

Threatened Birds of Asia:

The BirdLife International Red Data Book

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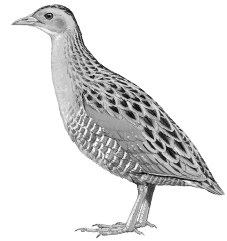
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CORNCRAKE

Crex crex

Critical —
Endangered —
Vulnerable A2c



Recent surveys in eastern Europe and new population estimates for Asiatic Russia have shown this species to be considerably more numerous than was thought in the early 1990s. Declines in western Europe occurred rapidly with changes in agricultural practices. Land privatisation has the potential to produce similar-use changes in the species's eastern strongholds, resulting in rapid population losses in the near future. Hence the species is considered Vulnerable.

DISTRIBUTION AND POPULATION The Corncrake breeds in Europe and Asia and winters in sub-Saharan Africa. It breeds in the **United Kingdom, Ireland, France, Belgium, Netherlands, Luxembourg, Liechtenstein, Italy, Austria, Switzerland, Croatia, Slovenia, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Yugoslavia, F.Y.R.O. Macedonia, Bulgaria, Romania, Hungary, Slovakia, Czech Republic, Germany, Denmark, Norway, Sweden, Finland, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Belarus, Ukraine, Moldova, Russia, Georgia, Turkey, Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan** and mainland **China**, with a total population estimated as 1,700,000–3,000,000 singing males, c.1,138,000–1,822,000 in Europe and c.515,000–1,240,000 in Asiatic Russia (Schäffer and Mammen 1999). This is much higher than the 92,000–233,000 estimated in 1996, the difference resulting from the completion of the first systematic surveys of national populations in eastern Europe and Russia. Whilst some populations may be increasing, trends are unclear. Populations often undergo rapid fluctuations and may do so in response to changes in agricultural practice in eastern Europe; historically, most western European range states have seen major declines, and declines continue in seven countries (Crockford *et al.* 1996).

ECOLOGY It breeds in open or semi-open habitats, mainly meadows with tall grass, particularly those managed for hay; in the wintering grounds, dry grassland and savanna are preferred (Taylor 1998, Barnes 2000). The diet consists of a range of invertebrates, and it is sequentially polygamous, nesting on the ground (Green *et al.* 1997, Taylor 1998).

THREATS Following privatisation, potential changes in agricultural practices in Russia and eastern Europe are the principal threat (Schäffer and Mammen 1999). Land abandonment temporarily favours the species but areas become unsuitable as scrub develops (Taylor 1998). Intensified management of hay meadows, or their conversion to arable, would also result in widespread habitat loss (Schäffer and Mammen 1999). Across western and central Europe, intensification of grassland management leading to earlier and more rapid mowing of hay and silage is the most significant threat (Crockford *et al.* 1996).

MEASURES TAKEN Conservation measures have been taken in 14 European range states, and national action plans have been prepared in six; appropriate habitat management has been researched (Crockford *et al.* 1996). A Corncrake Conservation Team was established in 1998 and a European Action Plan published in 2000 (Peet and Gallo-Orsi 2000).

MEASURES PROPOSED • Implement a survey and monitoring strategy. • Survey Asian populations to establish status and threats. • Conduct research on habitat management and limiting factors. • Encourage protection of key sites and of the species. • Encourage policies to promote extensive grass-based farming. • Raise public awareness.