

Corncrakes on Tory

Over the past decade, Tory has emerged as Ireland's Corncrake capital. The Corncrake, Ireland's only globally threatened bird species, was once widespread throughout the countryside. It has been brought back from the brink of extinction by a huge conservation effort by researchers, farmers and landowners. Tory is now one of the few places where you can still be sure of hearing the distinctive "crex-crex" call. To most Irish country folk over forty years old, this call was the very sound of summer, and many people make a sentimental journey to Tory each year just to hear again that well-remembered sound. Although sometimes heard during the day, it is in the evening that the birds get into full voice and often a chorus can be heard throughout the night.

It is the male bird that does the calling — they are territorial and each

bird calls to attract females and to warn away rivals. The hen is quiet — she's busy nest-building and chick-rearing throughout the summer. She builds the nest in tall vegetation and usually raises two broods each season.



Corncrake

The lack of intensive farming methods on the island means that Tory's hay meadows and damp grasslands offer ideal Corncrake breeding habitat. However, in recent years the number of calling males has declined (see Table), probably as a result of several factors, which include disturbance, predation (the

chicks cannot fly until they are five weeks old, which makes them very vulnerable) and lack of tall vegetation in April when they first arrive.

On warm, damp evenings, particularly in May and June, the birds can easily be heard from the main road — in West Town, anywhere between the pier and the Social Club and beyond, and in East Town between the village and Port an Dúin.

Numbers of Corncrakes on Tory

(calling males) 1993-2007

1993	8	2001	20
1994	8	2002	32
1995	12	2003	34
1996	21	2004	32
1997	19	2005	20
1998	19	2006	22
1999	25	2007	18
2000	21		



Meadow Brown butterfly

Stephen Shekidan

During the summer months the landscape of Tory is transformed as the wildflowers come into bloom. Orchids are common in the grass-lands and more notable plants include Scots Lovage, Prostate Juniper and Scottish Scurvygrass. Common butterflies include Meadow Brown, Peacock and Common Blue, while some years see an influx of Painted Ladies.

Occasionally, Otters can be spotted hunting along the shoreline. The tall cliffs on the north side of the island offer the best viewpoints for seal and whale-watching. But do remember to stay well back from the edge of the cliffs as in many places they have been undercut by erosion and large pieces often fall away.

The coastline of Tory has an interesting assortment of reef communities at various depths. Inshore, great forests of kelp can be seen from the



Otter

Eddie Dunne

Other wildlife



Chough

John Fox

shore. In recent years Minke, Humpback and Killer Whales have all been seen, while Harbour Porpoise and several species of dolphin are regular visitors. A good number of Grey Seals can be seen around the shores at all times of the year.

A young male Bottle-nose Dolphin moved into Tory waters in the summer of 2006 and has been delighting islanders and visitors with his antics ever since. Nicknamed "Dougie", he usually escorts the ferries leaving and entering the harbour and spends a lot of time with the island fishing boats. While Dougie obviously enjoys interacting with people and dogs, he is still a wild animal. Do not approach him directly and never attempt to touch or grab hold of him. Boats should not go too close.

In the early summer months Basking Sharks can be watched from the



Birds and Wildlife of Tory Island



Wheatear

Bes van't Sigt

of West Town. Look out for waders on the shore by the pier, where Chough can also often be seen picking through the seaweed. Small numbers of Eider nest each year and usually frequent the entrance to the harbour.

The cliffs on the north and east coasts support large seabird colonies, including Puffin, Razorbill, Gullinor, Fulmar and Kittiwake. They also provide nest sites for Peregrine, Raven and Chough and while Gannets don't nest on Tory they can often be seen diving for fish offshore. Boat trips around the island can be arranged at the hotel during the summer months and offer great views of all the seabird activity along the coast as well as a different perspective on the spectacular crags at Tor Mór.



Little Tern

Andrew Kelly



Corncrake chick

in the old walls, and Redshank and in the meadows, Wheatear and Wren Corncrake, Skylark and Meadow Pipit

abound with nesting birds — In summer the grasslands of Tory around with nesting birds — Warblers and Short-toed Lark. Oliveaceous, Ruddyfield and Arctic Rustic and Yellow-breasted Buntings, more exotic species have included Buntings are both regular visitors, Siberia, White Lapland and Snow Ptarmigan, usually vagrants from North America, northern Europe and even weather offers the chance to spot during spring and autumn, when bad birds, Passage migrants can be seen famous as a great place to watch of habitats, Tory has long been With its remote location and variety

Where to see birds

There is a mixed colony of Common Gulls and Common and Arctic Terns to the northwest of the Lighthouse and usually a small colony of Little Terns along the southern shore. Skuas can sometimes be seen patrolling the colonies. There are small colonies of both Tree Sparrows and House Sparrows in the Round Tower area

the look-out for an easy meal. gulls or skuas, which are always on attack by predators such as crows, to fly up, and exposes the eggs or chicks nesting birds causes the adult bird to them. Approaching too close to depending on camouflage to protect hollows scraped into bare ground, and often plovers, lay their eggs in Shipe in the marshy patches. Terns,