

## **Corn Bunting** *Emberiza calandra* (? , circa 34, 0).

(Breeds southern and central Europe, north Africa and Asia across to Kazakhstan. Mainly resident but some migrate southwards in winter).

Writing about the status of Corn Bunting in the mid-nineteenth century, Thompson had little to say on the distribution of the species in Northern Ireland other than it was not as common as the Yellowhammer, even though its alternate name was "Common Bunting". However, one measure of its abundance can be gauged by his comment;

"In severe frost and snow, [Corn Buntings] not only betake themselves to the roads for subsistence, but may be seen at such times in the less-frequented streets and stable-yards of the town of Belfast" (Thompson 1849).

On a visit to the Copeland Islands, County Down in 1897, C.B. Moffatt and R.M. Barrington noted its presence Moffatt 1898. Ussher & Warren reported breeding on Rathlin and Copeland Islands.

Around 1900, the species reputedly bred in every coastal county of Ireland and indeed in every county in Northern Ireland, except for County Fermanagh. Kennedy, Rutledge & Scroope 1954.

Precise details of its occurrence in Northern Ireland are scant; it was reported from the Gobbins, County Antrim in 1903 (*BNFC Ann. Report*, Series 2, Volume 5, Parts 1 –2, pp. 88 – 89), in 1904 at Hillsborough and Ballywalter, County Down (Foster 1904, 1905; Patterson 1908) and a specimen in the Malcomson collection was shot in Belfast in February 1907. Breeding might be inferred from a paper by Foster where he gave particulars of the dimensions and weights of four eggs of this species presumably taken in Northern Ireland. Foster 1903.

By 1954 the range of the species was confined to those areas bordering coastal districts, and inland breeding had almost certainly ceased. In County Down it was still regarded as a scarce local resident, though a flock of 20 birds was noted on the Ards peninsula in 1950. Kennedy, Rutledge & Scroope 1954.

There were no reports of Corn Bunting in County Londonderry in 1945 and in County Antrim the species was absent from Rathlin Island. Kennedy, Rutledge & Scroope 1954. Though it was not uncommon THERE in the 19th century. Deane 1954.

During the 1960's there were two records from Copeland Bird Observatory, County Down; one 19th April 1961 and one on 28th March 1965. Stewart 1996. One was reported in song from the moat at Dundonald village, County Down in June 1961 (per J. Lovatt).

The *Breeding Atlas* (1968 - 72) with its information derived from field surveys conducted between 1968 and 1972, indicated the continued presence of Corn Buntings on the Ards peninsula and around Newcastle, County Down. Sharrock, 1976. However, evidence for the species presence in these locations during this time is scant. The next *Breeding Atlas* (1988 - 91) indicated that Corn Buntings had completely disappeared from Northern Ireland. Gibbons, Reid & Chapman 1993.

Recent data contained in the Irish Red Data Book (Whilde 1993) is also erroneous; especially a record from Lisburn, County Antrim in 1992, and the notion that the species is still to be found on the coast of County Down.

### **Published records since 1968:**

#### **1968**

One: Magilligan, County Londonderry, 10th November. Bennett & Melville 1971.

#### **1974**

Two: St. John's Point, Killough, County Down; singles 6th January and 14th April. NIBRC 262/1975.

One: NIBRC 274/1975.

#### **1983**

One: Longfield Point, Lough Foyle, County Londonderry, 12th January, (Dave Allen, Doug J. Radford). NIBRC 1987.

#### **1987**

Two: Groomspoint, County Down in February and March (B.A.E. Marr *et al.*). NIBA 1992.

#### **1991**

One: Ardglass, County Down, 27th January (Anthony McGeehan). NIBA 1993.