

New records of Corncrake *Crex crex* in Xinjiang, China

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The Corncrake *Crex crex*, listed as Vulnerable by BirdLife International (2000), was found by Ludlow and Kinnear (1934) in the west of Xinjiang (Chinese Turkestan) more than seventy years ago. Prior to the 1990s there were no further reports, leading many authors to conclude that it was a very rare bird in China (Cheng Tso-hsin 1987, Collar *et al.* 1994). However, Hornskov (1995) reported this species in Xinjiang in 1995, and we observed it at a number of localities in Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous Region during May and June 1998, and June–July 1999 and 2000 (Lewthwaite *et al.* 1998, Ma

Ming and Wang Qishan 2000, Ma Ming 2001). These observations appear to constitute the first records from the Chinese part of the eastern Tianshan and Altay Mountains.

In Xinjiang, the Corncrake has been found in oases, river valleys and subalpine grasslands at 600–3,700 m. It is usually found in cultivated fields of sesame, alfalfa, wheat and barley, or grassland not far from water. In the harvest season (June to July) it can be found in orchards and scrub near farmland.

We consider the Corncrake to be quite common in Xinjiang, with 2–4 birds per km² estimated at most recording localities. In the Ili River valley (Xinyuan) a density of 6–8 birds per km² was estimated. Using these data, we have calculated a preliminary population estimate of 1,500–3,000 individuals in China (Ma Ming and Wang Qishan 2000). This suggests that the species may have previously been overlooked, probably because most observers lacked experience of its distinctive call. Alternatively, the species may have extended its range from the west to the east of Tianshan.

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Table 1. Localities of records of Corncrakes in Xinjiang, 1998–2000.

Locality	Coordinates
Xinyuan (=Kunes) County, Tianshan	43°25'N 84°00'E
Gongliu (=Tokkuztara) County, Tianshan	43°20'N 82°15'E
Zhaosu (=Mongolkure) County, west Tianshan	43°08'N 81°06'E
Huocheng (=Korgas) County, west Tianshan	44°00'N 80°50'E
Habahe (=Kaba) County, west of Altay	48°20'N 86°30'E
Kanas Lake, Burqin County, Altay Mountains	49°00'N 87°00'E
Terek village, west of Altay	48°40'N 86°40'E
Fukang city, Fukang County, east Tianshan ¹	44°06'N 88°03'E
Urumqi, east Tianshan ²	43°52'N 87°34'E

¹This breeding record constitutes the most easterly record in China, 700–1,000 km beyond its former known range (Ma Ming 2001).

²A male specimen collected on 24 June 2000 from a small marsh at 640 m constitutes the first record for the Urumqi area and the first specimen from China. The following measurements were taken: length: 252 mm; wing: 144 mm; bill: 22.5 mm; tarsus: 42 mm; middle toe (excluding claw): 38 mm; tail: 50 mm; fresh weight: 153 g. Stomach contents included the remains of Coleoptera, Diptera and Orthoptera, with some larvae of aquatic insects and plant fragments.

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