

The Corncrake (*Crex crex*) in Georgia

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1. Introduction

There has never been any special research on corncrakes in Georgia. Hardly any articles have been specially written about the corncrake. Authors have written about their sightings of corncrakes at different times and places or have only designated the species as a breeder in Georgia.

Some corncrakes were recorded near the towns of Surami and Akhaltsikhe by Mikhailovsky in 1880 (ZHORDANIA & GOGILASHVILI 1969). Radde recorded a large number of corncrakes in the surroundings of Tbilisi in 1884 (ZHORDANIA & GIGILASHVILI 1969); Tsvetkov recorded corncrakes near Tetrytskaro in 1901. Chkhikvishvili (1946) - in the Tsalka district near Bashkei Lake (ZHORDANIA & GOGILASHVILI 1969). Tsikhistavi in 1953 observed the corncrake migration in Sam-

gori The same author (1969) in his work "Birds of Likhi Mountain Range and Adjacent Areas" mentioned corncrake only during migration in April (ZHORDANIA & GOGILASHVILI 1969). Janashvili, Kutubidze & Zarqua (1960) regarded corncrake as a widespread, common breeding game-bird for Georgia (JANASHVILI, KUTUBIDZE & ZARQUA 1960). Gambarashvili and Burjanadze (1966) wrote that corncrake did not breed in Georgia, though they recorded corncrake in large numbers during migration (GAMBARASHVILI & BURJANADZE 1966). Kutubidze (1985) in "Key to the Birds of Georgia" gave corncrake the status of a common breeding game-bird (KUTUBIDZE 1985). Gavashelishvili (1996) recorded corncrake as a breeding species (GAVASHELISHVILI 1996). Zhordania (1997) designated the corncrake's status as a breeding, widespread, common game-bird (ZHORDANIA 1997).

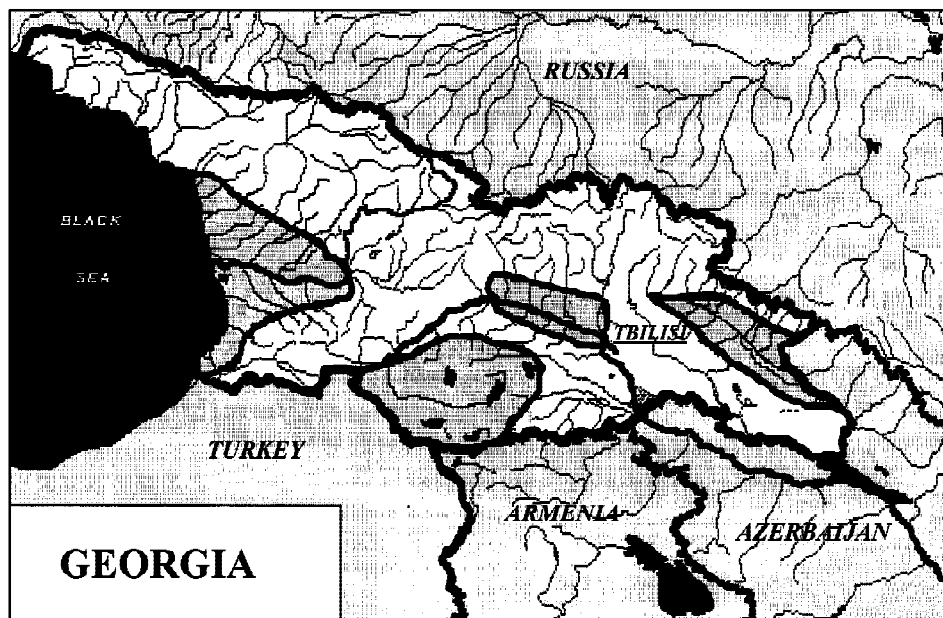


Figure 1: Distribution and important areas of corncrake in Georgia.

2. Development of knowledge about the corncrake in Georgia

As mentioned above, there is very poor scientific information on the ecology of the corncrake. Existing information is restricted to single sightings and the only reliable fact is that the bird is a migratory breeder. It should be noted that unfortunately hunters know more about this bird than specialists as they always shoot corncrakes during quail-hunting. Special hunting for corncrakes has never been practiced in Georgia. In spite of little knowledge of its conservation status, the corncrake is designated as a game-bird, and shooting it is still allowed in Georgia.

3. Distribution and important areas of corncrake population

See attached map (Fig. 1).

4. Size and development of national corncrake population

There is no data available of the national corncrake population and therefore no data on its increase or decrease.

5. Threats to the corncrake population

Mowing, uncontrolled pesticide use and destruction of habitats seem the most likely factors to detrimentally affect the population. Hunting: In Georgia licenses are still issued for shooting corncrake. The quota per capita is 12 corncrake within one season (15 August - 15 September). The quota is thought to relate to 15,000 active hunters. Fortunately, the licenses are not in demand - but no-one seems to miss the chance of shooting a corncrake flushed out while hunting for quail.

6. Conservation status

Corncrakes have no conservation status in Georgia.

7. Conservation projects

Corncrake conservation projects have never taken place in Georgia.

8. Ongoing or planned conservation or study projects

The Georgian Center for the Conservation of Wildlife (GCCW) has already identified most of the important sites for corncrakes in Georgia with a view to defining the size of each site's population and laying the foundation for monitoring activities at each site. Hopefully this survey will shortly be expanded in order to cover the whole country.

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