

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

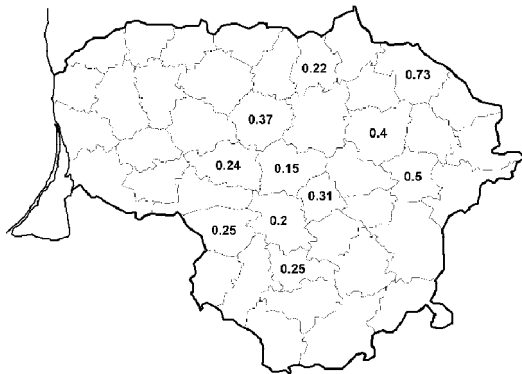
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### 1. Introduction

The corncrake is common in Lithuania and is a well-known bird. It is often mentioned in Lithuanian folk songs. Corncrakes usually arrive at the beginning of May in the southern part of Lithuania and in mid-May in the northern part.

### 2. Development of knowledge about the corncrake in Lithuania

Although the corncrake is well-known, at the same time it is a poorly studied species. Twenty years ago almost nothing was known about corncrakes. Later, (1980-1990) articles were published from time to time relating to the corncrake. Awareness of the corncrake was raised only



**Figure 1:** Corncrake density (singing males/km<sup>2</sup>) in some districts of Lithuania.

in the last decade. In 1996 the corncrake was “The Bird of the Year” and a survey and was carried out in nearly one-third of the territory of Lithuania. Some data was received from other areas as well. Some counts were done a few years earlier, especially in the Nemunas river delta, but in very small areas. There has been very little information about corncrake ecology and biology until now as no studies were carried out. Table 1 is showing corncrake ringing in Lithuania.

**Table 1:** Ringed corncrakes in Lithuania.

Year	Ringed birds
1929-78	5 ad. + 15 juv.
1979-97	4 ad. + 9 juv.

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

The corncrake is widespread in Lithuania. Important areas are:

- all river valleys;
- non-arable land (meadows, pastures).

### 4. Size and development of national corncrake population

#### 4.1. Size of national corncrake population

See fig. 1 and table 2.

**Table 2:** Estimates of the corncrake population in Lithuania. - \*Accuracy should be 0.

Year of estimate	Source	min.-max.	Accuracy
1985-88	TUCKER & HEATH (1994)	2000-3000	0
1994	CROCKFORD et al. (1996)	3000-4000	2*
1994-95	LITH. ORNITHOFAUN. COMMISSION (1996)	3000-5000	0
1996-97	ADOMAITIS et al. (1998)	25000-30000	2

#### 4.2. Development of population

The national population trend for the last 10 years is positive. Positive trend is based on most observers' personal reports as there were no surveys carried out. The future national population will be similar to the present in five years. In ten years the population will probably decrease - perhaps even sharply.

Reasons for the estimated population trend are:

- land privatization is going to be finished
- neglected and unused land will be planted with trees as forest or overgrown by shrubs
- every year the economical situation is getting better and land is used more intensively

#### 5. Threats to the corncrake population

Threats to the corncrake population are:

- early mechanized mowing
- the conversion of hay meadows and pastures to arable land
- neglected, suitable for breeding, land overgrown by forest or shrubs
- land reclamation (drainage).

#### 6. Conservation status

The corncrake in Lithuania has no legal conservation status. Corncrakes are fully protected by the regulations on particularly protected nature reserves. The species is included in the 1990 Red Data Book as an indeterminate, insufficiently studied species (fourth category).

#### 7. Conservation projects

There is one ongoing ecological project relating to corncrakes funded by The European Coastal Conservation Union. This project is carried out by The Lithuanian Fund for Nature and The Rusne Fund for Nature. It is carried out on Rusne Island in The Nemunas Delta Regional Park. It was started in 1987 and is a long-term project.

Generally conservation based on late mowing. Farmers are supported by technical equipment and training opportunity in The Netherlands.

#### 8. Ongoing or planned conservation or study projects

Corncrake studies are ongoing. These studies are done by The Lithuanian Ornithological Society. The research is to estimate the population size and to start long-term monitoring. Conservation or study projects could be done if funds were available.

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