

Why do Corncrakes Need Early Cover?

Corncrakes spend most of their lives in tall vegetation; or 'cover'. Early cover is important for corncrakes returning from Africa, as there tends to be very little vegetation growth in the areas they return to by April/ May.

Corncrakes need cover to

- Hide from predators
- Hunt for food
- Nest and raise their young
- Attract them to an area when they are at the end of their migration



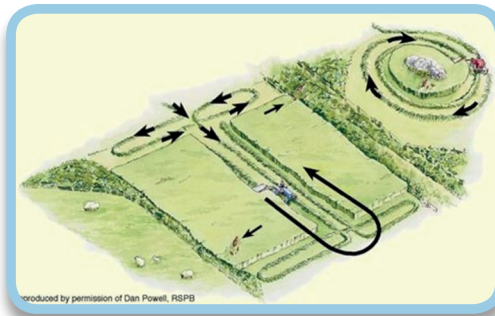
Photo: RSPB

Cover needs to be adjacent to good quality meadows, so they can utilise both habitats easily and safely.

Land Management for Corncrakes under Agri-Environment Funding

Under the current agri-environment funding is available for crofters and farmers undertaking

- Cover creation
- Cover management
- Delayed mowing of silage fields
- Corncrake-friendly mowing practices
- Stock exclusion at certain times of year in cattle grazing fields



- If the land in the target areas for corncrakes is managed at a landscape-scale, the benefits increase many-fold, as the birds have larger areas to nest and multiply in, without having to leave their safe ground. If multiple crofters and farmers in an area work together, they can both benefit the corncrake, and can also get increased points in an AECS application.
- On Skye there is currently around 140Ha under management to benefit corncrakes.

For more information on AECS go to www.ruralpayments.org

For a video on creating early cover for corncrakes go to www.fas.scot

How to Create Early Cover for Corncrakes



What are Corncrakes?

Corncrakes are a small, migratory bird that spend their winters in Central and Western Africa, and their summers in Northern Europe.

They used to be widespread in the UK, but are now on the red endangered list, and are limited to a few small populations in the Inner and Outer Hebrides, Skye, Orkney and Durness on the mainland of Scotland.

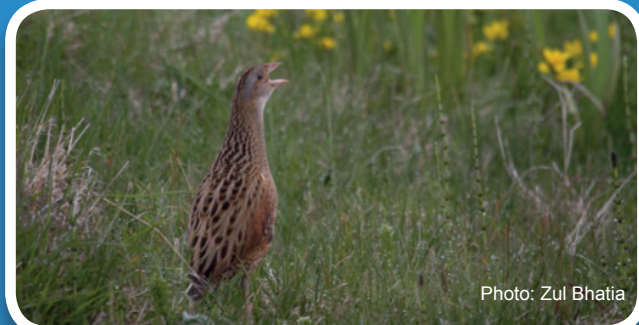
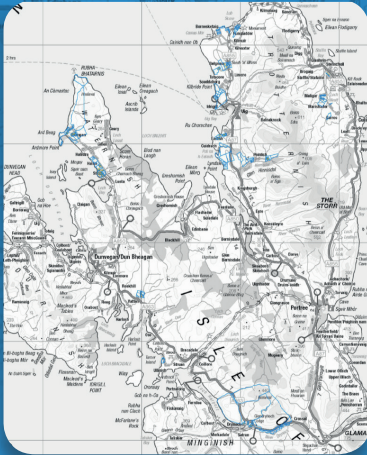


Photo: Zul Bhatia

These areas have a vital role and unique opportunity to aide the survival of this special bird. They thrive in areas with rich, high-quality meadows with nearby longer vegetation for cover. Crofters and farmers in these areas can take a lot of pride in the work that has already been done to help this unique bird.

How to Create Early Cover

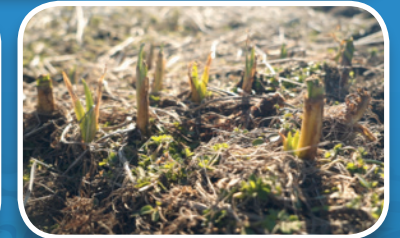
- Soil nutrition and fertility is the most important aspect of early cover creation. The more nutrition is present at the beginning of the process, the longer the earlier in the year the plants will grow, the longer cover will thrive for, and the less work needs to be done to maintain it.
- Place nutrition source (well-rotted manure or rotted silage bales are ideal).
- Add appropriate plants/ seeds/ rhizomes or roots.
- Fence when necessary to avoid grazing in the high summer (cover must be grazed after the end of September to ensure the areas do not become overgrown and rank).
- Add nutrition to the cover area as needed (spreading some additional manure each year can ensure vigorous early growth, ideal for corncrakes).



Plants to Use

Nettles

- Suited to dryer ground
- Roots and rhizomes can be transplanted from other areas
- Needs high levels of nutrition to thrive



Flag Iris

- Suited to damp ground
- Can transplant plants or rhizomes



Meadowsweet

- Suited to damp ground

