



Corncrake
Traonach LIFE

Newsletter

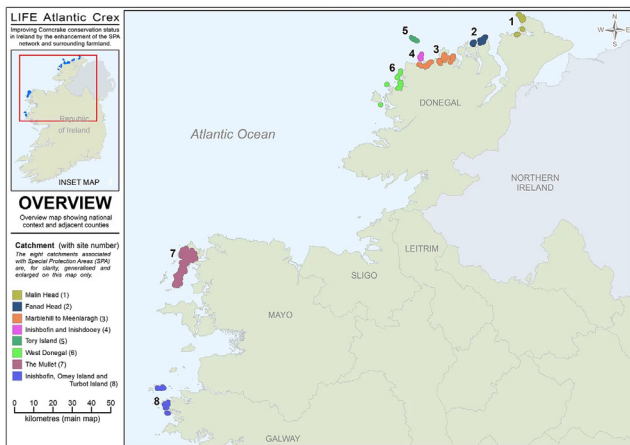
vol. 1 October 2022

Welcome

Dear Readers,

Welcome to the first issue of the Corncrake/Traonach LIFE newsletter!

Corncrake/Traonach LIFE is a 5-year EU-funded project aimed at improving the conservation status of one of Ireland's most iconic farmland bird species. The project works across counties Donegal, Mayo and Galway and is co-operating with farmers, landowners and local communities (see map below).



The Corncrake/Traonach LIFE project areas

Who we are

Corncrake/Traonach LIFE is coordinated by the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage (DHLGH) and The National Parks & Wildlife Service.

The project involves four beneficiaries; the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine, Udarás na Gaeltachta, Atlantic Technological University and FOTA Wildlife Park.



An Roinn Tithíochta,
Rialtais Áitiúil agus Oidhreacht
Department of Housing,
Local Government and Heritage



National Park &
Wildlife Service



An Roinn Talmhaíochta,
Bia agus Mara
Department of Agriculture,
Food and the Marine



Údarás na
Gaeltachta



This project has received funding from the European Union's LIFE programme under Grant Agreement No. LIFE18 NAT/IE/000090 LIFE Atlantic Grex



Some corncrake news!!!

In 2022, the national corncrake census recorded 197 calling male corncrakes in Ireland.

This is 5% increase on the number of birds recorded in 2021 and represents a very positive improvement in bird numbers.

Currently, a total of 148 calling male birds are found in the LIFE project target areas

with numbers in these areas having increased by 14%

since the project baseline in 2018.



A calling male corncrake in Co. Mayo

The projects core areas in Donegal, Mayo and Galway remain the key strongholds for the birds nationally. Islands host over half the national population.

Calling male birds were also recorded in Sligo and Kerry this year, and our friends from the RSPB on Rathlin Island had 4 calling males birds on their lands this year; a great achievement as birds had been absent there since the 1980s!

A good year for corncrakes - with plenty more to come!

Pilot Results-based Payment Scheme (RBPS)

2022 saw the first full year of the projects pilot results-based agri-environmental payment scheme. A total of 47 farmers took part in the programme which managed close to 450 hectares of farmed land from Malin Head in Donegal all the way to Turbot Island in Co. Galway.

Farm advisor training took place in July, with 20 advisors trained in corncrake habitat assessments.

Over 7 hectares of crucial early cover was created by farmers in the scheme, which will provide essential habitat for the birds when they return home in the Spring of 2023.

Nettles, Hogweed and Cow Parsley were all planted along with some old favourites such as traditional oats and kale.

Once again, the farmers and contractors did an excellent job of mowing fields from the centre out. Many farmers also chose to leave a margin along field edges to give the birds somewhere to escape to and received an additional payment for this measure.

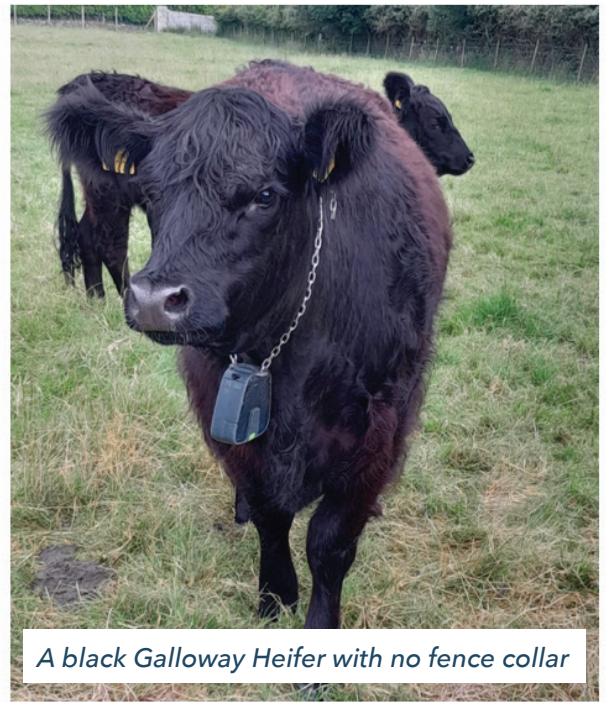
A call for new pilot scheme participants will be made in October 2023 and we are looking forward to building new relationships with those participants.



Golden oats ripening on a farm in Co. Mayo

Conservation Grazing on Toraigh

An important project action is to work with landowners to restore corncrake habitat where it is at risk of decreasing in quality due to lack of management.



A black Galloway Heifer with no fence collar

In July, working with local landowners and project participant Shaunie Boyle, five Black Galloway heifers were brought to Toraigh (Tory island) in Co. Donegal to assist with the removal of rank grass from a key corncrake area.

It was the first cattle on the island in almost 25 years and we were thrilled that the local community were so supportive of their return.

Galloway are a Scottish breed, and are well known for their hardiness and ability to gain condition on rough ground. These five ladies did a better job than any machine could ever do! Many plots which had been undergrazed for several years have now had new life brought them via the grazing and trampling of these lovely cattle.

We are really looking forward to seeing how the corncrakes respond to the reconditioned fields in 2023.

An old idea made new

'Flushing bars' were once a common sight on old Massey Ferguson tractors in the 1930's. The idea being that the chains on the bar scared birds and other wildlife out of the way before the mower came along.

A previous corncrake project in France trialled these bars on modern tractors with some success so Corncrake LIFE approached local contractor Shane McIntyre in Belmullet to develop something similar.

The design works off a eurolink for a front loader but we are hoping that other contractors will take the basic principal and design their own bar with assistance from the project.



A flushing bar designed by Shane McIntyre in Co. Mayo

Shane observed lots of wildlife benefitting from the bar during mowing the year- in particular hares and small birds.

If you are interested in making a flushing bar then please contact the project for more information.

MEET ONE OF OUR PROJECT PARTICIPANTS

James Joseph Doherty carries the title of Ireland's most northerly Corncrake farmer with pride. His farm includes Ireland's most Northerly point, Banba's Crown in Co. Donegal. Corncrake have utilized his lands for five consecutive years and he credits this return to the presence of an impressive swath of nettles and his traditional hay meadow which is mown late in the summer.

Corn and potatoes were historically harvested but nowadays the farm is used for sheep and cattle. When recalling his father's approach to farming he fondly states that "he never wrecked anything so I just followed him".

James Joseph is compensated for later mowing dates by Corncrake LIFE and also employs Wildlife Friendly Mowing (centre out) techniques. His species rich traditional meadows gets very little no fertiliser and no



pesticides and is very high scoring on the LIFE scorecard. The biodiversity and density of the meadow swards provide an ideal Corncrake habitat along with supporting other types of wildlife such as geese in October.

Less intensive farming in Malin Head makes it a special area for corncrake, according to James Joseph "when he comes this far, would we not let him stay?". With the numbers of Corncrakes in Malin Head down from eleven in 2021 to six in 2022 this farmer feels particularly privileged to have caught a glimpse of one in June.

Supporting farmers on our islands



In 2021 and 2022 the Corncrake/Traonach LIFE project worked with local farmers and contractors on Inishbofin to get meadows cut for the first time in over a decade. Inishbofin is famous for its wildlife and hosts a consistent population of corncrakes on an annual basis.

Picture (L-R) are Dafe Igegeri, Sean Igegeri with their Uncle Thomas Burke and Paddy Joe King who were involved in helping the project re-establish wildlife-friendly mowing on almost 12 hectares of land in the past 2 years.

New areas of early cover are also being established to ensure that the corncrake will always have a place on Inishbofin.

From Fanad to Fota and back again! (Ireland's luckiest corncrakes)

On June 13th the Corncrake LIFE team were monitoring a meadow being cut when something remarkable was discovered - a nest of 11 corncrake eggs.

As part of the project, the team are licenced to rescue eggs in the event that a nest is discovered abandoned. The eggs were carefully removed and brought to our partners in Fota Wildlife Park in Co. Cork where 9 of them hatched successfully.

After 3 weeks in Fota, the birds were returned to a special 'soft release' pen on Shane McAteers farm in Fanad Co. Donegal where they acclimatised to their surroundings for a further 3 weeks.

On Sunday July 7th all nine birds were released into the wild. It is hoped that some of these corncrakes will return to Fanad Head to help bolster the declining population there. Our huge thanks to all the farmers, local community and project team who made this happen.



One of the rescued corncrakes ready for release in Fanad head

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 [@CorncrakeLife](https://twitter.com/CorncrakeLife)

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Do you have an interest in our Corncrake LIFE project, nature, habitats, conservation or bird-watching?

If yes, please take 10 minutes to complete our questionnaire.

Scan the QR code to access the questionnaire:

