

## The Corncrake (*Crex crex*) in Liechtenstein

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### 1. Introduction

Covering only 160 km<sup>2</sup>, Liechtenstein is a minute country. Additionally, potential corncrake habitat is very limited. The species can only be expected to breed in the valley. The valley stretches over 40 km<sup>2</sup>, most of which is built up.

### 2. Development of knowledge about the corncrake population in Liechtenstein

KUBLI (1932) describes the corncrake as still common in the Alpine Rhine Valley, more common than for example the quail. This statement has certainly been true for Liechtenstein. An additional source (HOMBERG 1950) mentions that in 1950 the sound of corncrakes could be heard from the end of May until July in the fens. "Reid" probably describes all fen mires in Liechtenstein, in particular the Ruggeller Riet, the Banriet and even the Schwabbrünner Riet. At the end of the 60s the species was still breeding in all larger fen mires of the Rhine Valley (also Ruggeller Riet). Since the beginning of the 70s there are no records. But on 21 May 1977 a corncrake was heard in the Ruggeller Riet. From that time the presence

of the corncrake has been documented in detail.

### 3. Distribution and important areas of corncrake population

With one exception, since 1979 corncrakes have been recorded in Liechtenstein in the Ruggeller Riet only. The exception was a bird migrating through, which was heard in 1988 in the agricultural area between Vaduz and Schaan.

The Ruggeller Riet is a nature conservation site ("Naturschutzgebiet") of about 100 ha, of which about 60 ha are "streuwiesen". The corncrakes recorded here are closely linked to the population in the Vorarlberg region. The centre of this population is situated in the Unterried, which on 50 ha in 1994 had a maximum of 15 calling males.

### 4. Size of national corncrake population

Since 1979 the bird populations of the Ruggeller Riet have been quantitatively recorded. Therefore, a complete list of corncrake records, without omissions, can be given (Table 1).

**Table 1:** Number of corncrakes calling in the Ruggeller Riet in Liechtenstein.

Year	Count	Year	Count
1880	0	1991	2
1881	1	1992	3
1982	0	1993	2
1983	2	1994	8
1984	2	1995	3
1885	1	1996	2
1886	2	1997	1
1887	4	1998	0
1988	2	1999	1
1990	4		

### **5. Potential threats to the corncrake population**

The largest threat to the corncrake is undoubtedly intensive farming. Why the numbers of calling males in the Ried area are changing so much is not known. It is probably due to natural fluctuations. On the other hand, the eutrophication could lead to a decrease of habit quality. The eutrophication leads to an expansion of reed and tall herbs and to a reduction of short grasses.

### **6. Conservation Status**

The corncrake is legally protected in Liechtenstein. It is listed in the Red Data Book of the Fürstentum Liechtenstein under the category "threatened by extinction" ("vom Aussterben bedroht").

### **7. Conservation projects**

There are no concrete conservation projects in progress or planned.

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### **References**

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- KUBLI, H. (1932): Aus der rheintalischen Vogelwelt. [About the birds of the Rhine Valley] - Jahrbuch naturwissenschaftliche Gesellschaft St. Gallen: 64-79.