably is the effect of agricultural machinery. More effective land use also makes the lives of corncrakes more difficult.

5. Threats to the corncrake population

Currently there don't seem to be any new threats to corncrakes. Actually since 1995 the situation has become better as the European Union regulations have created some more habitat and more shelter for the corncrake.

6. Conservation status

Corncrake is protected by law in Finland. There is no hunting and no disturbance allowed of corncrake. It has also been included in the national list of threatened species in the category vulnerable, but it seems that it will be re-categorised during 1999 as near threatened.

7. Conservation Projects

In 1999 a conservation project for corncrake was started by BirdLife Finland. This project will include intensified catching and ringing of corncrakes, particularly in the southeast, informing farmers about corncrake-friendly practices and collecting data on habitat selection.

8. Ongoing or planned conservation or study projects

In addition, BirdLife Finland's member societies collect all records of corncrakes and publish them annually in their magazines. A national summary has been published periodically in the *Linnut* (*Lintumies*) magazine, the last report was published in 1991, the data exists till 1995. There are no scientific studies going on. Locally several ringers ring males in their study areas from year to year.

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