

Chough *Pyrrhocorax pyrrhocorax*

(Breeds Ireland, UK, Isle of Man. The mountains of Morocco and Spain eastwards through southern Europe and the Alps, across Central Asia and the Himalayas to western China).

Very rare breeding resident confined to coastal areas of north Antrim and until recently, Rathlin Island, County Antrim. Formerly much commoner and more widespread with breeding recorded at Knockagh, Greenisland, County Antrim *McSkimmin* 1811, The Gobbins, County Antrim *Thompson* 1849 and apparently at Skatrick Castle and Island Mahee, Strangford Lough, County Down (*Thompson* 1849).

Unrecorded from Cos. Armagh and Tyrone.

In 1739, Henry's *Upper Lough Erne King* 1892 states in discussing the Hanging Rock near Lough McNea.

"...are yet eagles of the largest kind, choice hawks and Cornish daws with red shanks and bills which are much sought after by the curious ..."

Later, in 1744, it was suggested that the Chough was still to be found in Fermanagh.

" *In the neighbourhood of Killough are sometimes seen, though not many in number, a species of bird which (as far as appears) are strangers to the rest of Ireland, except a few on the shores of Lough-Earn, in the County of Fermanagh*" *Harris* 1744.

Indeed *Ussher & Warren* 1900 state.

"..... *But it bred much further from the sea in the mountains of Fermanagh within the memory of my informants ...*"

Chough have been noted at Dunbar's Dock, Belfast in 1836, *Thompson* 1849, at Divis Mountain, County Antrim [shot] *Stendall* 1945b, flying past St. John's Point, Killough, County Down in the early 1960s (*pers Willie McDowell*.) singles in the Mourne mountains, County Down, October 1974, *Hutchinson* 1989 and in 1979 *NIBRC* 127/1979.

On Copeland Bird Observatory, Copeland Islands, County Down, 11 were present on 11th April 1961, one was on Mew Island in 1971.

Thirteen were noted at Fair Head, Co. Antrim on 30th June 1974. *NIBRC* 282/1975.

Historical records 1980-2008 to be updated.

Unpublished records

2009

Antrim

Three: Rathlin Island, 10th September (Flightline).

Three: Murlough Bay, Fair Head, Ballycastle, 31st October (Neal Warnock).

Down

One: Mourne Mountains, Newcastle, 25th August (Flightline).

2010

Down

Two: Fair Head, Ballycastle. One, 3rd April with two on 4th October (Patrick Barton *et al.*).

Two: Rathlin Island, 14th October (Neal Warnock).

2011

Antrim

One: Fair Head, Ballycastle, 23rd January (Keith Bennett).

One pair bred Knockakans, Rathlin Island, raising two juveniles (RSPB NI).

2012

Antrim

Up to three: Rathlin Island, 3rd May - 24th October (Ronald Surgenor *et al.*).

Up to four: Fair Head, Ballycastle, 2nd September - 6th October (Ian Enlander, Richard Donaghey).

2013

Antrim

Up to three: Adults. Rathlin Island, 26th February - 3rd September (Ronald Surgenor James Robinson *et al.*).
Breeding was attempted.

Down

One: Sheepland, Portaferry, 5th April. (David Nixon).

One: Heard only. St. John's Point, Killough, 19th April (Tim Murphy, Doris Murphy, Sharon Parr).

2014

Antrim

Up to five: Rathlin Island. Two adults & three juveniles, 11th June - 17th October (Colin Guy *et al.*).

Two: Fair Head, Ballycastle, 6th November (Nicholas Veale).

Down

One: Orlock Point, Belfast Lough, Groomsport, 21st September (Billy Miskelly).

2015

Antrim

Up to two: Rathlin Island, 18th March - 9th May (Colin Guy).

One: Giants Causeway, Bushmills, 15th April (Norma Wallace).

Up to three: Fair Head, Ballycastle, 2nd - 22nd November (Patrick Barton, Keith Bennett).

2016

Antrim

Up to three: Rathlin Island, 15th February - 24th October (Colin Guy *et al.*).

British Birds Vol. III 635-710 published that one pair bred in Northern Ireland in 2016.

2017

Antrim

One: Fair Head, Ballycastle. 27th February and the same at Lough na Crannog, 26th April (Clive Mellon, Richard Donaghey).

One: Rathlin Island, 10th February - 18th September (Richard Donaghey *et al.*).

One: The Gobbins, Islandmagee, 10th April (Nick Simpson- Eye).

Londonderry

One: Balls Point, Lough Foyle, 29th October (Derek Charles).

Chough did not breed in Northern Ireland in 2017.

2018

Antrim

One: Rathlin Island, 5th February - 21st August (Hazel Watson, Ric Else *et al.*).

One: Fair Head, Ballycastle, 8th May (Robert Plant).

The above records appear to document the long slow decline of Chough as a breeding species in Northern Ireland. Chough did not breed in both 2017 and 2018 and the 2018 individual (pictured below) appears to be the last remaining bird in Northern Ireland.



Chough *Pyrrhocorax pyrrhocorax* Rathlin Island 2018. Photo Ric Else.