ACRES Corncrake SCORECARD TIP SHEET

This scorecard should be applied in Corncrake SPAs and other areas where Corncrake have been recorded in recent years.

Corncrakes are summer migrants, present in Ireland from April to September and they generally remain hidden at all times in tall grass (>20cm).

This card applies to grassland fields where mowing or grazing is delayed until mid August, to provide this tall grass cover.

Additional patches of cover in the field can provide added shelter and nesting/feeding areas, particularly early and late in the season, when meadow grass may be short. (These are known as Early/Late Cover (ELC) patches).

TIPS Positive indicators may occur throughout the field, and may be sparse or found growing in clumps.

In order to adequately survey the field plot, walk a "W" throughout. Use the plant identification key to identify the plants encountered during this walk.

Note the plant leaves, as not all species may be in flower during the assessment.

During the walk, ensure to cover a selection of vegetation types and structures, such as slopes, hollows and hummocks.

Target any obvious potential problem spots e.g. access points, roads/tracks, areas adjoining coniferous plantations, water crossings.

It is essential to look around as you walk to get a feel for the wider areas – to estimate the overall grazing level, proportion and type of scrub, etc.

A5 Overall % cover of grasses throughout the field

Fields with a high proportion of grass (over herbs) do not provide ideal habitat for corncrakes, as they may become too rank later in the season, making it difficult for the birds to move through the vegetation. The herb layer generally ends at 50cm so anything above that height is usually grasses.

High (>75%) cover of grass will be noticeable via the sense of uniformity of the field. There will be a distinct lack of a herb layer and the field may be dominated by one or two grass species (typically Rye grass, but also other improved grasses such as Timothy or Cocksfoot).

Moderate (50-75%) cover of grass is often characterised by a suite of 3-4 grass species whose structure allows for a herb layer to form in sporadic areas throughout the field.

Low (<50%) cover of grass means that herbs are as frequent as the grass within the field; this is often characterized by an open sward which is easily traversable for corncrakes at ground-level.

B1 Sward density and structure

The aim of this section is to identify the suitability of the sward for young corncrakes, which require a balanced sward density (not too rank and not too sparse).

Can you walk through a field and kick your feet forward without them getting caught in dense vegetation? ***If yes,*** then the sward is well structured. ***If no,*** then the sward is too heavy or has a rank, thatched undergrowth at the base.

If the sward has no structure, it is too thin and provides no cover. Select one based on dominant cover (occurs across >50% of the field).

Note: Large rush should be considered heavy and if >50% of the field is large rush, the field gets a score of -10.

Weak/poor Score: -10	Weak/ moderate Score: 5	Balanced, good Score: 10	Moderate/ slightly dense Score: 5	Heavy/dense Score: -10

A6 Combined cover of all large rushes

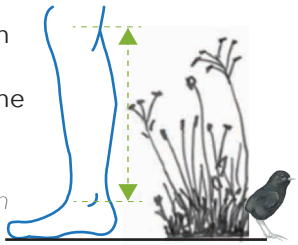
Soft rush is a common plant of wet grassland habitats.

While an important component of such habitats, its profusion can create dense tussocky swards which are avoided by corncrakes and which will reduce the value of the field for nesting birds.

B2 What percentage of the field contains the optimal vegetation height for corncrake?

Vegetation height should be between 20-50 cm (ankle to knee). What % of the sward is within this range?

Exclude rushes from this assessment.



Low: <25% of the field

Moderate: 25-50% of the field

High: 50-75% of the field

Very high: >75% of the field

B6 Additional features present

Additional features which can provide added protection and cover for corncrakes include e.g. a rocky outcrop or rough headland, which are usually left uncut during mowing and which may provide a temporary refuge. The presence of reeds can also be beneficial and these often provide additional areas of early cover.

ACRES Agri-Climate Rural Environment Scheme

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

B3 Does the field contain an Early and Late cover plot?

An Early/Late Cover (ELC) plot is a clearly defined area within the field, easily distinguishable from the rest of the plot, owing to the species composition.

It provides taller cover (20+cm), in late April/early May, when birds first arrive.

It should also be left uncut/ungrazed to provide cover into September.

It must be a minimum of 0.05 ha or 1/8 of the field to be functional.

It should be fenced off, and be at least 10m wide.

It must have at least 50% cover of early cover species - nettles, cow parsley, common hogweed, meadowsweet, yellow iris, wild angelica or ELC crop mix .

Some examples of ELC plots:

An ELC patch with a high % cover of common hogweed (not yet in flower) is excellent Corncrake cover.

Large beds of nettles, where grass is not dominant, will attract corncrakes, giving them cover and insects to eat early in the summer.

Positive Indicator species

1. Bedstraws & stitchworts
2. Birds-foot-trefoil
3. Common valerian *(not Red valerian)*
4. Eyebrights
5. Knapweeds
6. Lady's mantle
7. Lady's Smock *(Cuckoo flower)*
8. Lesser spearwort
9. Marsh marigold & Marsh cinquefoil
10. Marsh pennywort
11. Meadow buttercup *(not Creeping)*
12. Meadowsweet
13. Mints *(all)*
14. Orchids
15. Oxeye daisy
16. Ragged robin
17. Red clover
18. Ribwort plantain
19. Scabious *(Devil's-bit & Field)*
20. Sedges
21. Selfheal & Bugle
22. Small Rushes *(Woodrush,Spike rush, Heath rush)*
23. Sorrel *(Sheep & Common)*
24. Thistles *(Marsh, Meadow & Carline)*
25. Tormentil *(Common & English)*
26. Umbels large *(Angelica, Common hogweed)*
27. Umbels small *(Pignut, Yarrow, Wild carrot & Cow parsley)*
28. Violets *(all)*, Harebell
29. Yellow composites *(Catsears, Hawkweeds, Hawkbits & Goats-beard)* - **not dandelion**
30. Yellow flag iris
31. Yellow rattle *(Hay rattle)*