

4 November 2024

## **CORNCRAKE NUMBERS SOAR ON CANNA**

- **Trust records buoyant corncrake population on Canna**
- **Farming practices benefitting biodiversity have supported the protection of this endangered bird**
- **Corncrake is one of 26 priority species outlined for conservation in the Trust's Plan for Nature**

The National Trust for Scotland has recorded a promising corncrake population on Canna after years of low numbers on the island, which is an important step forward in the conservation of this endangered bird.

The Trust recorded at least 12-14 calling males on Canna this year, which is the first time the conservation charity has conducted formalised corncrake monitoring on the island for many years. Data collected by Bob Swann from the Highland Ringing Group over the last few decades demonstrated a worrying trend of just one or two corncrakes on Canna in many seasons, so the new figures are a welcome increase.

The growing corncrake population on Canna can be largely attributed to high nature value farming practices that support the conservation of this species. Once prevalent across the UK, the population has been in long term decline due to the intensification of agricultural methods. Because of this decline, corncrakes are one of the 26 priority species identified in the Trust's Plan for Nature, announced earlier this year. The Trust is working with crofters and farmers, and managing land directly, to increase the corncrake population to 50 calling males on Trust land, which would account for approximately 6% of the current UK population.

Canna has five designated areas of farmland for corncrake, which are managed by Geraldine MacKinnon and the island farming team, with support from Tom Allen, the Trust's ranger on Canna. The team undertakes farming practices to benefit biodiversity, which includes strategies to support breeding corncrakes. Extensive mixed livestock grazing of the hill ground in summer, combined with no mowing of the grassland fields, provides areas of undisturbed cover around the home farm for nesting birds. The Sanday crofters also reported high levels of corncrake activity on the crofts they manage and graze with native cattle.

Angus Murray, Canna Operations Manager for the National Trust for Scotland, said: "We undertake a very different and productive way of farming on Canna, which is vital for

nature conservation. It supports a wide variety of species, but as one of our priorities, we are especially pleased to see the growth of our corncrake population.

“Nature conservation on Canna, and across the Trust, is a key focus. We care for 76,000 hectares of countryside in Scotland and with our Plan for Nature, we have a clear focus on where to concentrate our efforts to help nature flourish.”

Tom Allen said: “Canna Farm is a great example of prioritising both the production of high-quality livestock and creating a haven for wildlife and achieving success in both. By adapting our farming methods on Canna, we are supporting this species and its regeneration without making significant sacrifices to our other outputs.

“We’re really heartened by the success of corncrake on our farmland, and we hope this is a sign that things are moving in the right direction. However, we know this is an endangered species and their numbers are especially prone to fluctuations, so we will continue to closely monitor our numbers and do what we can to support corncrake habitats.”

Launched in 2024, the National Trust for Scotland’s Plan for Nature outlines the six habitats and 26 species it will prioritise for conservation over the coming decades.

Scotland’s largest conservation charity says it has special responsibility for these identified priorities and has a particular ability to make a positive impact on them. The habitats include mountain willow scrub, found at Ben Lawers and Mar Lodge Estate; sea cliffs and islands, such as the Treshnish Isles, St Kilda, and St Abb’s Head; wood pasture and parkland, like Drum Castle in Aberdeenshire; native pinewoods at Mar Lodge Estate; upland heathland at locations such as Glencoe, Torridon, and West Affric; and machair on Canna, Iona, and Sanday.

## **ENDS**

### **Notes to Editors:**

#### **About the National Trust for Scotland**

Established in 1931, the National Trust for Scotland is Scotland’s largest conservation charity and cares for, shares and speaks up for Scotland’s magnificent heritage.

Over the last 90 years the Trust has pioneered public access to and shared ownership of some of the most magnificent buildings, collections and landscapes in Scotland. It cares for more than 100 sites, from ancient houses to battlefields, castles, mills, gardens, coastlines, islands, mountain ranges and the plants and animals which depend upon them.

In March 2022 the National Trust for Scotland launched *Nature, Beauty & Heritage for Everyone*, its ten-year strategy which sets out the ambitions of the charity over the coming decade. From speaking up for Scotland's heritage which doesn't have a voice, to improving the lives and wellbeing of people across the country, and responding to the climate and biodiversity crisis, the Trust will build on its work in recent years to grow its impact and conserve and restore more of Scotland's heritage, as it moves towards its centenary in 2031.

Scotland's largest membership organisation, the National Trust for Scotland relies on the support of its members and donors to carry out its important work.

For more information on the National Trust for Scotland visit [www.nts.org.uk](http://www.nts.org.uk).

The National Trust for Scotland is a charity registered in Scotland, Charity Number SC 007410.