

MAYO CORNCRAKE UPDATE 10 June 2010

A flurry of reports last weekend suggested a late fall of Corncrakes, with new ones being first reported on two Connemara islands as well as at Elly Point on the Mullet (in one of the fields fertilized with farmyard manure in April for Corncrakes) and Rossport South (the first record here in 15 years).

The best place to hear them at the moment remains around Carne Hill, just outside Belmullet, with one very vocal performer on the top of the hill, in a garden on the south side of the road, and four others in and around Carne House. Others are dotted all around the peninsula in ones and twos. Two at Aghany, near Roonagh, Louisburgh, are in silage due to be mown this week, which is the second Corncrake breeding area and site of probable nests to be destroyed by mowing so far this season in Ireland – with congratulations to the two landowners involved.

I don't know what to make of the Corncrake calling at John Tiernan's in Doughmakeon, near Louisburgh. In 2006, a Corncrake with a strange, damaged-sounding call (much like a hoarse whistle, which later developed into a call which tailed-off like a deflating balloon) was heard calling from May until early June, from when it went silent. Within days of last being heard at Doughmakeon, this same individual was heard, once only, at Fallmore, on the southern tip of the Mullet peninsula, fully 40 kms north. (Fallmore is the first landfall for a bird from Doughmakeon flying due north through the Bull's Mouth at Achill Sound.) This same bird was reported heard back in the Louisburgh area once thereafter.

Now, three years later, a Corncrake with a strange voice (with a similar vocal impediment, creaking rather than craking, with a single high-pitched, uneven whistle, repeated in the traditional Corncrake rhythm of repeated couplets) once again returned to Doughmakeon. Having called for three weeks in precisely the same patches of nettles in and around John's house, this one also fell silent, not being heard for two weeks. During that period, a strange-sounding Corncrake was reported heard, on one occasion only, in Fallmore village. Now, the strange-sounding Corncrake is calling once again in John Tiernan's garden. Is it a descendent (not only inheriting it's progenitor's vocal imperfection, but perhaps also it's internal geographical map), or coincidence?

Corncrake census to date: 62 or 63 in North Donegal, 25 in Mayo, eight in Connemara, three in Sligo and two in the Shannon callows.

Corncrake telephone hotline: 095 44941

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