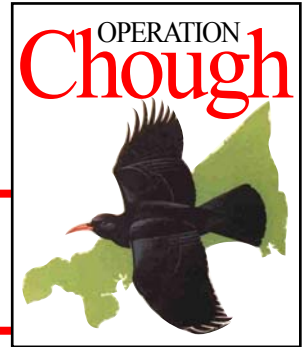


Paradise Park Wildlife Sanctuary

www.paradisepark.org.uk



7th Aug
2003

CHOUGH UPDATE

CHOUGHS RELEASED IN WEST CORNWALL

A group of Choughs has been released in West Cornwall as part of a project to re-establish the species in the area. This has been long in the planning - 'Operation Chough' was started in 1987 at Paradise Park Wildlife Sanctuary in Hayle, with the aim of getting this red-billed crow back to the cliffs of Cornwall, where it had become extinct.

First release put on hold

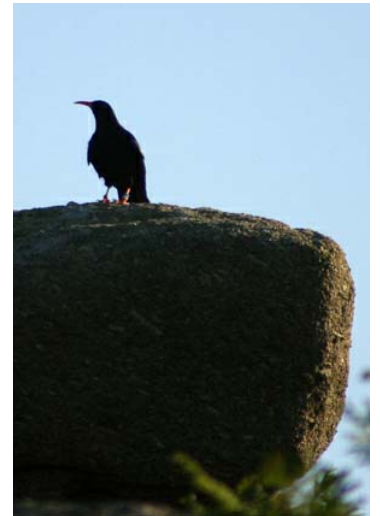
After five years of research to examine why the Chough disappeared, pairs were set up in breeding aviaries at Paradise Park. They are difficult to breed in captivity but in 2001 enough birds were available, and continued monitoring of Cornwall's coastal habitat indicated that a release could be successful. However, Foot and Mouth Disease struck and all footpaths closed, just when access to the coast path was needed to monitor released birds. Then at the same time, and to the astonishment of all, three wild Choughs arrived in the Lizard area of Cornwall. Over the years occasional single birds had passed through, but these three stayed, found food through the winter months and the pair successfully fledged three chicks in Spring 2002. They followed this with two more chicks in 2003.



Supplementing the wild birds

This great success proved that the habitat can support Choughs, and that they are not disturbed by people on the coast path. But there are just eight birds, five are siblings and only one is known to be female. Operation Chough does not believe that this constitutes a viable genetic group in the long-term.

West Cornwall has been chosen as it is a historic site for the species, and is far enough away from the Lizard so that the birds there are not disturbed. The six birds to be released have been DNA tested to prove their ancestry, and thoroughly health checked. They are two pairs and two further females, a ratio chosen because the three chicks hatched at the Lizard in 2002 are all believed to be males - and they may soon be looking for mates.



Update on progress

The released birds are being monitored, helped by radio tracking devices. A total of six birds are available for this release, with the first four leaving the specially built aviary at 3pm on a warm, bright day. For the first two nights three birds stayed together, with one about a mile from them. By the third day out all four had met up.

So far they have not travelled far but are flying strong circuits of their local area, which will familiarise them with their surroundings. All have been observed foraging and finding food and water, and they have also taken supplementary food.

Eventually the West Cornwall Choughs may meet the others already in the Duchy. Mike Reynolds, founder of Paradise Park, says 'We have prepared the birds for this over a long period, and are doing all we can to support them. These Choughs still have a lot to learn, and we wish them luck - they could make all the difference in creating a thriving population of Cornish Choughs in ten years time.'



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Cornwall's award-winning wildlife park and home of the World Parrot Trust