

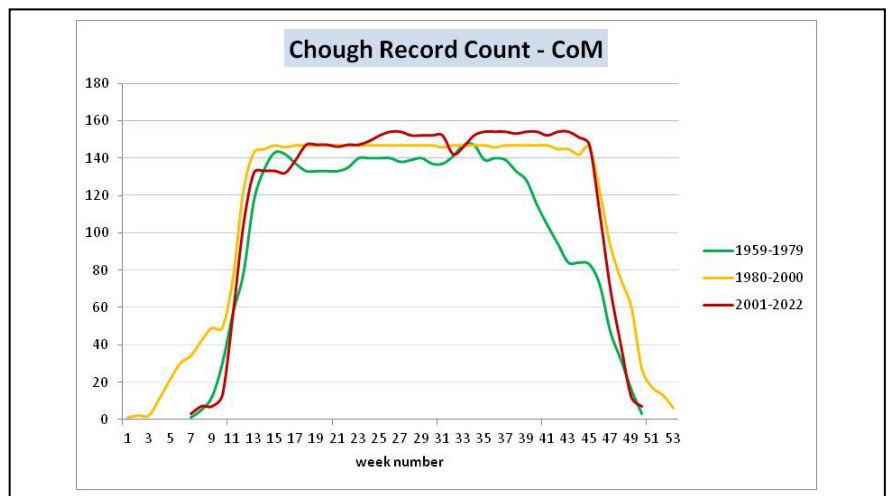
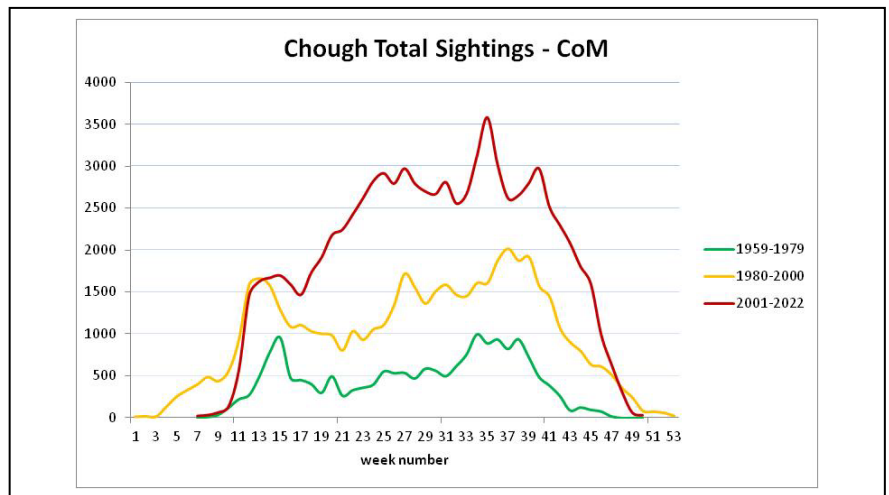
Common Name:	Chough
Scientific Name:	<i>Pyrrhocorax pyrrhocorax</i>
Manx Name:	Caaig
BoCC IoM 21 classification:	AMBER
IUCN 3.1 classification:	Least Concern
MBRC:	AE*
Legal classification:	Schedule 1

The Red-billed Chough is a common breeding resident with an average of eight pairs breeding annually during this period 1959 - 2022, which represents the single highest breeding density (per 1km²) for this rare corvid in the British Isles.

Train (1845) described the Chough as very numerous on the Calf and in his first edition of *British Birds* Yarrell (1843), through J. R. Wallace a Douglas printer, described how they bred in security in the very rocky southern extremity of the Isle of Man. In his fourth edition (1876 – 82) Yarrell wrote “it was formerly resident in the Isle of Man, particularly its southern part, and the rock called the Calf of Man, where it used to breed and may perhaps still do”. Cullen & Jennings (1986) thought that “the drastic decline of the Chough in the Isle of Man in the 19th century could be totally attributable to indiscriminate shooting of the type Jardine (1838 - 43) so enthusiastically decried”.

The fortunes of the Chough undoubtedly increased during the first half of the 20th century and Cowin & Megaw (1943) mentioned a recent flock of 70 seen on the Calf. By the time that the Observatory opened in 1959 the Calf’s Chough breeding population had reached 10 pairs and over the next four decades fluctuated between 3 – 11 pairs, although between 5 – 7 pairs was more the average. Since the turn of the 21st century breeding numbers have consistently achieved 8 – 10 pairs, with 11 in 2008 & 2016 and a peak of 14 in 2002 & 2015.

The nesting behavior of Choughs on the Calf Island is quite interesting and diverse. The majority of their nests are found in typical coastal fissures and caves around the island’s coastline. However, there are several notable exceptions where Choughs have adapted to human-made structures for nesting. For instance, they have regularly bred in the disused Stevenson Lighthouses and at a location known as



Jane's House. Since the early 1980s, a pair of Choughs has almost annually utilized an artificial nest box placed in the upper window of the Silo for nesting.

Chough nests are most commonly built from heather twigs and are lined with wool, and occasionally rabbit fur. In a study by Holyoak in 1972, it was observed that Choughs would fly approximately 2 km from the Calf to the main island to collect wool for their nests, a round trip that could take between seven to thirty minutes. However, this behavior changed after 1969 when native Loaghtan sheep were introduced to the Calf. The presence of these sheep provided a local source of wool, reducing the need for long trips to the main island and contributing to an increase in the breeding population and successful fledging of young Choughs (Bullock and Del Nevo, 1983). Additionally, the high rabbit population on the island plays a significant role in maintaining the short grassland sward that Choughs prefer. This environment is ideal for foraging, allowing Choughs to dig for Crane-fly larvae, dung beetles, ants, and spiders.

In 1980 a two-year old 'helper' assisted in raising a brood of young, and was seen allo-preening with both pair members, accompanying them in collecting nesting material, accompanying the male during incubation and assisting with the feeding of young during the fledging period. The helper found a mate in autumn 1980 and they built a nest at a new site in the following spring (Jennings, 1984). Most eggs are laid between mid-April to mid-May, although three eggs hatched on 15th April 1959 must have been laid during the last few days of March. Conversely, during the dry spring of 2021 the Silo pair delayed laying until late May, resulting in a fledging date of 25th July, some 38 days later than their average fledging dates between 2017 – 2019 (Sapsford, 2022).

The total sightings graph illustrates an increase in records throughout this review period, although caution should be exercised when comparing the trendlines for the two earlier periods with that for 2001 – 2022, owing to the use of 'present – no count' records which accounted for 31% of sightings between 1959 - 1996. The annual record count graph provides a much truer picture of the status, showing a fairly stable population during this review period, with perhaps a slight increase during the latter two periods. Records were received from all months, although sightings during December, January and February do not reflect the true status of the species during these months. The majority of these records were collected during 1978 – 1981 when the 'normal' season included some period of both February and December and between 1991 – 1996 & 2012 – 2013 when wardens were present for periods over winter. Four records during January and February during 2021 & 2022 were the result of winter day trips, which have become a more frequent opportunity in recent years.

Accumulative monthly total of records (1959 – 2022):

Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
38	182	1121	1804	1895	1877	1937	1937	1860	1740	1098	135

Choughs are highly gregarious birds, a behavior vividly illustrated by historical and contemporary observations. Williamson (1959) noted the importance of the flock based on his observations from the late 1930s, emphasizing that the flock serves as the central hub of Chough social life. He described how pairs would periodically leave the flock to fly towards specific coastal points.

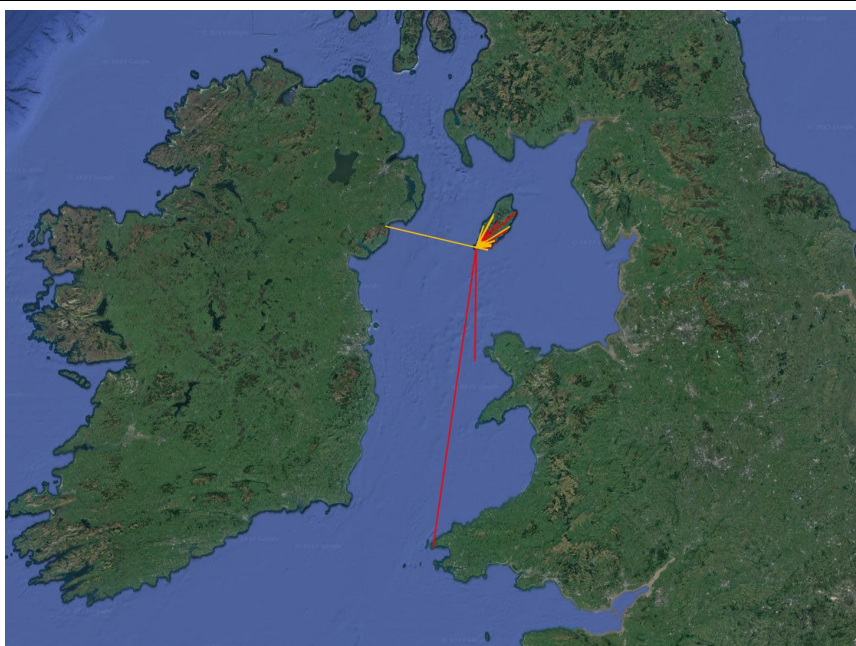
This social nature is further supported by extensive data collected from 1959 to 2022, showing that solitary Chough sightings are extremely rare. Out of 15,624 records, only nine instances noted a single Chough. The majority of sightings involve groups of Choughs: counts of 2 to 26 birds are the most common, representing 63% (9,797 records) of the total. Sightings of 27 to 50 birds are less common, comprising 6% (942 records) of the total. Larger gatherings, with counts between 50 and 76 birds, are relatively rare, occurring only 63 times.

The five highest recorded counts are particularly noteworthy: 118 on 15th March 1992, 91 on 15th August 2016, 86 on 25th June 1999 and 85 on 7th May and 26th August 2007. These high counts underscore the Choughs' tendency to congregate in large flocks, highlighting the species' strong social bonds and the central role of flock dynamics in their behavior.

A total of 520 Chough have been ringed on the Calf between 1959 – 2022 resulting in 92 subsequent recoveries and 24 reports of controls:

Chough	Isle of Man	Northern Ireland	Wales	Grand Total
Recoveries (yellow)	97	1	0	98
Controls (red)	23	0	1	24

Since 1989, a color-ringing program organized by the Manx Ringing Group and the Manx Chough Project has significantly enhanced the understanding of Chough movements on the Isle of Man. During winter, large congregations of Choughs gather on seaweed-strewn beaches, particularly in the island's southern regions, to feed on Kelp fly (*Coelopidae*) larvae found in rotting seaweed. This seasonal behavior provides excellent opportunities for birdwatchers to record sightings of color-ringed Choughs. As a result, 25



Choughs color-ringed on the Calf of Man have been observed 67 times on the main island, with movement distances ranging from 5 to 26 kilometers. Some individuals were seen multiple times, with one bird recorded nine times over three years, three months, and ten days.

Choughs are long-lived birds, with the British longevity record being 23 years and 11 days. Typically, their lifespan is around seven years, with breeding commencing at about three years old. Approximately one-third of Chough recoveries on the Calf involve birds older than three years, and 10% of birds reach at least eight years old. The longevity record for a Calf Chough is 12 years, seven months, and 24 days.

Movements of color-ringed Choughs have provided valuable insights. One bird crossed the Irish Sea, having been ringed as a nestling in June 1990 and found dead in Newcastle, County Down, 72 kilometers away, four months and eight days later. Additionally, 25 reports of 16 birds ringed elsewhere and later found on the Calf have been documented. Notably, a nestling ringed on Anglesey, Wales, in May 2004 was seen on the Calf three months and 11 days later. This female Chough was subsequently observed at a nest site near Castletown, Isle of Man, in May 2007, again in 2011 and 2012, and last seen in September 2018 near Scarlett, reaching the age of 14 years, three months, and nine days.

This color-ringing program has provided crucial data on Chough movements, longevity, and behavior, enriching the understanding of this rare corvid on the Isle of Man.

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