

The Corncrake (*Crex crex*) in Norway

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1. Introduction

There has been some work done on the corncrake in Norway. In response to the preparation of BirdLife International «Action Plan for the Corncrake», The Norwegian Ornithological Society (NOF) started «Project Corncrake» in 1994/95.

2. Development of knowledge about corncrakes in Norway

A network of project contacts has been established in each county, and a nationwide census of the population is carried out every year. In addition, the project has focused on promoting practices for corncrake-friendly farmland management (in particular postponed mowing).

3. Distribution and important areas of corncrake population

The corncrake population in Norway has, as in almost every European county, shown a serious decline both in distribution and population size during this century. At the turn of the century, the species was regarded as «common, but declining» in most parts of southern Norway but by 1960 it had virtually disappeared. The corncrake-project has shown that it is only in Co. Rogaland, in the south-westernmost part of Norway, where there seems to be a genuine population left. 0-5 annually breeding females are estimated. Otherwise, most singing corncrakes are probably unpaired males.

4. Size and development of national corncrake population

4.1. Size of national corncrake population

The Norwegian corncrake population is estimated

at 50-75 singing males (a.o FOLVIK & ØIEN 1997), with some annual fluctuations mostly due to prevailing wind and weather patterns during May. The accuracy of this estimate could be said to be «a census accurate to 10% of the true number».

Table 1 gives a review of the number of singing males and breeding attempts recorded during 1995-97 (FOLVIK & ØIEN 1995, 1996, 1997).

Table 1: Number of singing males and breeding attempts recorded during 1995-97.

	1995	1996	1997
Singing males	70	29	45-47
Breeding/breeding attempts	2	1	3

4.2. Development of population

a. National population trend

The national population has been decreasing steadily during the 1900's. However, little data from surveys exist. During the last 20 years, the population seems to have been stable and low, fluctuating somewhat over the years.

b. Accuracy of data

The population seems to have stabilized in the last 10-20 years, and farmers have reported that the singing of corncrakes was the first heard for twenty years. However, this applies only to the species stronghold in Norway, Co. Rogaland. No information on short-term trends are available for other parts of Norway.

c. Population trend in restricted areas

A sample survey of a small part of the species stronghold in Co. Rogaland shows a decline from approximately 20 singing males during the early 1970's to 2-5 singing males during 1995-97.

d. Future national population trend

It's estimated that the population will stabilize at a very low level, provided the population elsewhere in Europe does not disappear. Supposedly there will be a Spring surplus overshooting to Norway also in the near future. Also, occasional breeding as a result of this may take place. The prospect of reestablishment of a significant population seems poor without important changes in land-use practices.

e. Reasons for population trend

The reason for the declining population is the same as in other European countries: changes and intensification in agriculture (mowing machinery, new grass-types making mowing possible 2 or 3 times each year).

5. Threats to the corncrake population

See 4.2e.

6. Conservation status.

The species is fully protected by national laws. Illegal prosecution poses no threat to the species' survival. Ringing has revealed road kills which have a negative impact. The species is listed as «Critically Endangered» in the Norwegian Red Data Book.

7. Conservation Projects.

Project Corncrake aims are:

- a. To conduct an annual surveillance of the population.
- b. To propose and implement conservation measures.

8. Ongoing or planned conservation or study projects

An information awareness campaign has been launched between 1995-98 (on national TV and in national/regional magazines/newspapers) both to inform on the status of the species, promote conservation techniques and gather information on singing corncrakes.

Funding has been made available to farmers nationwide for delayed mowing.

Project Corncrake will also keep on working in the near future. No special studies or conservation programmes are planned beyond this.

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