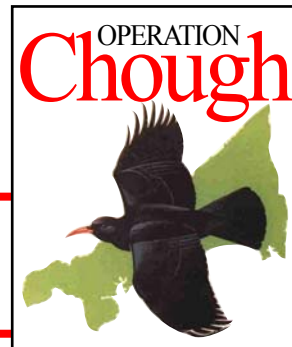


Paradise Park Wildlife Sanctuary

www.paradisepark.org.uk



28th Aug
2003

CHOUGH UPDATE

NEWS OF THE RELEASED CHOUGHS

'Operation Chough' started in 1987 at Paradise Park Wildlife Sanctuary, with the aim of securing the future of this beautiful and acrobatic red-billed crow in Cornwall. The first couple of weeks after the release in West Cornwall have been fascinating and exhausting for the team, with both highs and lows experienced while following the progress of the birds.



Initial observations

Dr Richard Meyer, who instigated Operation Chough by writing his thesis 'The feeding ecology of the Red-billed Chough and the feasibility of re-establishment in Cornwall', has written the following summary of the first week after the release:

The initial release was successful. The birds reunited after the initial separation of one male. They remained together for at least three days until subsequently separating again. They initially responded well to the soft release technique used, coming down at feeding times and settling in two sites within easy contact range of each other. In between feed times, they behaved naturally - feeding amongst the granite clitter and at the rock-soil-vegetation interfaces,

and taking many flights around the area, performing well and flying confidently. Later they dispersed, and tracking became more difficult. They spent more time at coastal sites, which could be seen as reversion to more natural behaviours although the 'inland' behaviour was reminiscent of Choughs feeding at upland sites elsewhere.

Accidental death

Sadly, we also have to report that on the 9th day after release one bird died in a cattle water trough. The team were naturally distressed by this, and set about protecting all the other troughs in the area with floats to prevent any re-occurrence. Our thanks go to local farmers who have been very supportive with this initiative.

The birds have been seen drinking from natural sources but supplementary drinking water is also being offered whenever possible.



A thick sea mist made radio-tracking difficult for several days.

The monitoring continues

Birds which have established a routine become much easier to monitor, although early mornings are needed to catch a Chough stirring from its roost. It is certainly worth the effort if you have the chance to hear those first distinctive calls, see the birds preening and making their first feeding forays for the day. Each bird must be identified, water supplies checked, an attempt made to gather dropping samples and notes made of all the birds' activities. If birds are missing from their usual site then the task is much harder as extensive trekking may be needed.

With such a small initial number of birds released, any loss is hard to accept. We have had to learn a lesson from it and see every day in the wild as a triumph for the birds, who have had so much to learn. They already appear to be using new flying techniques, such as dramatic vertical drops not possible even in a large aviary.



The 'tide-line' of mud on the bills of these two birds is evidence of foraging for insects.

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