



Corncrake  
Traonach LIFE



# Project results booklet



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



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



Coláiste  
Teicneolaíochta  
an Aibreáin  
Atlantic  
Technological  
University



This project has received funding from the European Union's LIFE programme under Grant Agreement No. LIFE 18 NAT/IE/000090 LIFE Atlantic Crx



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# Project Overview

**Project name** Corncrake LIFE (LIFE Atlantic Crex)

**Project number** LIFE18 NAT/IE/000090

**Duration** September 2020 - September 2025 (with extension to June 2026)

**Total budget** €5,894,900



Corncrake  
Traonach



**EU contribution** €4,296,170

## Beneficiaries



Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage/ National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS) [Co-ordinating beneficiary]



Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine



Údarás na Gaeltachta



Fota Wildlife Park



Galway-Mayo Institute of Technology / Atlantic Technological University

**Website** [www.corncrakelife.ie/](http://www.corncrakelife.ie/)



The Corncrake LIFE project (LIFE18 NAT/IE/000090) is a conservation project funded under the EU LIFE Programme that aims to improve the conservation status of the endangered corncrake in Ireland.

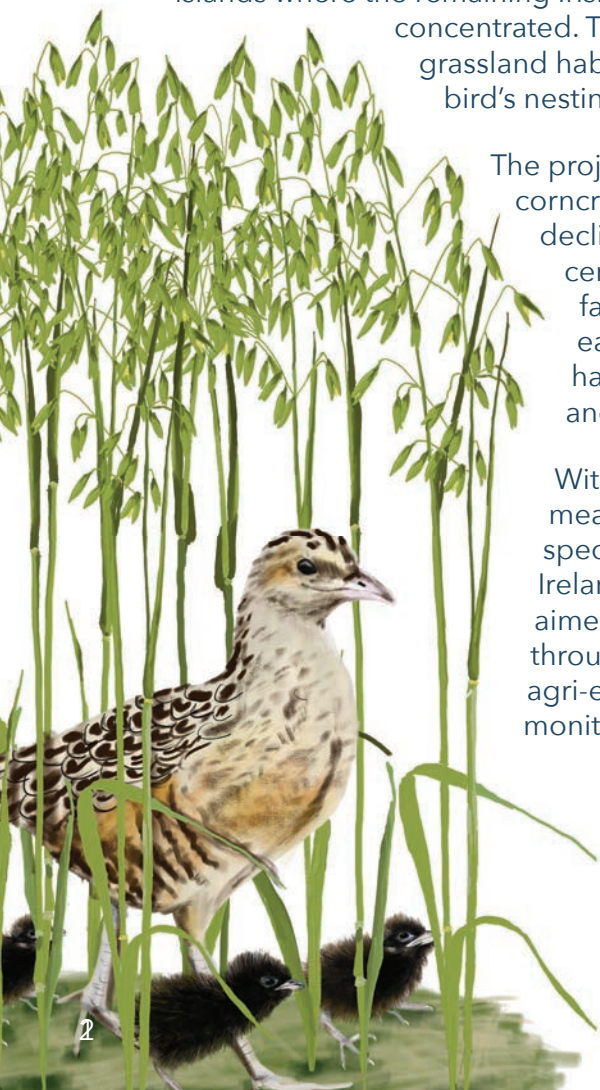


The project focused on restoring and managing suitable breeding habitat for the species, while supporting farmers to adopt wildlife-friendly practices that allow agricultural activity to continue alongside conservation.

The work was coordinated by NPWS in partnership with government agencies, research institutions, and local communities. The project took place mainly along the west and north-west coasts of Ireland, including key Special Protection Areas (SPA) in Mayo, Galway, and Donegal as well as offshore islands where the remaining Irish corncrake population is concentrated. These areas contain traditional grassland habitats that are essential for the bird's nesting and breeding success.

The project was needed because the corncrake population in Ireland has declined dramatically over the last century due to changes in farming practices, particularly earlier mowing dates, loss of hay meadows, intensification and habitat fragmentation.

Without targeted conservation measures, there is a risk that the species will disappear from Ireland. The project therefore aimed to reverse this decline through habitat restoration, agri-environment schemes, monitoring, and public awareness.



# Background

The corncrake is a small, secretive bird belonging to the rail family. It has mottled brown and buff plumage that provides good camouflage in tall grass, and it is more often heard than seen. The male is known for its distinctive rasping “crex-crex” call, which is repeated throughout the breeding season, mainly at night.

Corncrakes are migratory birds, spending the winter in south-eastern Africa and returning to Europe, including Ireland, in late spring to breed in tall grassland habitats such as hay meadows and silage fields. The species nests on the ground, which makes it highly vulnerable to disturbance and agricultural activities.

## Conservation status

The corncrake is considered endangered in Ireland due to its very small and localised breeding population. It is protected under the EU Birds Directive, meaning that member states must take measures to conserve its habitat and prevent further decline.

## Why it is important

The corncrake is an important indicator of traditional low-intensity farming landscapes that support high biodiversity. Protecting the species helps conserve species-rich grasslands, wildflowers, and other farmland wildlife. Conservation measures for the corncrake also benefit many other birds, insects, and plants, making it a key species for farmland conservation in Ireland.

## Decline in numbers

The corncrake population in Ireland has fallen dramatically over the past century. Once common across the country, numbers declined rapidly from the 1970s onwards, leaving only a small population in the west and north-west. Without conservation efforts, the species was at risk of disappearing completely from Ireland. It is estimated that the population has declined by 90% in the past forty years. The number of calling male bird territories was as low as 161 at the inception of the Corncrake LIFE project.

## Habitat loss

One of the main causes of decline has been the loss of suitable breeding habitat. Traditional hay meadows, which would have been cut late in the summer in the past, have largely been replaced by silage fields that are cut earlier and more frequently. This destroys nests and chicks before they are able to fly.

Mowing of hay and silage fields during the breeding seasons destroys nests; in many areas of Ireland harvesting takes place from June onwards and thus overlaps with the nesting period; second nests are particularly vulnerable. Machine mowing from the edges of the field to the centre results in the death of unfledged chicks, which are reluctant to escape across open ground to field margins; moulting females may also be at risk.

## Changes in farming

Modern farming methods have had a major impact on the species. Earlier mowing dates, the use of faster machinery, and the shift from hay to silage production mean that grasslands are often cut during the peak nesting season. Because corncrakes nest on the ground and rely on cover, these changes greatly reduce breeding success.

Female corncrakes lay 8-12 eggs & usually produce two broods a year. They need cover for nesting throughout this time to give the greatest chance of survival.

Adults arrive from Africa

First brood depart for Africa

Second brood depart for Africa



APRIL

MAY

JUNE

JULY

AUGUST

SEPTEMBER

FIRST BROOD:

LAY

CHICK CARE

DEPARTURE

SECOND BROOD:

LAY

CHICK CARE

DEPARTURE

## CORNCRAKES IN IRELAND

## Need for conservation action

Conservation action became necessary to prevent the extinction of the corncrake in Ireland. Measures such as delayed mowing, habitat management, agri-environment payments for farmers, and protection of key breeding sites were needed to allow the species to recover. Projects like the Corncrake LIFE project were developed to support farmers, restore habitat, and increase the population in the remaining strongholds.

## Project Area

The Corncrake LIFE project focused on the remaining strongholds of the corncrake in Ireland, primarily along the west and north-west coasts.

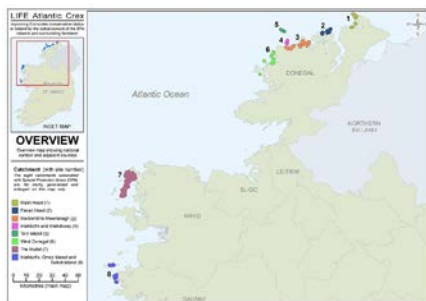
### Key project areas include:

**County Donegal** – Coastal grasslands, off shore islands and low intensity farmland supporting some of the largest remaining populations.

**County Mayo** – Including the Mullet Peninsula, Belmullet, and the surrounding coastal areas which are critical breeding sites.

**County Galway** – Offshore islands such as Inishbofin, Omev Island, and Turbot Island, as well as mainland SPAs with suitable grassland habitats.

The project area was defined by SPAs under the EU Birds Directive and adjacent farmland where traditional management practices can be maintained. These areas were selected for their existing corncrake populations, suitable grassland habitats, and potential for habitat restoration, making them the focal points for monitoring, habitat management, and farmer engagement activities for the duration of the project.



Map of the Corncrake/Traonach LIFE catchment areas

# Project Objectives

The main aim of the Corncrake LIFE project was to halt the decline of the corncrake in Ireland by restoring and protecting suitable breeding habitat, supporting farmers with wildlife-friendly management, and increasing the national population of this endangered species.

## 1. Increase the Irish corncrake population

One of the main objectives was to increase the number of breeding corncrakes in Ireland, particularly in strongholds in Mayo, Galway and Donegal.

The project aimed to do this by improving breeding success and expanding the amount of suitable habitat available.

## 2. Restore and protect suitable habitat

The project aimed to restore species-rich grasslands and create the tall vegetation needed for nesting. Actions included:

- Managing hay meadows and pastures
- Creating early cover for arriving birds
- Controlling scrub and unsuitable vegetation
- Improving habitat in SPAs
- Habitat restoration was essential because loss of traditional grassland is the main cause of the species' decline.

## 3. Support farmers through agri-environment schemes

Because corncrakes depend on farmland, the project worked closely with farmers to promote wildlife-friendly practices. Objectives included:

- Delaying mowing dates
- Using wildlife-friendly mowing techniques

- Providing payments to farmers for habitat management
- Maintaining low-intensity farming systems

#### **4. Improve knowledge, monitoring, and research**

The project aimed to improve scientific understanding of corncrake populations by:

- Monitoring calling males each year
- Tracking breeding success
- Assessing habitat quality & monitoring habitat use
- Identifying best practice methods of management

#### **5. Raise awareness and involve local communities**

Another objective was to increase public awareness of the importance of corncrake conservation, especially in rural areas where the species still occurs. This included:

- Working with local landowners
- Education and outreach
- Community involvement in conservation

#### **6. Secure long-term conservation of the species**

The overall goal of the project was to ensure that the corncrake remains a breeding bird in Ireland by putting long-term conservation measures in place that will continue after the project ends.



# Securing Landowner Cooperation & Local Community Involvement & Support

## Working with farmers and landowners

The project team worked closely with local farmers in providing suitable breeding habitat for corncrakes. Many of the participants either requested access to the project or were approached via a member of the project team via an expression of interest system.

Suitable participants were selected based on previous engagement with corncrake conservation initiatives or compatibility of farming practices with the project goals. Constant communication was maintained with each participant in order to explain the needs of the species and how small changes in management could improve breeding success.

Farmers were encouraged to delay mowing, use wildlife-friendly mowing techniques, and maintain areas of tall grass for cover. By involving farmers directly, the project ensured that conservation actions were practical, acceptable, and sustainable alongside ongoing agricultural activity.

## Site selection

Sites were chosen based on where corncrakes were already present or where suitable breeding habitat existed. Priority areas included Special Protection Areas, offshore islands, and coastal grasslands in counties Donegal, Mayo, and Galway. Surveys and monitoring data helped identify key fields and meadows that could support breeding, ensuring that conservation efforts were targeted where they would have the greatest impact.

The pre-existing grant scheme continued to operate during the duration of the Corncrake LIFE project and served as a stepping-stone for many participants to make longer-term plans for Corncrake management.

## **Farm Plans and Habitat Management Agreements**

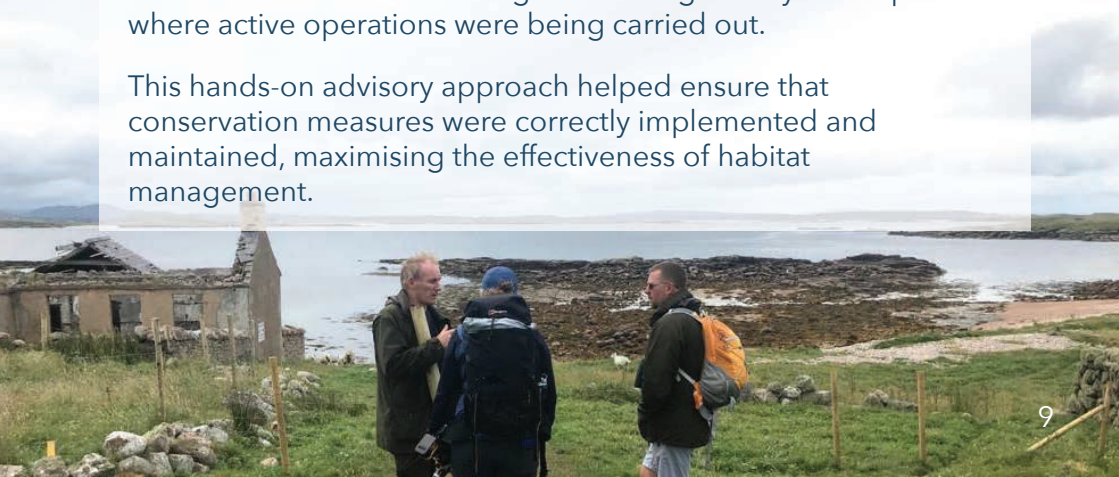
The project established formal agreements with landowners to protect and manage corncrake habitat. These agreements often included written management plans where each participant could select a specific delay date, mowing date or grazing regime from a menu based on differing rates of payment.

Two conditions for entry into the project were that all mowing on elected plots must follow wildlife-friendly best practice and that all participants must create a portion of Early and Late Cover (ELC) for Corncrake. These agreements helped secure long-term protection for the species while providing clear guidance to landowners.

## **Advisory support**

The project provided ongoing advice and technical support to farmers and landowners. Field officers gave guidance on best practice for mowing, grazing, and vegetation management as well as assistance in the establishment and maintenance of ELC plots. Contractors were also trained to create a variety of ELC types, carry out wildlife-friendly mowing and have a better awareness and understanding of breeding activity within plots where active operations were being carried out.

This hands-on advisory approach helped ensure that conservation measures were correctly implemented and maintained, maximising the effectiveness of habitat management.



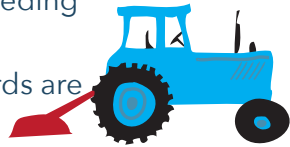
# Improving Management Regimes for Corncrake in Project sites



## Managing breeding habitat

### 1. Late Mowing

- Mowing scheduled after the peak breeding season to avoid destroying nests.
- Wildlife friendly mowing to ensure birds are not killed during grass harvesting.
- Coordination with landowners to ensure compliance across all suitable fields.



### 2. Delayed Grazing

- Grazing postponed until chicks have fledged.
- Livestock numbers controlled to prevent overgrazing of nesting vegetation.
- Strategic rotation to maintain dense cover for breeding.



### 3. Habitat Creation

- Establishment of new breeding areas through sowing suitable grassland mixes.
- Management of field margins to create refuges.
- Restoration of previously unsuitable areas (wet meadows, rough grasslands).



*Restoration of grasslands and crop cultivation were key landscape actions within the project*

#### **4. Rush / Scrub Control**

- Targeted removal of rushes and scrub to maintain open grassland structure.
- Use of mechanical cutting and controlled grazing.
- Regular monitoring to prevent loss of optimal habitat condition.



**BEFORE**



**AFTER**

# Improving targeting & delivery of effective conservation measures

## Habitat types

The Corncrake requires tall, diverse grassland vegetation for breeding and nesting. Suitable habitats include traditional hay meadows, species-rich grasslands, rough pasture, and nettle, umbelifer and iris beds that provide good cover during the nesting season. These habitats allow the bird to hide from predators and safely raise chicks on the ground. In Ireland, the best remaining habitats are found in coastal grasslands, low-intensity farmland, and on offshore islands along the west and north-west coast. These areas are often designated as Special Protection Areas (SPAs) under the EU Birds Directive because they support the remaining breeding population.

## Farming systems

The habitats used by corncrakes are closely linked to traditional, low-intensity farming systems. In the past, farmers cut hay late in the summer, which allowed chicks enough time to hatch and grow before mowing began. Grazing levels were also lower, which helped maintain tall grass cover.

Modern farming systems, however, tend to use silage production instead of hay, with earlier and more frequent cutting. Machinery is also faster and more efficient, which increases the risk of destroying nests.

Conservation programmes now work with farmers to delay mowing dates, use wildlife-friendly cutting methods, and manage grasslands in ways that support both farming and biodiversity.

## Land use

Land use in corncrake areas has changed significantly over the last century. Many traditional meadows have been reseeded, fertilised, or drained to increase productivity, resulting in the loss of suitable habitat. In some places, land has been abandoned, leading to scrub growth that is also unsuitable for breeding. The remaining corncrake populations are mostly found in areas where land use is still relatively traditional, such as small-scale farms, commonage land, and coastal grasslands.

Conservation projects aim to maintain these land uses while providing financial support to farmers so that habitats suitable for corncrakes can be protected and restored.



*Ecologists and landowners worked together to identify a fair and equitable means of rewarding for the delivery of high quality corncrake habitat*

# Creation of Early & Late Cover (ELC)

Within the Corncrake LIFE project, the minimum size for each ELC plot was 0.05 ha (i.e., ~500 m<sup>2</sup>). For newly created ELC, each participant needed to establish at least 0.1 ha of ELC. On Island sites where plots are smaller and more fragmented, ideally about 5% of the total area entered into the project's grassland management should be under ELC.

The requirement of a minimum patch size of 0.1 ha may not be feasible on very small holdings or fragmented land on mainland sites too and as a result two ELCs of 0.05 ha could be created in two separate locations.

Once created, ELC areas had to remain for the full duration of the management plan. In some cases, that was a 5-year commitment for participants. For ELC that was grazed, the plot was clearly delineated, and grazing was restricted during parts of the year, especially during the breeding season. For newly established ELC, there is a 'grace period' of 2 years for establishment.



*ELC corridors on farm*

Under Corncrake LIFE the payment in €/0.1 ha was:

- First 1,000 m<sup>2</sup>: €350
- Second 1,000 m<sup>2</sup>: €175
- Third 1,000 m<sup>2</sup>: €125
- Beyond that: €75 per additional 1,000 m<sup>2</sup>



The maximum total payment for ELC per farm was capped at €1,000 for ELC.

ELC areas needed to be fenced off from livestock to protect growth, especially if the adjacent plots had grazing actions in the management plans.

ELC ensures that corncrakes have dense high vegetation (~20 cm) available when they arrive in spring and when surrounding grassland is cut or grazed later in the season. This is critical because lacking cover at key times makes them vulnerable.

By providing safe cover, ELC supports nest concealment, foraging, and chick survival.



*Harvesting and growing nettles for ELC creation*

# Knowledge Exchange with Farmers & Planners

## Working with Farmers

The success of the Corncrake LIFE Project depended on close collaboration with farmers and landowners in core breeding areas. Through results-based payments, habitat management agreements and regular advisory support, the project delivered large-scale improvements in breeding habitat while supporting farm incomes.

## Number of farmers involved

Over the course of the project, participation increased each year as confidence in the project grew.

- Approximately 260 farmers participated in the final year of the project (2025)
- This included both LIFE project participants and conservation programme participants
- Farmers were located mainly in Donegal, Mayo and Galway, with additional sites elsewhere.

### *At peak project output in 2025:*

- 165 participants in the LIFE conservation programme, which included the pilot agri-scheme, management agreements and land leases
- 99 participants in the LIFE grant scheme

This represents the highest level of participation recorded during the project, which worked to protect birds on other lands within the catchments.

## Area managed

Large areas of grassland habitat were managed each year to provide safe nesting and feeding conditions for corncrakes.

In 2025:

- 539 ha managed under the NPWS Corncrake/Traonach Conservation Programme (CTCP) and Corncrake LIFE
- ~1000 ha managed under plans via NPWS and Corncrake LIFE
- ~60 ha Early / Late Cover habitat under management
- Over 1500 ha under management in total

## Payment schemes

Farmers were supported through targeted payment schemes designed to protect breeding birds while maintaining viable farm systems.

Payments were made for:

- Delayed mowing or grazing
- Wildlife-Friendly Mowing
- Retention of refuge areas or margins
- Early and Late Cover habitat
- Habitat restoration works



*The project team engaged closely with farmers on all aspects of their farm plan*

## Advisory visits

Regular advisory support was essential to the success of the project.

Field staff:

- Surveyed calling males each season
- Visited farms to plan habitat measures
- Supervised mowing operations
- Provided guidance on grazing and cutting dates
- Helped farmers choose the most suitable ELC options

Farmers were contacted throughout the breeding season to ensure that management was carried out safely for nesting birds.

Advisory visits also helped to:

- Improve habitat quality each year
- Encourage new participants to join the scheme
- Project team support ensured that conservation measures were correctly applied and that nests were protected during the breeding season.



# Species Protection

## Protecting nests and chicks

### 1. Predator Management

- Key nest predators such as foxes, crows, mink and rats.
- Installation of predator-proof fencing around high-risk fields.
- Use of humane traps or deterrents where legally permitted.
- Regular checks of predator activity and control effectiveness.
- Adjustment of management strategies based on survey results.

### 2. Mowing Protocols

- Wildlife friendly mowing carried out outside peak breeding season (generally after mid-August) to avoid nest destruction.
- Use of machinery with low ground impact.
- Strip or rotational mowing to maintain undisturbed areas.
- Regular checks to ensure adherence to agreed dates and methods.
- Record-keeping of mowing dates and field locations.

### 3. Margins & Refuges

- Protect breeding areas from disturbance (machinery, livestock, human activity).
- Establish unmown strips along field edges or around known nest sites.
- Minimum width guidelines (e.g., 10-20 m depending on field size).
- Ensure buffers remain intact throughout breeding season.
- Monitor vegetation growth and habitat suitability.

# Monitoring

## Co-ordinated Census

The Corncrake Census in Ireland is a coordinated national survey designed to monitor populations of the corncrake. The census provides critical data to guide conservation actions, track population trends, and inform agri-environment schemes aimed at protecting and restoring suitable breeding habitat.

The programme is led by the National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS), with field operations overseen by a Census Supervisor, responsible for training fieldworkers and coordinating regional census to ensure consistency and accuracy across all survey areas.

For operational purposes, the census is divided into four key regions reflecting the core remaining strongholds of the species:

- South Mayo & Connemara
- North Mayo
- East Donegal
- West Donegal & Islands



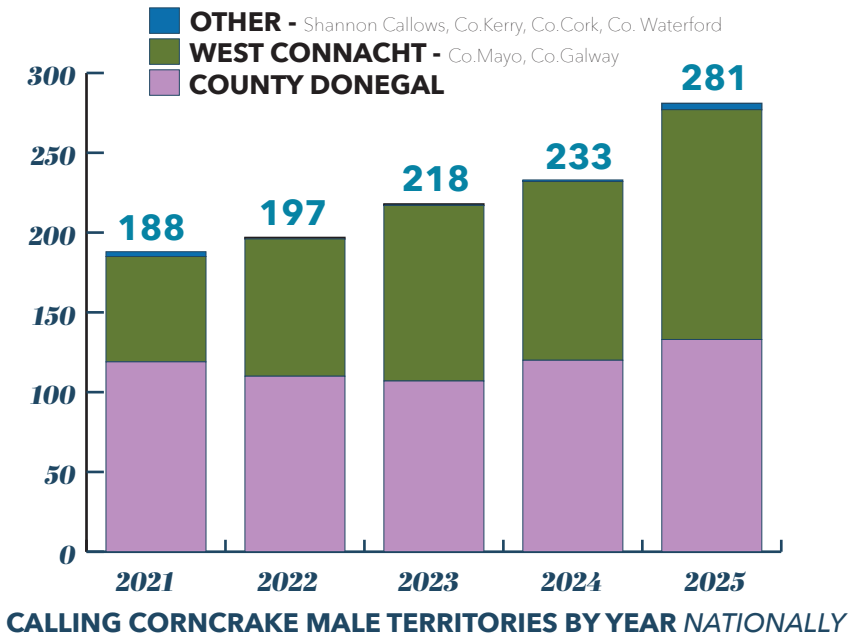
The census typically takes place during the breeding season, from mid-May through to late July, when male corncrakes are most vocally active. Surveys are conducted at night, generally between 11:00 p.m. and 3:00 a.m., as males call loudly during these hours to attract mates. Fieldworkers follow standardized listening routes, recording calling males and mapping their locations. These locations are then used to map the centre of new breeding territories.

An important aspect of the census is its integration with conservation incentives. Where confirmed breeding sites are identified, landowners may be offered a compensatory payment for adopting corncrake-friendly practices—such as delayed mowing, outward mowing patterns, and the preservation of early and late cover habitats—to reduce the risk of nest destruction and

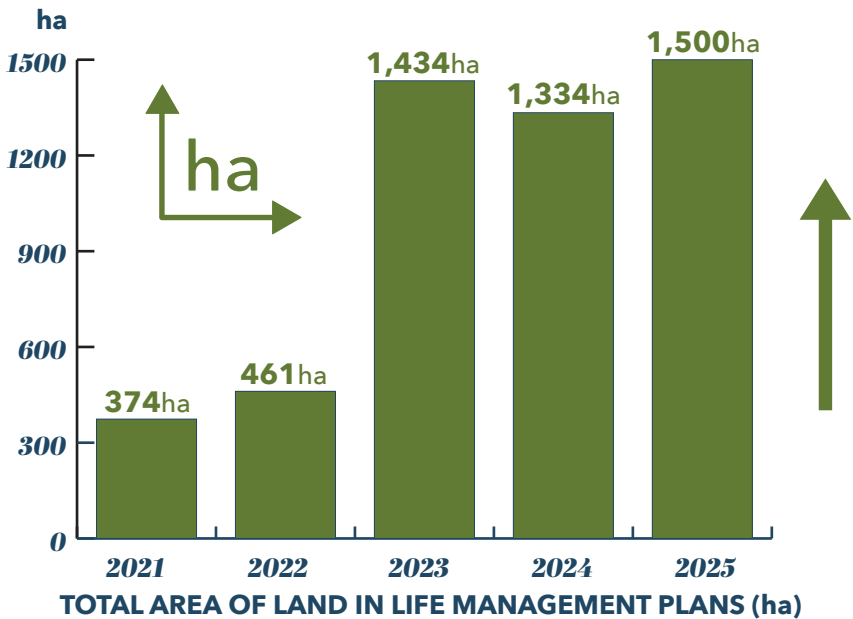
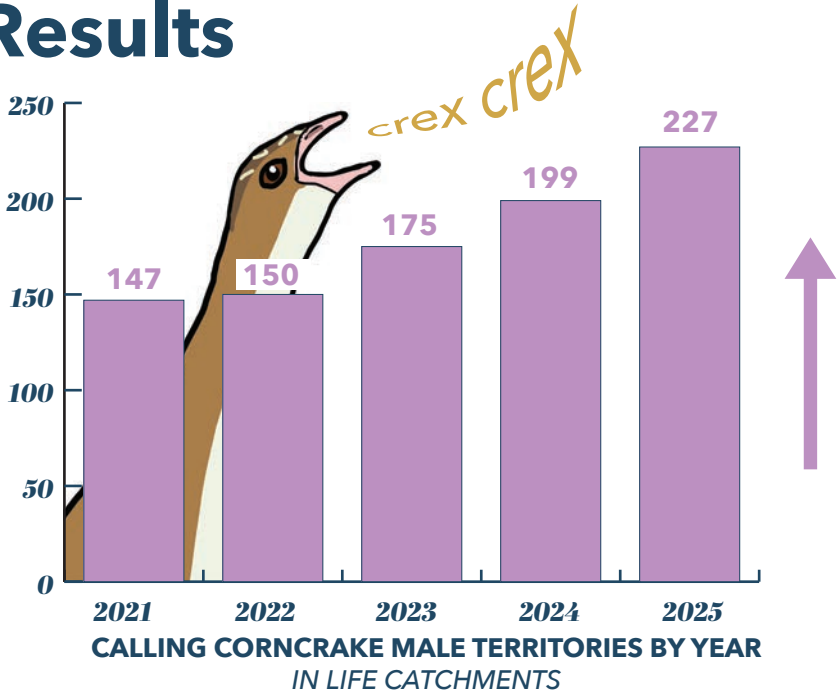
improve breeding success.

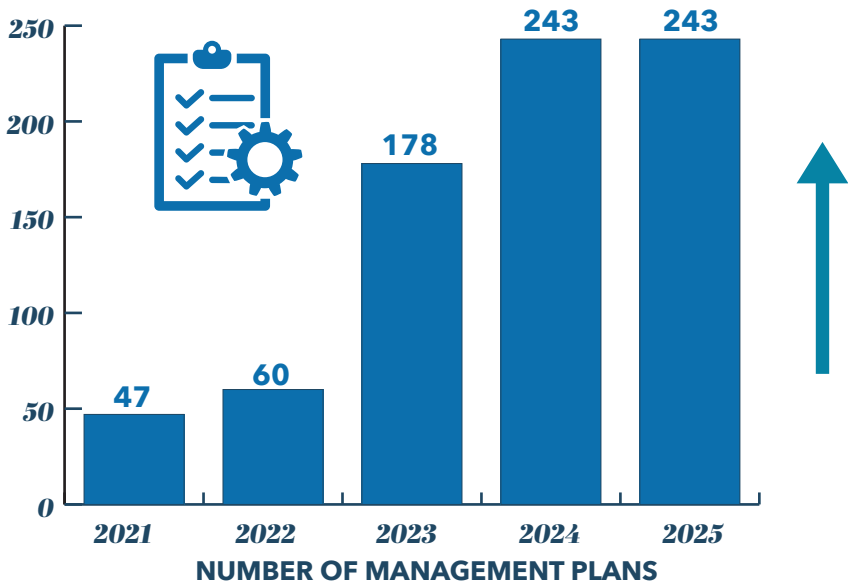
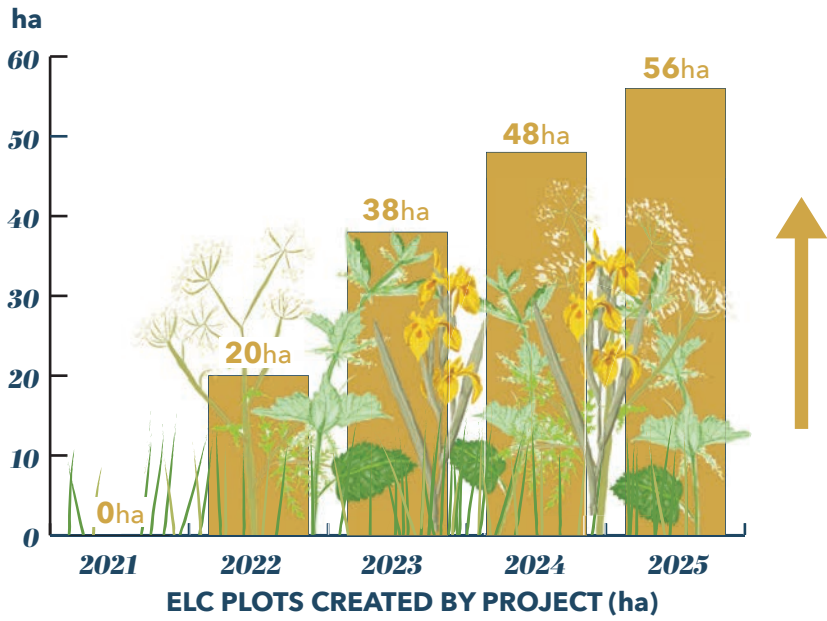
Overall, the census is a cornerstone of Ireland’s effort to prevent the extinction of the corncrake as a breeding species, combining rigorous field monitoring with practical, locally targeted conservation measures. This work involves:

- Standardised listen surveys between 11pm and 3am when males are most vocal
- Recording of calling males locations via GPS mapping
- Conducting multiple visits per breeding season to assess population changes
- Informing management decisions (habitat interventions, mowing timing)
- Contributing to national and European corncrake population monitoring
- Surveys conducted weekly during breeding season (typically May–July)



# Results





# Results

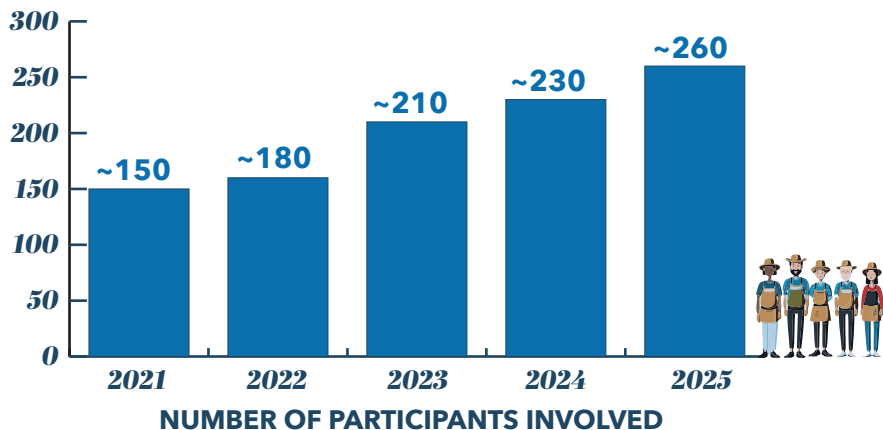
## Farmer involvement

The Corncrake LIFE Project continued to scale up its delivery of targeted conservation actions in line with its strategic objectives of stabilising and increasing the breeding population of corncrakes across key Special Protection Areas (SPAs) and associated LIFE catchments.

By the project's conclusion in 2025, it engaged approximately 165 programme participants, including 99 LIFE participants in the responsive measures, bringing the total number of farmers involved in corncrake-friendly management to around 260.

This expanding participation underpinned the delivery of core measures such as habitat creation, early-late cover (ELC) provision, delayed mowing regimes, and the development and maintenance of LIFE restoration sites.

These actions were implemented across multiple SPAs and priority landscapes, including both offshore islands and mainland strongholds, ensuring a coordinated, landscape-scale approach to habitat restoration. Early-late cover (ELC), in particular, played a critical role in providing essential early-season nesting habitat and late-season refuge, complementing delayed mowing and wider habitat management measures.



## Sites managed and restored

The steady increase in sites managed or restored reflected the project's growing capacity and reach, rising from approximately 20 sites in 2021 to over 30 sites directly managed annually from 2023 onwards, and reaching 34 managed grid squares across multiple SPAs by 2025.

Collectively, these efforts demonstrated a significant intensification of conservation activity, aligning farmer engagement with practical habitat measures to deliver high quality habitat.



## Population increase



188



281

calling  
males



**+49% increase in 5 years**



The national population increased steadily during the project, reaching **the highest total recorded corncrake** since monitoring began.

## Nests protected

Under Action C.3 of the LIFE Atlantic Grex project, a programme of systematic predation risk management was undertaken throughout the project's operational areas. Predator control was supported by the National Parks and Wildlife Service via contracted officers. Predation risk management acted as a complementary measure to habitat creation and maintenance to deliver the project's overarching objective: **to enhance the conservation status in Ireland of the corncrake.**

The project subsumed responsibility for directing predator control in the target catchments from the National Parks and Wildlife Service in March 2021. All predation risk management was conducted under licence from the National Parks and Wildlife Service. A predation risk management strategy was drafted which identified the key threats and pressures in terms of predation risk within each of the eight catchments.

Operational zones were identified in each catchment for actions in 2021. Operational zones encompassed broad areas of each target catchment area due to the project's preparatory phase in 2021, the rationale being to continue to undertake predation risk management in key corncrake areas based on current and historic distribution data. During the bird breeding season predation risk management is informed by the location of bird territories and land management agreements, with predator control targeting zones around bird locations once the breeding season begins.

The corncrake predator control programme amalgamated with the LIFE on Machair project in 2024 and is now operating at a wider landscape level under the remit of the NPWS pilot nest protection programme until March 2026.

## Key metrics from Nest Protection Activity

Total predators removed: **10,603 individuals**

Total predator-related actions recorded: **6,850 actions**

### Recorded activity types:

- Trap servicing: 3,802 events
- Trap dispatch (captures dealt with): 2,342 events
- Shooting events: 2,393 events
- Observations: 849 events
- Camera/documentated traps: 661 events

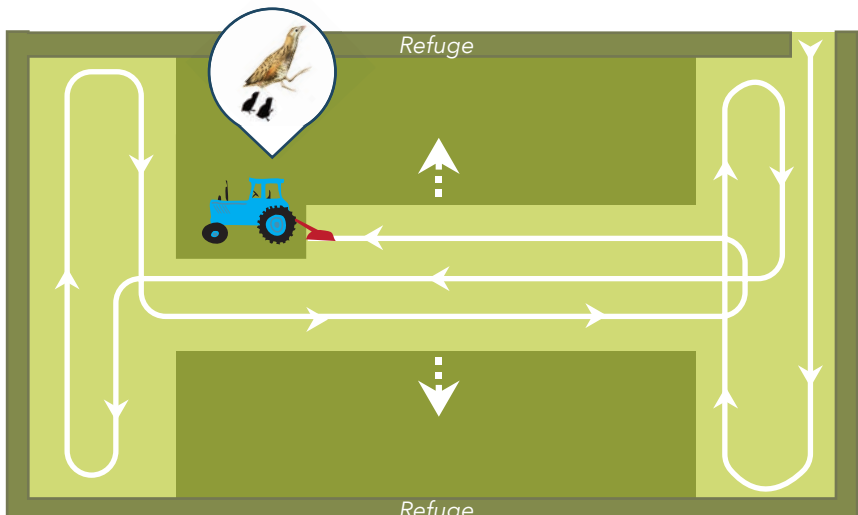
### Estimated effort (approximation)

If we apply conservative fieldwork estimates:

- Trap service: ~20-30 min each
- Dispatch: ~15-20 min
- Shooting/field visits: ~1-2 hrs

## Wildlife-friendly mowing (WFM)

WFM also played a vital role in nest protection, where slow speed, flushing bar use and the retention of margins and refuges led to higher instances of chick survival. Overall, WFM and delayed mowing significantly reduced risk to breeding birds and nests.



# Socio-Economic Benefits

## Benefits for farmers

### Income support

The project provided direct financial payments to participating farmers in return for implementing corncrake-friendly management practices, such as delayed mowing and wildlife-friendly grazing. These payments helped offset potential loss of income caused by reduced silage yields or changes to traditional farming schedules.

### Knowledge exchange

Farmers involved in the project gained practical knowledge of biodiversity-friendly farming techniques, habitat management, and participation in agri-environment schemes. This increased their capacity to manage land more sustainably while maintaining farm productivity.

### Farm sustainability

By promoting low-intensity farming, traditional hay meadow management, and improved grassland diversity, the project supported long-term soil health, resilience, and environmental sustainability, helping farms remain viable into the future.

## Benefits for Communities

### Biodiversity

Conservation of the corncrake also protected a wider range of species associated with species-rich grasslands, wetlands, and coastal farmland. This contributed to healthier ecosystems and enhanced the natural environment for local residents.

### Tourism

The presence of a rare and protected species such as the corncrake attracted nature-based tourism, including birdwatchers, researchers, and visitors interested in conservation.

This created additional income opportunities for rural communities through accommodation, guiding, and local services.

## **Heritage**

Traditional farming practices supported by the project helped maintain cultural landscapes that were part of rural heritage, particularly in areas of western and north-western Ireland where the corncrake had historically been present. Protecting these landscapes helped preserve local identity and traditions.



## **Benefits for policy**

### **Agri-environment schemes**

The project helped test and refine results-based and habitat-focused agri-environment measures that could be used in national schemes under the Common Agricultural Policy. Lessons learned improved the effectiveness of later programmes such as the ACRES Cooperation project.

### **Natura 2000**

The project contributed to the conservation objectives of sites within the Natura 2000 network by improving habitat quality for protected species and supporting Ireland's obligations under the EU Birds and Habitats Directives.

### **LIFE programme**

As part of the LIFE Programme, the project demonstrated how EU funding could deliver practical conservation results while also supporting rural livelihoods, providing a model that could be replicated in other regions and for other species.

# Communication & Outreach

## Sharing the project

### Events

The project organised and participated in public events, workshops, and information days to raise awareness of corncrake conservation and the importance of biodiversity-friendly farming. These events provided opportunities to share results, demonstrate project methods, and engage with farmers, local communities, and conservation groups.

### School visits

Educational visits were carried out in local schools to increase awareness of the corncrake and its habitat.

These visits introduced students to wildlife conservation, traditional farming practices, and the importance of protecting biodiversity, helping to build long-term support for conservation efforts.



## **Demonstrations**

On-farm demonstrations were organised to show how corncrake-friendly management techniques could be implemented in practice. These demonstrations allowed farmers, advisors, and stakeholders to see habitat management methods such as delayed mowing, cover provision, and low-intensity grazing in real working farm conditions.

## **Website**

The project maintained a dedicated website which provided updates, reports, guidance documents, and background information on the project. This ensured that information was accessible to farmers, policymakers, researchers, and the general public throughout the lifetime of the project.

## **Social media**

Social media platforms were used to share news, photographs, project results, and event information. This helped reach a wider audience and increased public awareness of the project and the conservation of the corncrake.

## **Publications**

The project produced reports, guidance documents, and informational leaflets outlining the results and lessons learned. These publications supported knowledge transfer and helped inform future conservation projects, agri-environment schemes, and policy development.



# Promoting the Corncrake as an Asset for Local Areas and Communities

## Public engagement

### Talks

- Delivered talks to local communities, schools, and interest groups to raise awareness of corncrake conservation.
- Presentations focused on the species' biology, habitat requirements, and ways the public can support conservation efforts.

### Field Days

- Organized field visits and guided tours on SPAs, offshore islands, and farmland to showcase habitat management in action.
- Allowed farmers, students, and community members to see conservation practices, such as delayed mowing and wildlife-friendly grassland management, firsthand.

### Training

- Provided practical training for farmers, landowners, and volunteers on habitat management techniques, nest protection, and monitoring.
- Delivered workshops on corncrake-friendly mowing methods and sustainable farmland management.

### Media

- Project updates, success stories, and conservation guidance were shared via local and national media, including newspapers, radio, and online platforms.

- Social media campaigns on platforms like Twitter/X promoted awareness, highlighted volunteer activities, and encouraged community participation.



Murals created in cooperation with local communities



CorncrakeLIFE's informative sign erected at Turbot Island pier



Appearance on TG4



Networking event on Inishbofin island, Co. Galway

# Key Lessons Learned

## What worked:

- Collaboration with farmers was highly effective in improving habitat and breeding success.
- Delayed mowing and wildlife-friendly cutting techniques significantly increased chick survival.
- Habitat restoration on SPAs and offshore islands provided secure breeding areas.
- Monitoring and annual surveys allowed adaptive management and informed decision-making.
- Community engagement and awareness campaigns raised local support for conservation efforts.

## Challenges:

- Intensive farming practices, early mowing and overgrazing from sheep remain a threat in some areas.
- Small, fragmented populations make monitoring and recovery more difficult.
- Limited funding and resources constrained the scale of habitat restoration in some regions.
- Land abandonment and scrub encroachment reduced some potential breeding sites.

## What should continue:

- Farmer partnerships and agri-environment agreements to maintain suitable habitat.
- Long-term monitoring of breeding populations and habitat quality.
- Public engagement and education to maintain awareness and support.
- Targeted habitat management on SPAs, offshore islands, and priority farmland.

## Recommendations:

- Treat corncrake as an umbrella species for wider farmland biodiversity to maximize conservation benefits.
- Continue integrating conservation measures with national agri-environment schemes like ACRES CP while avoiding double-payment.
- Maintain and expand community-led initiatives to ensure local ownership and sustainability.
- Ensure flexibility in management plans to respond to changing conditions and population trends.
- Utilise locally led and embedded conservation workers to maintain trust and cooperation with the key stakeholders.



# FUTURE OF CORNCRAKE CONSERVATION

Once the LIFE project ends, the conservation measures put in place are maintained and monitored to ensure the corncrake population continues to recover. LIFE projects are designed to leave a lasting impact, meaning that the habitats restored, agreements with farmers, and management practices established during the project continue beyond the funding period. Monitoring and evaluation ensure that lessons learned are applied and that successes are built upon.

## Follow-up schemes

Following the completion of the LIFE project, a new 3-year Natura Communities for Birds pilot project will be launched by NPWS to safeguard and build upon the work already carried out for corncrake conservation. With corncrake considered an umbrella species for the wider farmland landscape, this project will ensure that the benefits of habitat restoration and improved management extend to other associated farmland bird species and ecosystems. By focusing on existing Special Protection Areas (SPAs) and surrounding farmland, the project aims to consolidate the gains made over the past five years and enhance long-term protection for both the species and its habitat.

Under the NPWS the new project team will continue to operate the grant scheme for seasonal Corncrake breeding sites, as well as maintain the longer-term landscape level farm planning that has proven successful for the species. The project will work directly with local communities and stakeholders within the Natura 2000 network to improve the quality and management of SPAs and adjacent farmland.

Led by a community development company, it will seek to align

with existing policy and agri-environmental schemes under the Department of Agriculture, such as the ACRES CP programme, which supports farmers in high-biodiversity areas. Through collaboration, practical guidance, and ongoing monitoring, the initiative aims to create a sustainable model of farmland management that benefits corncrake, other wildlife, and local communities alike.

## Policy links

The project directly supports implementation of EU and national policy:

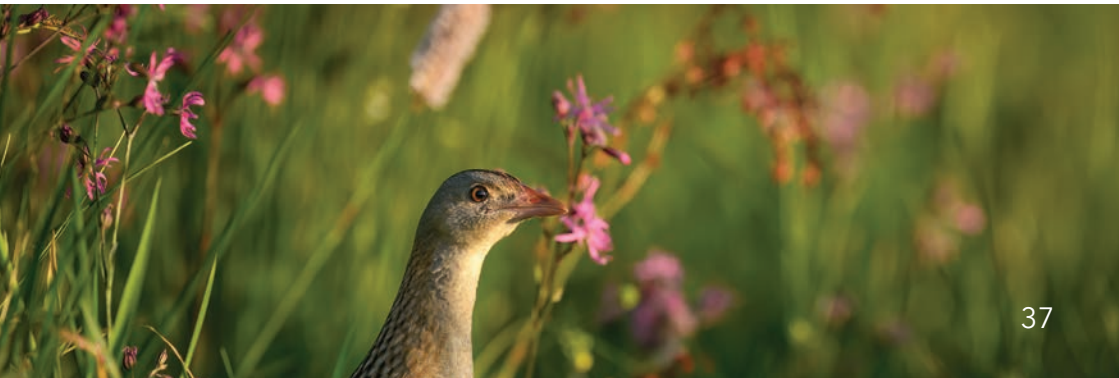
**EU Birds Directive** – protects corncrake habitat and requires member states to maintain species populations.

**EU Habitats Directive** – ensures protection of Special Protection Areas where corncrakes breed.








**National Biodiversity Action Plans** – LIFE outcomes are integrated into Ireland's broader biodiversity conservation strategy.

## Long-term management

Long-term management focuses on maintaining suitable grassland habitats, continuing delayed mowing and wildlife-friendly farming practices, and supporting farmers through incentives and guidance. Community involvement and ongoing monitoring ensure that the species remains present in key breeding areas, while lessons learned from LIFE inform future conservation efforts. The combination of habitat protection, farmer cooperation, and policy enforcement aims to secure a sustainable future for the corncrake in Ireland.



# Project Partners

<p style="writing-mode: vertical-rl; transform: rotate(180deg);"><b>COORDINATOR</b></p>	 <p>An Roinn Tithíochta, Rialtais Áitiúil agus Oidhreacht Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage</p>  <p><b>NPWS</b> <small>An tAidmhe Páirceanna Náisiúnta agus Faoilteora National Parks and Wildlife Service</small></p>	<p><b>Dept. of Housing, Local Government and Heritage/ National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS)</b> Overall management of the project, site selection, monitoring, and delivery of conservation actions.</p>
<p style="writing-mode: vertical-rl; transform: rotate(180deg);"><b>PARTNERS</b></p>	 <p>An Roinn Talmhaíochta, Bia agus Mara Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine</p>	<p><b>Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine (DAFM)</b> Support for agri-environment schemes and integration of farmland management with corncrake conservation.</p>
 <p><b>Údarás na Gaeltachta</b></p>	<p><b>Údarás na Gaeltachta</b> Engagement with local communities in Gaeltacht areas, promoting awareness and participation in conservation.</p>	
	<p><b>Fota Wildlife Park</b> Public outreach, educational programmes, and species awareness initiatives.</p>	
 <p>Ollscoil Teicneolaíochta an Atlantaigh  Atlantic Technological University</p>	<p><b>Galway-Mayo Institute of Technology / Atlantic Technological University</b> Scientific research, monitoring, data analysis, and technical support for habitat management.</p>	
	<p><b>Local farmers and landowners</b> Implementation of on-the-ground habitat management, delayed mowing, and wildlife-friendly farming practices.</p>	

# About the LIFE Programme



The LIFE Programme is the European Union’s funding instrument for environment and climate action, supporting projects that protect nature, promote biodiversity, and address climate change.

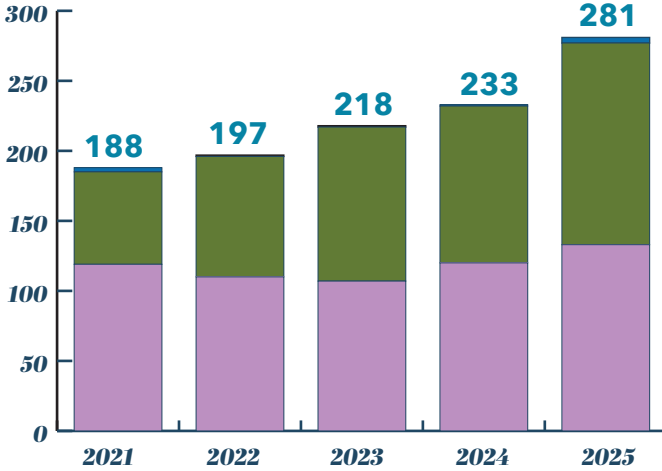
It funds initiatives in areas such as nature conservation, species protection, habitat restoration, environmental policy implementation, and climate action projects.

**Website:** [https://cinea.ec.europa.eu/programmes/life\\_en](https://cinea.ec.europa.eu/programmes/life_en)



# CORNCRAKE RECOVERY I

## STEADY NATIONAL RECOVERY DRIVEN BY TARGETED CONSERVATION



### CALLING CORNCRAKE MALE TERRITORIES BY YEAR NATIONALLY

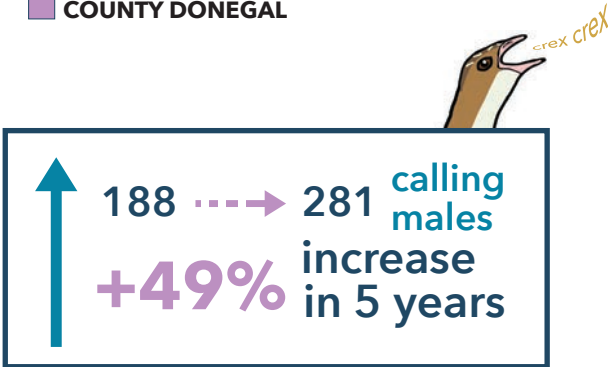
- OTHER** - Shannon Callows, Co.Kerry, Co.Cork, Co. Waterford
- WEST CONNACHT** - Co.Mayo, Co.Galway
- COUNTY DONEGAL**

**133**  
DONEGAL

**113**  
MAYO

**31**  
GALWAY

**SO**  
KERRY &



Corncrake  
Traonach LIFE



An Roinn Talmhaíochta,  
Éil agus Fóir,  
Department of Agriculture,  
Food and the Marine



An Roinn Talmhaíochta,  
Rialtas Árainn agus Talmhaíochta  
Department of Housing,  
Local Government and Heritage



# N IRELAND: 5-year impact



## ELC & SITES MANAGED

**30+** sites annually

**~60ha** early & late cover



## EDUCATION & COMMUNITY

**20** schools visited

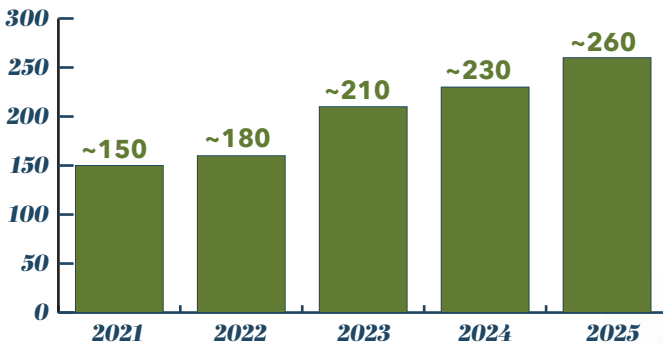
**150+** pupils engaged

## KNOWLEDGE & TRAINING

**93** events

**430+** attendees

**40+** farm planners trained



**NUMBER OF PARTICIPANTS INVOLVED IN CORNCRAKE LIFE PROJECT**



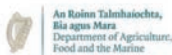


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*This project has received funding from the European Union's LIFE programme under Grant Agreement No. LIFE 18 NAT/IE/000090 LIFE Atlantic Crex*