

Red-billed chough reintroduction project

Work Plan 2017

[REDACTED]. Durrell Wildlife Conservation Trust

Objective 1: Increase wild population to four successful breeding pairs

Two pairs successfully reared young in 2016. A third pair failed to fledge their chick(s) and a fourth inexperienced pair built a nest but got no further. There will be two more pairs of potential breeding age in 2017.

Actions

- Put up minimum of two nest-boxes within the quarry buildings to establish safe sites and facilitate monitoring
- Set up nest-box cameras in quarry buildings by start of January 2017 (Q1)
- Daily monitoring of nesting activity throughout the breeding season Q1 and Q2
- Nest site protection, e.g. minimising human disturbance at wild site(s)
- Ringing of chicks in nest at three weeks old if feasible with co-operation of Channel Islands Ringing Scheme licenced ringers

Objective 2: To enhance effectiveness and efficiency of supplementary feeding regime

Supplementary feeding is very successful but it is unclear exact needs of wild-living birds and how well they are finding natural food.

Actions

- Develop and trial daily diary (electronic tags) suitable for choughs in conjunction with Swansea University
- Trial commercially produced pelleted diet by end of Q1 including development of food hoppers
- Continue supplemental feed at release aviary on daily basis until hoppers in use.

Objective 3: To have secured additional breeding birds for the captive population in 2018

All birds in captive population and wild-living flock come from same source (Paradise Park) with no new blood having entered this population in many years (and proposed projects in UK using birds from the same population). While this may almost be natural in sedentary chough populations it is considered important now to find new, un-related, breeding birds for population.

Actions

- Identify source birds - review two options (wild or captive) in Europe and decide on best option by end Q2
- Import wild-caught adult female bird in Portugal that has been offered to the project (this bird will not be released but paired to existing captive bird)
- Plan logistics for movement (including quarantine procedure) of overseas birds by end Q3
- Secure continuing permissions in place for aviary on north coast for 2018 onwards by end Q3

Objective 4: Support the management of habitat restoration to support chough population across relevant sites by the year end

Movements of the chough flock and their selection of sites for feeding can be indicator for targeted habitat restoration with sheep etc.

Actions

- Complete data collection and analysis of radio-tracking data for the chough to determine most appropriate places for habitat management by end of Q2
- Trial data-loggers with RSPB Northern Ireland for use in Rathlin Island (for RSPB to locate non-breeding areas of one remaining pair in NI) and for potential future tracking in Jersey.

Objective 5: To produce a written report on the project to date by the year end

Report production both in-house and (peer reviewed) to a wider technical audience is now appropriate.

Actions

- To have produced technical report on the reintroduction process and lessons learnt by end Q3
- Paper submitted for publication by end of Q4

Objective 6: Improve public engagement and increase public sightings to aid tracking data

Engagement with partners, supporters and wider lay audience is increasingly important. As wild-living flock disperse more over Island coastline, public reporting becomes more essential.

Actions

- Develop citizen science app with Fenella Blair (Durrell) for public use to record chough sightings around Jersey. Create app by end Q1 and trial use Q2/3 2017

Objective 7: Improving the sex imbalance in the free-living population

Wild-living flock has a high female bias (12 males 23 females). Aim to release only males captive-bred at Durrell in 2017 (possibly some females if required for the social cohesion of the release cohort).

Actions

- Continue captive breeding at Durrell, release any males reared in Q3
- Do not import further birds from UK (Paradise Park) unless significant number (4+) males are bred and made available.

Objective 8: Ongoing close management of free-living choughs

Close management of the free-living flock will continue throughout the year as appropriate.

Actions (where not included in Objectives 1-7)

- Continue supplemental feeding throughout the year. Quantities and frequency of feeds adjusted according to outcomes of objective 2
- Continue health monitoring of individuals through observations, body weight records, and faecal sampling
- Free-living birds (captive bred and released and wild-hatched) may be caught in release aviary for adjustments to rings (i.e. replace unreadable or missing rings etc.) or radio transmitters (replace batteries, attach to any birds being studied)
- Free-living birds (captive bred and released and wild-hatched) may be caught in release aviary for routine veterinary procedures by Durrell Veterinary Department (anti-parasite treatments, abrasion treatments etc). Any treatment to wild-hatched birds will be done after consultation with DOE
- Free-living birds (captive bred and released and wild-hatched) may be caught in release aviary for major veterinary procedures by Durrell Veterinary Department (X-Ray, treatment requiring anaesthesia etc or euthanasia). Birds may be transferred to Durrell but will be held (even if only held for short period) in strict quarantine conditions. Any treatment to wild-hatched birds will be done after consultation with DOE.