

RED-BILLED CHOUGH *Pyrrhonorax pyrrhonorax*

January 2017 Report

Elizabeth Corry, Bird Department

Further photos (with captions) and videos can be seen at www.birdsontheedge.org

New Year, new adventures. That appears to be the motto of the juveniles, in particular the foster chicks who have taken a liking to the bay at Le Pulec, known to locals as "Stinky Bay". This area is just below Battery Moltke, Les Landes, where we reported the choughs were last month. So not a surprise, but certainly an interesting addition to their home range. The bay has plenty of rotting seaweed, hence the name, harbouring insects attractive to many shorebirds. Are the choughs also exploiting this food resource as Scottish choughs do?



Early morning at Stinky Bay where the juveniles have been hanging out. Photo by Liz Corry



Dozens of rock pipits were down at Stinky Bay to raid the strandline for tasty morsels. Photo by Liz Corry

So far our observations suggest not. Trying my best to avoid analogies to a certain president and his wall, there is a current divide between the shore birds foraging below the sea wall defence and the choughs probing the loose soil on the other side.

That may change as January's freezing temperatures restrict the amount of food available in the coastal grassland forcing the choughs to look for alternative sources. The choughs were definitely more hungry this month than last. Wing-begging at staff is just one way to determine how hungry each individual is. Having the entire group of 35 stalk staff from the public car park along the cliff path to the aviary shows just how little wild food is available. They also had a great desire to cache food in preparation for the cold days that lay ahead. Something I think the magpies have cottoned on to as I observed a pair promptly dig up a stash once the unsuspecting chough had left.

The first time the juveniles were spotted alone at Le Pulec there was concern that they might not have the gumption to make it out of the bay and back to the aviary. Would they find enough food in the bay?

I had spent the first hour of the morning above the bay at Les Landes trying to pinpoint the radio signals. When I arrived at Le Pulec car park and walked around to look across the bay I could make out six chough shapes on the cliff face, but couldn't identify them. Until that is, they took to the air calling excitedly and four choughs flew over to land behind me within 5 metres of where I stood.

In a roll-call fashion I ticked off **Ubé, Wally, Vicq,** and **Xaviour**, i.e. the four foster chicks, from the list of missing choughs. Once they realised I had no food for them they re-joined the other two juveniles in the bay. By 10:50 I had to leave so I could put the supplemental feed out at Sorel. On arrival at Sorel twenty minutes later the entire flock greeted me, headed up by none other than **Ubé, Wally, Vicq,** and **Xaviour!**



Vicq and Wally flying to greet the keeper at Le Pulec. Photo by Liz Corry

This demonstrates how well the birds have learnt to associate the aviary with food, how they can map out the land, and how they somehow know what time it is!



Choughs foraging at Sorel. Photo by Liz Corry

The older choughs have also been spending more time away from Sorel although they don't seem to wander as far. Crabbé is still a favourite for them. They like flying around Plémont and have been seen at Les Landes, but in terms of foraging they prefer to stay within sight of Sorel.

Lee and **Caûvette** are still doing their thing over at Les Landes in the mornings. Inching far too close to peregrine territory for our liking. Especially now the juveniles are following their lead.



Twenty-two choughs congregating on the roof of Crabbé Farm. The rest of the group were over on the west coast. Photo by Liz Corry

There is another pair, **Bean** and **Kevin**, who have started playing truant at the morning feed although not as frequent as yet to suspect anything. We may struggle in future weeks to identify individuals as some of the plastic rings are snapping off. Notably breeding males **Dingle** and **Green** have lost rings. Once the repair work on the aviary is completed, we should be able to trap birds inside once again allowing rings to be replaced before the breeding season kicks off.



Red has been missing her red leg ring for some time. Now with the others losing theirs we need to catch her up to fit a new red ring. Photo by Liz Corry

Bird flu precautions

With cases of bird flu being declared in France and the UK we are taking various precautions within the Zoo to minimise the threat to our collection in Jersey. For this reason staff working on the chough project are changing footwear when entering zoo grounds, a disinfection footbath and separate wellies are in use at Sorel aviary, and chough food is being prepared away from the Zoo Bird Kitchen to reduce any potential cross-contamination.

To date bird flu has not been recorded in the Channel Islands. However, the States Vet is asking Islanders to be cautious and follow recommendations including reporting dead birds to the States Veterinary Office. [Click here for more information.](#)

Free-falling for choughs!

Simon Inman, our current student placement on the chough project, is loving his time at Durrell so much that he is going to jump 10,000 feet from a plane!



That sentence might need re-wording, but essentially Simon is going to do a skydive in summer and would like to raise funds for the choughs at the same time. So if you would like to support the choughs, and Simon's craziness, please visit his **JustGiving** page and donate.

His fundraising target is £150 which will pay for camera equipment for the nest box in the display aviary at the Zoo. We hope to set up a wireless network to send live footage direct to a PC and our smartphones.

Last year, the pair in that aviary successfully reared two chicks for the first time. A third unfortunately died. We might have been able to save it if we could have observed nest activity in real time and intervened at the first sign of decline.

Any donations will be gratefully received.

Plus, if you all donate money it makes it harder for him to back out at 10,000 feet in the air!

RED-BILLED CHOUGH *Pyrrhocorax pyrrhocorax*

February 2017 Report

Elizabeth Corry, Bird Department

Further photos and videos can be seen at www.birdsontheedge.org



Considering February is the shortest month, Mother Nature managed to fit in pretty much every weather type bar drought. The choughs faced blinding fog, F10 gales, hailstorms, thunder, and glorious sunshine.

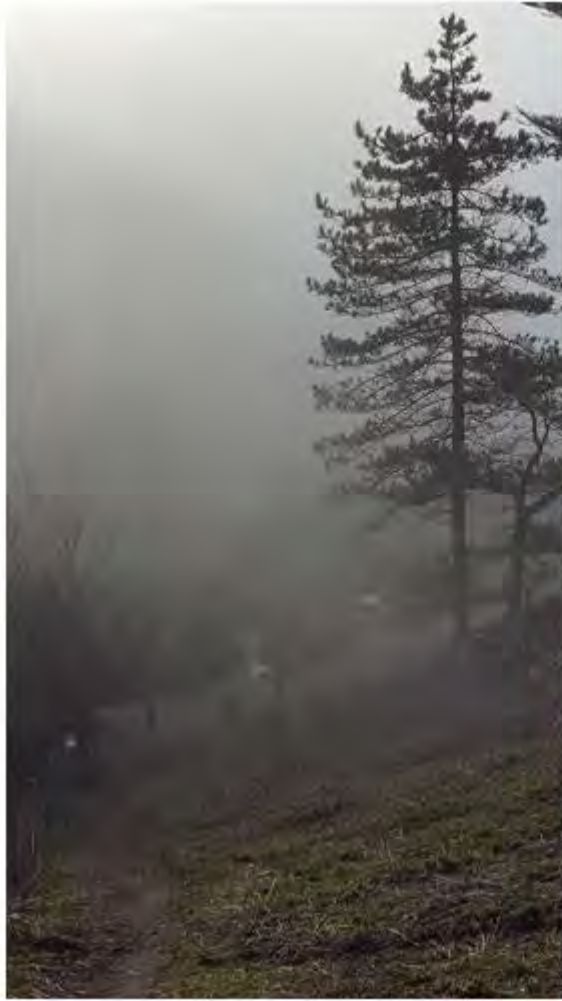
This might explain why **Lee** and **Caûvette** failed to turn up for supplemental feeds four days in a row. In fact they were not sighted anywhere for almost five days. We are not entirely sure if they stayed out at Les Landes the whole time or just waited until sunset to reach their regular roost site at Sorel. Staff attempted to find the answer by stalking the pair around Les Landes and staking out the roost site. Both of which failed because they were either nowhere to be seen to stalk or the roost site was shrouded in fog.

Just as panic set in with the sighting of peregrines hunting at Les Landes the pair were spotted. Both completely fine, behaving as normal feeding around the parade ring at the racecourse.

There was the slight twinge of excitement about their absence if we went with the train of thought that they had chosen to roost at Les Landes. Would this be a clue about where they will attempt to nest?

Chough nest-site prospecting with the Channel Island Occupation Society

Choughs will nest in man-made structures and down mine shafts as well as sea caves and crevices. We know Jersey's choughs have been hanging around the German observation tower at Les Landes so we decided to investigate the various structures built during the



Rolling sea fog to the west of Mourier Valley (left) glorious sunshine to the east at the same time. Photos by Liz Corry.

German Occupation in the 1940s. We met with Tony Pike from the [Channel Island Occupation Society \(CIOS\)](#) and his dog Sal who very kindly gave us a guided tour of the site.

We started at the tower, known as the Kriegsmarine Marine Peilstand 3 tower. This was originally built by the German Navy for observing targets at sea. There are seven floors to it, five of which look out to sea and take a fierce battering from the sea winds. Birds cannot enter the tower from this side as the openings have been blocked off with perspex to preserve the interior.

There is one opening on the land side left open by CIOS members for bats to access if needed. Theoretically, the choughs can use this to access the tower. The walls of the tower are two metres thick providing a convenient shelter ledge for choughs at the opening. Despite the depth it might still be too exposed for choughs to choose to nest on.

Once inside there are just flat walls, no ledges to build a nest on with the exception of the concrete spiral staircase. When it rains the floors can become very wet and although they dry out fast I imagine that a smart bird like a chough will quickly realise that this is not a suitable place to raise young.



View of the MP3 tower at Les Landes (above) and from a rifleman's lookout position blasted out of the cliff face (right).
Photos by Liz Corry

There are two 'brother' towers of Bt Steinbruch on Guernsey and Bt Annes on Alderney allowing the Germans to pass semaphore messages throughout the Channel Islands. The mobile network of its day. Maybe that is what the choughs are doing? Trying to scope out the other islands to decide whether its worth the flight across?

As a side note Tony pointed out two sites along the cliffs which the Germans had blasted square holes into the rock face to provide sheltered artillery positions for a soldier to sit in. This side note turned out to be extremely relevant as one is positioned a metre below where we have stationed ourselves several times in the past two months watching the choughs. If only we had known we could have saved ourselves a lot of earache and a few less head colds.

The other structures we were interested in are to be found below ground. There is an extensive complex of passage-linked personnel and ammunition bunkers at [Battery Moltke](#). Precision engineering by the Germans meant that the bunkers had heating and ventilation through a series of shafts and underground piping. None of which look accessible by choughs. Most of the public entrance ways to the bunkers and passageways are behind locked metal-sheeted doors to stop vandalism. If the choughs did find their way in I would like to think they would appreciate what is hidden away underground as much as we did.

One particular bunker was unearthed by Tony and a team of volunteers last year several decades after the States of Jersey had back-filled it with rubble for health and safety



reasons. The 'flower bunker' as Tony called it, is an anti-aircraft bunker with a decontamination unit in case of a gas attack. On the walls inside you can see the original artwork by German officers of flowers in what one assumes is an attempt to brighten up the doom and gloom one would face being locked away in an air raid.

From what we observed it looks unlikely that choughs would nest successfully in any of these places. We are very grateful to Tony nonetheless and now have a greater appreciation of Les Landes when we go out radio-tracking. The choughs still have the option of sea caves and crevices along that stretch of coastline. They may look to the farm buildings behind the racecourse. We will keep a close eye on **Lee** and **Caûvette** in March. At the first sign of twig carrying we will be on them like...falcons (in a non-aggressive way).

Big brother is watching you

Ronez Quarry very kindly agreed to fund nest cameras in the quarry this year. With help from quarry staff nest-boxes have been installed to try and encourage two particular pairs to nest away from active machinery.

We cannot be sure that the pairs will use the boxes, but if they do we will be able to follow their progress closer than ever before. Using equipment supplied by Handykam we will be able to record what goes on inside the box and hopefully learn more about clutch size, hatch rates, and general day to day activities of nesting choughs.



Original artwork by German officers on the walls of an anti-aircraft bunker at Les Landes. Photo by Liz Corry



Highly sophisticated calibration techniques for setting up nest cameras. Photo by Liz Corry

We do not currently have the option to view live footage. This incurs a greater cost and would be a gamble since we are not even sure if the birds will use the boxes.

The set up also includes monitors at each site to allow quarry staff to check the nests whenever they like without disturbing the birds. Their attentiveness over the past two breeding seasons has been invaluable to the success of the choughs. In the past we have had to wait for a scissor lift or something similar to be brought into the quarry to look in a nest if staff alert us to a situation. Now we just flick a switch.

If the pairs decide not to use the boxes we may be able to reposition the cameras and still capture nesting activities. However, it all depends on timing as we do not want to disturb the choughs unnecessarily. We are very grateful to Ronez Quarry for funding and supporting this project. In particular Mark de Carteret and Andy Paranthoen for co-ordinating and fitting the cameras.

Last, but not least

Orlux Remiline granules, a complete food for song thrushes, is being gradually added to the supplemental diet this month. We are trying to see if we can switch from an egg-based diet which can spoil relatively quickly to a dry pelleted diet.

If successful we will then look into automated feed stations similar to those used in Mauritius and New Zealand.



Photo by Liz Corry

RED-BILLED CHOUGH *Pyrhacorax pyrrhacorax*

March 2017 Report

Elizabeth Corry, Bird Department

Further photos and videos can be seen at www.birdsontheedge.org



Choughs gathering at Sorel. Photo by Liz Corry

Preparations for the breeding season were well under way this month both at the Zoo and out on the coast. The breeding pairs at the Zoo moved into their seasonal accommodation ready to begin nesting. For **Issy** and **Tristan** that meant staying put and keeping a watchful eye on the visitors to the Zoo. Our other two pairs headed off show. Last year **Issy** and **Tristan** successfully reared two chicks who were later released onto the north coast. We are hoping for the same success this year. Maybe even more as keepers can now monitor activity in the nest from their computers thanks to a new wireless CCTV installation in their aviary.

The off-show aviaries had a spruce-up before the other two pairs moved in. The birds had a quick health check by the vets prior to moving. All appeared physically OK. Mentally? We will have to wait and see.

We are hoping that **Lucifer** learnt his lesson last year and allows **Gwinny** to incubate her eggs in peace. A reminder of the 'domestic dispute' can be found in the April 2016 report.

In case he does live up to his namesake, we have set up the artificial incubation room at the Bird Department. We also have foster-mum **Gianna** on standby. To ensure that she is in sync with the pairs we moved her into her own 'breeding' aviary when the others moved into theirs.



One of the off-show breeding aviaries at Jersey Zoo. Photo by Liz Corry

Nesting material was provided over several days by keepers. Each pair received material at the same time to encourage the pairs to nest in sync.

By the end of the month **Gianna** had pretty much completed her nest. Material could be seen sticking out of **Issy** and **Tristan's** nest. The other two pairs were a bit slower on the uptake. Our nest-box cameras are not online for public viewing. However, over in Cornwall, our partners at Paradise Park have their nest cameras up and running. You can follow their progress here <http://chough.org/2017-nest-cameras-online>.



Gianna is on standby to help foster-rear chicks with the Zoo keepers. Photo by Liz Corry

Back on the north coast the free-living choughs were also busy with nesting material. The established breeding pairs started turning-up late to the feeds and not foraging as much around Sorel as the others. They were spending their time in the quarry trying to keep what they were up to under wraps. However, thanks to the new chough nest-box cameras in the quarry they could not keep it a secret for long.



To everyone's relief **Green** and **Black** decided to use the nest-box Ronez fitted to encourage them away from working machinery. Within a week of the box being up, the birds were adding twigs. This will provide extremely valuable information to the team if the pair complete their nest.

The other nest camera is located in the building used by **Dingle** and **Red**. The monitor showed an empty nest-box, but we know from their antics they were up to something. It will be a case of wait and see.

The trickier detective work this month focused on trying to determine if **Lee** and **Caûvette** would attempt to nest for the first time? If so would it be away from Sorel? And will there be any other first timers now that the birds coming of age?

Chough CCTV in the quarry providing evidence that nest building began in early March. Photo by Mark de Carteret

We know **Lee** and **Caûvette** like hanging out at Les Landes in the morning. Towards the end of March they also started missing out on the afternoon supplemental feed. They would arrive 20-40 minutes later than everyone else. We delayed the afternoon feeds by 30 minutes to give them a shot of getting some food before all the others scoffed it. This worked out well for a bit. Then the clocks changed and the birds gained at least an extra hour of daylight to frolic in before roost.

Lee and **Caûvette** seemed quite content without the aviary feed. They were obviously finding plenty of wild food. Probably because they had added Plémont to their list of daily foraging sites.

I am personally indebted to Tony Paintin for his feeding observations from Plémont since they reaffirmed my sanity as, on the 25th March, I looked up from my lunch plate at Plémont cafe and watched as two chough-like birds flew across the panoramic window view towards the headland. It meant that when I ran down the steps to the beach like a crazy lady I knew I would be rewarded with the site of **Lee** and **Caûvette** exploring the nooks and crannies of Plémont's coves and crevices.

They didn't stay for long. Minutes later they were off exploring Grand Becquet and Grève de Lecq. They probably wanted to get a look at the black guillemot reported there to see what all the fuss was about.

No sign of them collecting nesting material, but then again we only get to see them for about an hour each day. The radio-tracking study stopped at the end of this month allowing the team to spend more time observing behaviour. Only five of the original eleven birds were still wearing their transmitters. Besides, apart from two birds, the flock was staying put at Sorel.



Headland at Plémont at high tide. Choughs have been seen foraging in this area. Photo by Chris Brookes Aerial Photography

During this time we discovered a shift in one of the non-breeding couplings. **Q** has ditched **Pyrrho** in favour of **Flieur** who is a month shy of her 3rd birthday and prime age to start breeding.

We also noticed a few of the youngsters sneezing. The monthly faecal screening showed presence of *Syngamus* and *Coccidia* within the group. The condition of the birds was not as severe as on previous occasions so there was no urgent need to catch them for worming

injections. Instead we focused on repairing the aviary so that we could catch birds and continued to monitor the group as closely as we could.

The aviary finally had a spring clean. More like overhaul with new hatch wires, in some cases new hinges. The hatches themselves were cleaned and painted and the broken central beam was replaced and, thanks to Trevor's trusty truck, the partitions were hauled back into place.



Project student Simon monitoring the choughs at Sorel. Photo by Liz Corry



Maintenance staff came up with a novel idea to operate the release hatches. Photo by Liz Corry

At the same time the National Trust for Jersey were up replacing the sheep fencing a Sorel. The sheep are still confined to the aviary field and adjacent field. Once the lambs at St Catherine's are old enough they will move up and roam free at Sorel and Devil's Hole.



Not content with their wool, their dung larvae, their drinking water, and their feed, the choughs found another way to exploit the grazing flock...a shelter box. Photo by Liz Corry

Other activities this month included a visit by Allen Moore from the Isle of Man. Allen is pretty much chough aficionado and not just in the Isle of Man. In fact he flew to Jersey from Las Palma (indirectly sadly) where he had just spent a two week 'holiday' studying the choughs and the other birds of La Palma. The La Palma chough is a bit of an oddball of the chough family (there is always one). It can be found in a wide range of habitats, including pine forest, and eats olives!

Durrell Training Academy is hosting the annual DESMAN course at present. Running from February until May. Participants spent time this month learning about the Birds On The Edge project via lectures and site visits. They also received training in radio-tracking techniques. For the tour of Sorel they were joined by a visiting course group from Nottingham Trent University. Despite the number of visitors and disturbance caused by maintenance work, the groups got to see the choughs in action.

And finally,

if you want to read the moving story behind the first ever chough at Jersey Zoo then grab yourself a copy of ***Dingle*** by Marie Marchand. It has an introduction by Gerald Durrell who was responsible for bringing the original **Dingle** to Jersey.

Published in 1961, hard-copies are few and far between. We got hold of one through the good folks at [Cotswold Internet Books Ltd](http://CotswoldInternetBooksLtd.com). However, if you prefer a digital copy then register for free with www.archive.org, an online lending library.





Part of the chough flying display at Sorel put on for the DESMAN students. Photo by Anna Chouler



RED-BILLED CHOUGH *Pyrhcorax pyrrhcorax*

April 2017 Report

Elizabeth Corry, Bird Department

Further photos and videos can be seen at www.birdsontheedge.org

April started on a tragic low note progressing, the only way it could, into a steady crescendo to a high and hopeful cadence. In fact, April started as it always does with April Fool's Day. So when an email entitled 'chough vs. peregrine' was opened on the 2nd, wishful thinking wanted to dismiss this as a delayed prank.

The email was from Mick Dryden and Romano da Costa, two of Jersey's top birders, who had been out at Sorel Point doing a migration count.

Mick described observing *"an immature peregrine fly onto the cliff with a black bird in its talons. We both thought it was the remains of a chough. The peregrine was hassled by gulls and flew off west, but dropped the bird in the sea where a greater black-backed gull performed the last rites. I had the scope on it distantly and think I could see red legs very briefly, possibly also a ring which may have been green. So if you are short of a chough, you know why!"*



For legal reasons we would like to state that the peregrine flying over Sorel in this photo is innocent until proven guilty.
Photo by Liz Corry

The email was read at home after spending the day out at Sorel monitoring seemingly very content choughs. In fact, it was the first day the choughs had been seen carrying nesting material. Not only that, but the first bird spotted carrying material was **Pyrrho**, a female of only two years of age. A potential new breeder!

Added excitement had come when a large group of choughs spent the day hanging out around the section of cliffs where we fitted a nest-box in 2014. Birds were seen to come and go from the box. Could one of them be adding nesting material?

The acrobatic aerial displays they were putting on, launching themselves off the cliff face were a joy to watch.



Pyrrho carrying nesting material, but to where? Photo by Liz Corry

To get home and find out that one of them had most likely been skewered by talons, plucked apart, and unceremoniously dropped in the sea, only to be further shredded into oblivion, was a little disorientating to say the least.

The choughs have started changing their daily patterns most likely as a result of the breeding season. Pairs have been spending less time near the aviary, some turning up late. In the case of **Lee** and **Caûvette**, the notorious absentees, they did the opposite and started turning up for both morning and afternoon feeds.

Once the choughs had grabbed their free handouts they would swiftly return to their business of either nest-building and/or wild foraging. There has been an abundance of leatherjackets and other grubs in the fields this month keeping them fuelled for the day. It, therefore, didn't raise alarm bells when only 32 of the 35 choughs were counted on

The following day was spent staking out Sorel ticking names off the chough register. Mick's description of a green ring turned out to be a red herring when, after a few hours, all the choughs sporting green rings were alive and well. This included a breeding male, **Pale Green**, a wild-hatched chick, and hand-reared **Bean**. Never believe parents when they say they don't have a favourite!

By the end of the day the identity of two birds still remained unconfirmed. **Hayle** and **Yarila**, both hatched at Paradise Park last year, and wearing almost identical leg rings. One blue and white striped. One black and white striped. Out in the field with the glare of the sun, the white-out of the fog (we had both), and the desperation in your mind, it is very difficult to determine the difference between the two rings.

Even when **Hayle's** radio transmitter was tracked down to the cliff face where the peregrine attack occurred your mind wants to add the element of doubt. What if she just shed the transmitter there and is merrily foraging in the fields? Sea fog and sheer cliffs prevented the recovery of the transmitter.



Acrobatic choughs at Sorel. Photo by Liz Corry



Lee and Caûvette (centre) have started returning for the supplemental feeds suggesting they might be nesting nearby. Photo by Liz Corry



Ticking off the chough register each day isn't easy with birds like Helier whose broken green ring has slipped over the blue one. Photo by Liz Corry



Somewhere beyond the gorse lies a cliff face and a lost radio transmitter. Photo by Liz Corry

Not that it would have told us anything other than **Hayle** was no longer attached to it. Three days later, with a total count of 34 birds, none of which wore a blue and white striped ring, we reluctantly concluded **Hayle** wasn't attached to anything in this world.

And now for the steady crescendo...

Breeding season update

The chough group did not spend long mourning the loss of their friend. Priorities were focused around breeding and collecting nest-liner courtesy of the sheep. We were able to ascertain a few new potential breeding pairs thanks to this. We have also noticed a few unexpected couplings based on mutual preening and feeding behaviour.

The most intriguing of which is a new trio. **Pyrrho** has teamed up with one of last year's wild-hatched chicks. At only 11 months old (someone call Social Services) he would seem a bit young for **Pyrrho**. The young male is still very close to his sister and the three are often spotted flying to the quarry together. It would be unusual if this trio were to produce anything other than a nest this year.

We already have a trio of **Dusty**, the original wild-hatched chick, and two females **Egg** and **Chickay**. Both females have been building nests; however, **Dusty** pays more attention to **Egg** and we believe she has started incubating. Last year, when this trio formed, they did not get beyond the nest-building stage so **Egg's** behaviour is very encouraging.

These were not the only choughs to be busy nest building. We have seen five pairs visiting the sheep pens to collect wool. Not straight from the sheep's' backs I hasten to add.



Choughs busy collecting wool to line their nests at Sorel. Photo by Liz Corry

We have struggled to assign each pair to a nest site. With so many choughs using the quarry now simply for recreation it is difficult to know who is who and what they are up to. Working with quarry staff, we believe we have double the number of nest sites compared to last year.

We started to notice behaviour in the last two weeks of April that suggested some of the females had started incubating. It has not been as clear-cut as in previous years making it trickier to predict hatch dates. Bets aside it is certain that May will be a productive month.

Health updates and post-release care

Monthly faecal screenings showed the parasite count in the flock to be lower than last month. It would be a statistical miracle to assume that the entire flock was represented equally within a sample. However, taking into account fewer observations of sneezing birds it appears to be a fair reflection of the group's general parasite loads. The reduction was possibly helped by the absence of **Hayle** who had been seen sneezing and wheezing a few days before she encountered the peregrine.

One of the wild-hatched choughs was seen to have something wrapped around her foot on 17th April. We monitored her closely and it soon became clear the offending material was not going to come off unaided. We are permitted to catch up and handle wild-hatched choughs for welfare reasons under our license granted by the States of Jersey. Therefore, to avoid any potential problems with blood circulation in the future, we caught her up and snipped the thread free.



At the same time as attempting to catch this bird (it took several days) we noticed **Bean** had managed to wedge one of her digits up into her plastic rings. We had hoped that she might manage to wiggle it free or break the plastic since the rings are now quite old. She didn't comply so she too was caught up.

We had to be very careful with **Bean** and the rest of the group when it came to entrapment. Not for legal reasons. We did not want to inflict any unnecessary stress on any of the egg-laying females. We had suspected **Bean** could be one such female since her and her partner have collected nesting material. Once in the hand her brood patch was a big giveaway. Her foot was quickly freed, replacement rings fitted, and she was allowed to return to her nest within minutes of being trapped in the aviary.

(Left) PP003 had to be caught up in the release aviary to remove tangled thread from her foot. Photo by Glyn Young.

Yarila conveniently preened out her radio-transmitter on 24th April whilst sat on the aviary roof. At the start of the month one of

her middle tail feathers was sticking up at a right angle to the other eleven. Obviously loose, but hanging on to something. In fact we noticed it the day after the peregrine incident. Coincidence?

Looking at the recovered transmitter it is clear that the loose feather was still holding on by a thread to the base of the transmitter. The other central tail feather, which gets glued to the transmitter, has snapped off and detached from the base of the transmitter hence the tag falling off. This is the first time we have seen this with our choughs.

Jersey Zoo breeding pairs

CI Fire & Security Ltd kindly installed a new wireless system at the chough breeding aviaries this month to allow staff to monitor all three nests. CI Fire & Security Ltd have previously installed cameras at Durrell in the bear and orang enclosures. Whilst seemingly not as challenging as designing an orang-utan-proof camera, the chough-cams proved trickier than expected. Two of the three cameras were up and running in March. The third, in **Issy** and **Tristan's** aviary where we hope the pair will parent rear took a bit longer, but finally went online on 13th April. At which point we discovered she was sitting on three eggs!

Keepers had found an egg on the floor near to the nest-box earlier in the week. We don't know why it was on the floor. We do know that she has not laid anymore eggs since the day the camera went online. An unusually low clutch number for **Issy**, but at least she has eggs and is looking after them.

Now we have the nest-camera we can closely monitor the progress of these eggs, any subsequent chicks and support the parents along the way if needed. We expect the eggs to hatch at the start of May with a view to release healthy fledged chicks in the summer.

Our other two breeding pairs appear to be dawdling. It took them a while to start building nests and now they just don't want to stop. It is a little harder to tell what **Gwinny** and **Lucifer** are up to thanks to **Gwinny** inadvertently repositioning the camera.

For our tame bird **Gianna** she has to sit and wait for the likes of **Gwinny** to start egg-laying. We can then give **Gianna** a dummy egg to stimulate her to start laying her own (infertile) eggs. When the time is right we can swap eggs or chicks for foster rearing purposes. Timing is partly influenced by the behaviour of the pairs especially **Lucifer** who has a tendency to dislike eggs appearing in his nest box. We're not exactly sure what he expects to use the nest for.



Gianna taking nesting material for her foster nest. Photo by Liz Corry



Gianna completed her nest and is now waiting for the cue from keepers to start laying eggs. Photo by Liz Corry

RED-BILLED CHOUGH *Pyrhacorax pyrrhacorax*

May 2017 Report

Elizabeth Corry, Bird Department

Further photos and videos can be seen at www.birdsontheedge.org



Jersey's coastal habitat was home to spring lambs, wild flowers, and baby choughs this month. Here is what the choughs got up to. Or, as we can now call them, what the award-winning choughs got up to!

May the 4th be with you

On May 4th the first of the three eggs in **Issy** and **Tristan's** nest hatched. Staff were naturally excited and considering the date, the geeks amongst us (i.e. everyone), started putting bids in for *Star Wars* related names for the clutch.

Chough eggs hatch sequentially so we expected it to take a few days. However, the days passed and it became clear that this would be the only egg to hatch.

Han Solo was duly christened.

The parents were keen to remove one of the failed eggs while the other was left in the nest for quite some time. With only one chick to care for, **Han Solo** was well fed and grew steadily day by day.

Breeding in the wild

This year's wall planner had a rather colourful month in store with various predicted hatch dates starred and scribbled in colour-coded marker. First off the blocks were to be **Red** and **Dingle** (hand-reared) who raised their first chicks last year. This year's eggs were due to hatch around the first week in May. A change in **Red's** behaviour on 4th May suggested the eggs might have started hatching. Instead of waiting for the cue from **Dingle**, she was already waiting at the aviary for food in the morning. As soon as she picked up a mouthful of mealworms she zoomed back to her nest.

We asked Kevin le Herissier, responsible for 'their' building (Ronez naively still believe that the buildings are theirs not the choughs'), to check the nest the following week. This was to allow time for the entire clutch to hatch and so that the parents were not as sensitive to disturbance.

To our bemusement the photo he sent back was of a perfect nest containing four eggs.



Red and Dingle's nest early in May. Photo by Kevin le Herissier

A follow up check on the 19th also found four eggs. Guess what was found when the nest was checked for a third time on the 31st? Sadly, not a case of third time lucky. Under license by the States of Jersey, these eggs were candled in the nest to find answers to what had happened. One egg had failed during embryonic development. The others looked like they contained almost fully developed chicks. The eggs were returned to the nest.

New nest-site discovered

Student John Harding and Ronez operational assistant Toby Cabaret checked on the nests in the quarry on the 19th. Armed with a GoPro and a very long pole they checked nest-boxes and known nest sites. One of the nest-boxes we fitted in the quarry in 2015 had nesting material in it. What flew out wasn't a chough. It was a kestrel!

Most of the nests were just centimetres out of reach of the pole and suspiciously quiet. The team did, however, spot a female on a nest in a building not previously used by the choughs. With no wish to disturb her the nest was left alone. We now have the task of trying to work out which pair this nest belongs to.

A neighbouring building was also found to have a nest. This one didn't have a female on it, but from the begging noises it was clear there were at least two chicks in there. Again this is a new site and new pairing.

Toby and John trying to use the GoPro to check the cheeping nest. They didn't realise at the time how close they were to the nest. The chicks looked extremely young. Normally we would avoid disturbing a nest at this age. From our calculations we expected any chicks to be a few days older. From their begging they looked strong.

All nest checks are done under license from the States of Jersey.

Chick ringing and revelations

On the 31st we returned to the nest sites. This time with Channel Island ringer Dave Buxton in case the chicks were old enough to fit with leg rings. We were also armed with a new piece of equipment...a USB endoscope camera. It doesn't provide HD images like the GoPro. However, it is equipped with LED lights and a lot more manoeuvrable (and only cost £25).



Toby Cabaret checking a chough nest with the Potensic endoscope. Photo by Liz Corry

Due to health and safety concerns, two nest-sites were out of bounds. We were able to check the nest with the cheeping chicks. This time eerily silent, although it was clear from the endoscope image that there were three bills. They still had pin feathers on their heads and from their size they looked no more than two weeks old. Too young to fit rings.

Before leaving the building John and Toby went and checked the next floor up on a hunch that there could be something. They were right! They found a nest tucked away behind girders.



Spot the nest? Photo by Liz Corry

Whilst checking this nest **Kevin** and **Bean** flew in and appeared slightly aggrieved that we had discovered their little secret. The disappointment of the chicks once again being too young to ring was quickly overshadowed by this news. **Bean** is one of our hand-reared females released as a juvenile in 2014 and now, three years later, rearing chicks of her own!

Chough-watch

We received several reports of choughs out and about this month from members of the public. Of interest was a report of a pair from Tabor Park, St Brelade. They had been seen on the allotments, but flown before leg rings could be read. Five days later another report came in of a chough calling at the desalination plant by Corbiere.



Choughs on the move. Photo by Liz Corry

We have radio-tracked choughs to the south-west before in 2014 and 2015. Since then there have been a handful of sightings around Gorselands, Le Creux and Red Houses.

Regular chough watchers Mick Dryden, Tony Paintin, and Piers Sangan reported choughs at Crabbé, Île Agois, and Grosnez during the day. We assume these are the sub-adults and non-breeders who don't have commitments at the quarry. Without leg ring records we can't be sure.



Grosnez to Plémont with Sorel point in the far distance: areas visited by the choughs this month. Photo by Liz Corry

Personality research with Nottingham Trent University

Guille Mayor arrived this month to start his MSc research looking at personality traits in released choughs. He is trying to see if personality relates to dispersal distances and success in the wild. Part of his work will involve behavioural observation at the release aviary and how individuals react to a novel object.

The trickier part of his study requires him to find where the choughs go each day. He obviously likes a challenge since only three in 34 have radio tracking devices and Guille is on a bicycle. If you do spot a chough away from Sorel please also let us know. Send an email, call 01534 860059, or post on Jersey Wildlife Facebook page. Location, date, time, and, if possible, leg rings need including.

And finally

British and Irish Association of Zoos and Aquariums ([BIAZA](#)) held their annual awards at The Deep in Hull this month. Durrell had entered four categories and came away with three gold and one silver. We are delighted to announce that the return of choughs to Jersey was awarded gold in the conservation category.

Many thanks to everyone involved over the years that have



helped plan, raise, release, monitor, and protect the choughs, many of which have volunteered their free time to do so. And of course our partners at the National Trust, DOE and our extended chough family at Paradise Park.



Choughs at Sorel Point May 2017. Photo by Mark Sleep

RED-BILLED CHOUGH *Pyrhonorax pyrrhonorax*

June 2017 report

Elizabeth Corry, Bird Department

Further photos can be seen at www.birdsontheedge.org

Jersey's free-living choughs have had another productive nesting season. There are seven pairs in the group and we discovered five nests. As reported last month, Dingle and Red's clutch of four eggs failed to hatch. That still left four active nests with chicks. The team was taken to the nest sites on July 9th by Ronez operational assistant, Toby Cabaret. Dave Buxton, licensed ringer, joined the team in order to fit leg rings on the chicks.

We were initially greeted with bad news. We found two dead chicks on the floor under a nest, approximately 2 and 3 weeks old at time of death. Post mortem results were inconclusive due to decomposition of soft tissues. Fortunately there was still one chick alive in the nest.



A chough chick in the quarry fitted with leg rings so staff know year of hatch (black) and identity (green over black). Photo by Liz Corry

A second nest had also lost a chick leaving just one chick for the team to process. The third nest was checked and also found to contain just one chick. In all of the above nests, the parentage was unknown; although we had our suspicions.

The fourth nest belonging to **Green** and **Black** was in one of the nest boxes fitted this year. Despite the nest camera being blocked with wool and twigs we had strong suspicions there were chicks inside. Due to access issues it would be a case of waiting for fledglings to emerge to determine if this was the case.

On the 21st we received news from Toby that one of the ringed chicks had started to explore outside the nest. We estimated it would be a week before it made an appearance at Sorel.

We were right! On the 27th the dulcet tones of a begging chick could be heard over the cliff tops and upon its arrival at the aviary accompanied by its parents. Finally we knew who its parents were. **Kevin** and **Bean** were the only two choughs hurriedly feeding the chick. This was quite a moment for the team since young **Bean** is one of three hand-reared females at Sorel. There could only be one name for this chick; **Beanie baby**.

Our question over the fourth nest was answered two days before **Beanie baby** flew to Sorel. Paul Pestana's voluntary observations paid off on the 25th when he spotted a commotion on the roof of one of the quarry buildings. Two chicks had jumped up through a hole in the roof and started begging frantically at **Green** and **Black** who had returned with food from Sorel. Within minutes of being fed they hopped back out of sight and the adults flew off to find more food.

This breeding season seems to be one of give and take. Therefore our news of two unringed chicks was followed by news of a loss the next day. Concerned quarry staff phoned in the morning to report a chick on the ground in a building looking like it couldn't fly. A somewhat common appearance in chough chicks that haven't fully fledged. However it soon became apparent it was more serious. Sadly the chick died before it reached the vets. A post-mortem showed a severe syngamus infection as likely cause. **Black** was showing symptoms of a syngamus infection. If she was ingesting infected insects it was highly likely she was also feeding them to the chicks. The survival of the second chick was now in doubt, but there was nothing we could do until it flew to Sorel.

Chough travels

Whilst staff have been busy observing nests, the choughs have been off gallivanting along the north coast. Nottingham Trent student Guille has been attempting to follow them as part of his MSc project. He wakes at dawn and tracks groups or individuals armed with a pair of binoculars and a trusted bicycle. He also put a plea out to the jersey public via social media to report any sightings. They didn't disappoint.

After an initial slow start, Guille has been able to observe choughs foraging at Crabbe, Plemont, Grosnez, and Les Landes. All places we knew they visited already, but thought they had ditched during the breeding season to stay close to nest sites. At least that is the impression you get when you go to the aviary to feed twice a day.

One warm day, a pleasing find was seeing a group of choughs bathing and drinking in the stream at Mourier Valley. Rather more interesting was the discovery of the breeding pairs travelling several kilometres away from their nest sites. **White** and **Mauve** with at least 16 others were photographed at Greve de Lecq at the start of the month. We had started to think this pair had failed to breed this year, so it wasn't too surprising for them to be away from their nest site.



Public report of choughs at Greve de Lecq on June 12th. Photo by Nick de Carteret

We suspected the Les Landes pair, **Lee** and **Caûvette**, were responsible for one of the chicks in the quarry. Guille's observations and public reports meant that the pair were spending considerable time and distance (~5km) away from their nest to forage. Grosnez, Plemont headland, and Les Landes, being their favourite spots. **Kevin** and **Bean** were also spending time away from their nest having been seen 2-3km away in the mornings and early afternoon.

Catch up with Caûvette

We trapped **Caûvette** in the aviary at Sorel and caught her up to remove her back digit from her plastic leg ring. Unlike **Bean** she had not managed to free it unaided. There appeared to be no damage. The only thing was that claw had become overgrown and needed a trim. Once weighed she was released from the aviary to join the others. In the process of catching her up we also caught up **Green** and **Q** much to their displeasure. Not one to waste an opportunity we recorded body weights for those two prior to releasing. The two males and **Caûvette** were all good weights suggesting that they must be finding enough food whether wild or at the aviary.



Toe caught in plastic ring. Photo by Liz Corry.

Han Solo takes flight

Our zoo chick, **Han Solo**, took his first flight out of the nest box on June 15th and there wasn't a Millennium falcon in sight! Well maybe a kestrel hovering over the valley.* He had been teetering at the edge for several days beforehand. Once out it took him a little while to get used to his new found flying skills, preferring to hang out in one of two places. He doesn't seem too perturbed by the public. We assume mum and dad have explained the situation to him.

*apologies to anyone not a fan of Star Wars and to everyone for the bad pun.

RBC helps out Jersey Zoo's own RBCs (red-billed choughs)

On the 9th June a team from the Royal Bank of Canada volunteered their time at Jersey Zoo to help with the choughs.



Royal Bank of Canada staff volunteered their time for the Red-Billed Choughs. Photo by Gisele Anno

They were set the task to weed the borders outside the display aviary and plant it up to look like chough habitat found on the north coast. Species such as foxglove, red campion, bladder campion, knapweed, lady's bedstraw, bird's foot trefoil and heather were added. Most of the plants were coming to the end of their flowering period, but they will grow back next year.

On top of volunteering their time, the RBC has donated money to help rodent proof the release aviary and repair netting damage. For which we and the choughs are extremely grateful.

LIVE Teaching through nature

The choughs participated once again with [Alderney Wildlife Trust's LIVE Teaching Through Nature](#) schools programme. Their blogging skills almost as good as their flying skills if I may say so myself. The online paid programme offers schools the opportunity to bring nature into their classrooms by utilising live streams of Alderney's seabirds, videos and blogs from Durrell and the choughs in Jersey, and the occasional live chat with field staff.

This project links directly to the key stage 1 & 2 curriculum, and is an effective way of teaching science and literacy skills, and encouraging pupil creativity and confidence. Feedback from our two week takeover in June was yet again positive hopefully inspiring some young conservationists along the way.

RED-BILLED CHOUGH *Pyrrhonorax pyrrhonorax*

July 2017 report

Elizabeth Corry, Bird Department

Further photos can be seen at www.birdsontheedge.org

Fledging news!

On the 27th June **Beanie baby** was the first of four wild chicks to appear at the aviary with parents, **Kevin** and **Bean**, by its side. Six days later another chick arrived. Unringed, but accompanied by **Green** and **Black**, and sneezing and wheezing, so it wasn't hard to determine which nest it came from. It wasn't hard to find a name for the new chick. Lil' Wheezy, who clearly wasn't well, but it had made it to the aviary, so it's odds were looking up.



A fledged chough visiting the aviary for the first time. Photo by Liz Corry.

The third chick made an appearance on the 5th July. We knew which nest it came from because of we could see pink and black leg rings. We didn't know who it's parents were. Well, not until it started guzzling food down its throat provided by **Lee** and **Caûvette**. This meant that our Les Landes pair had been travelling 9km away from their nest and the group finding food for their chick.

The news of this chick also means that another of our four hand-reared choughs has successfully bred in the wild; **Dingle** (fathered two in 2016), **Caûvette** and **Bean**. Poor **Chick-Ay** has yet to find a dedicated partner.

The fourth and final chick was spotted flying around the quarry on the 6th July. Again, we knew which nest it was from, but did not know the parents. Two days later we were in for a pleasant surprise. **Q** and **Flieur**, a new pairing, led their chick over Sorel Point to join the flock feeding at the aviary.

This now brings the total number of free-flying choughs in Jersey to 38. Almost a quarter of which were wild born in Jersey.

Lil' Wheezy gets wormed

We needed to worm the sick chick that was now visiting the aviary twice a day. It couldn't be done straight away. We needed the chick to become accustomed to flying in and out of the aviary in order to trap it inside. It took a good week for Lil' Wheezy to grow in confidence and fly all the way in at each feed.

Patience paid off on the 19th when the team managed to trap it inside and catch under licence. Dave Buxton fitted leg rings and the vet gave it a wormer before being released back to it's parents and the rest of the flock.

MSc project wraps up

Guille finished collecting data for his research at the end of this month. He now has the delight of returning to Nottingham Trent University to make sense of it all. I will let Guille explain in his own words...

"Birds, and other animals have personalities. Consistent behaviours that are different between individuals, maintained through time and favouring -or not- the survival of the individuals and their successful breeding.

With the choughs I am looking at a classical behavioural trait: the boldness-shyness continuum and how it might affect survival. Basically, if you are a bold bird you may be good at defending your food patch from others, get stronger and healthier and be able to feed your nestlings properly. However if you are a very bold bird that would not leave the food patch even when there is a falcon approaching, you are in serious trouble.



Does Lee's personality type predispose him to travel several kilometres away from the release site to feed? Photo by Mick Dryden

I want to see if we can predict how far the released choughs will go to find food everyday just by looking at their personalities. Some studies have already shown that boldness has an effect on habitat use and distance travelled, which may be useful in a project like this one, where every bird is highly valuable and the distance they will travel will increase the chances of finding more food, or getting lost! If a correlation is found, it would help the project team to select which birds should be released depending on what behaviour is best to assure survival in the area.

For assessing their boldness, I presented them a squirrel-proof bird feeder that they had not seen before, as they have their daily supplementary feeding in open trays. I recorded the latency of each bird to pick food from it for the first time, during 15 minutes. After that, they were given their daily meal and I would not repeat the test until approximately ten days later, so they would not get used to it. Finally I gave every bird an average boldness score based on how long they took to pick food for the first time.



This year's wild chicks were clearly not shying away from the feeder. Photo Guillermo Mayor

Assessing the distance travelled was the fun part, as they had lost their radio tags. I had to become another chough and follow the group during their morning stroll. They leave the roost by 5am, returning for the 11am feed. I learnt lots about chough behaviour in the field. I saw their games, love arguments, gang fights, first trips of their chicks, but still they are very complicated birds.

By the end of July, after having cycled every single track of the North coast, I had a bunch of observations, from which I would pick the furthest point from the roost I saw each bird. Some of them were a bit surprising, such as Trevor and Noirmont. I found them perching on a German WW2 cannon, south of Les Landes. They looked like nobody could mess with them. I would definitely keep an eye on those two.

The two and a half months passed too quickly and I wish I could have stayed longer. The support I received from the project staff was amazing, and I would definitely recommend anyone that has cool ideas that would help the project and the broad bird recovery knowledge to think about doing some research here.

I am currently in front of the computer, missing the field and the choughs, and for now it seems that the boldness was consistent, which is good news! I really hope I can come back soon and see the noisy choughs again soaring over the windy cliffs, and all the lovely people who were like a family for a summer."

Birds On The Edge wins a RHS award

Birds On The Edge received a Silver award in the conservation section of the annual 'Parish in Bloom' event, a hugely popular and well supported national floral competition held under the professional auspices of the [Royal Horticultural Society](#).

Glyn Young met the judges and Mike Stentiford on Sunday 23rd July to show them around Sorel to see the grazing flock of sheep, conservation crop fields, and the choughs. Although only two choughs showed up!

More information about the Parish in Bloom event run by Natural Jersey can be found at http://www.parish.gov.je/Documents/NatJerBrochureA4_ParishSites.pdf.

RED-BILLED CHOUGH *Pyrrhocorax pyrrhocorax*

August 2017 Report

Elizabeth Corry, Bird Department

Further photos and videos can be seen at www.birdsontheedge.org



Choughs in flight over Jersey. Photo by Liz Corry

This month has flown by. So have the choughs. Awful opening line, but accurate. Now that the breeding season is over the choughs are spending more time away from Sorel and it is quite rare to see all 38 choughs at the supplemental feeds.

West is best?

Lee and **Caûvette** are back at Les Landes and Grosnez. This time with their chick in tow. We were treated to several sightings of the family whilst we carried out rat monitoring fieldwork at Plémont. The most memorable sighting was that of all three flying through the early morning fog towards Grosnez. These days they spend the whole day out west, returning to Sorel an hour or so before roosting time.

They are not the only ones on the move. A sighting from an ex-Durrell colleague of seven choughs flying over Hamptonne Country Life Museum added to the tally of sightings in St Lawrence parish.

All of the reports from St Lawrence are of birds flying over. Are the choughs just passing through or checking out the parish for suitable feeding site?

Their daily activities are making it a little harder for the team to monitor every chough as closely as we have in the past. Although we have still kept on top of monitoring their health and welfare. It is hard not to when you can get this close...



Lee photographed by a member of the public at Grosnez Castle. Photo by Mike Nuttall

Syngamus infections in the wild chicks

Last month we reported that the wild chicks were sneezing and sounding congested. We managed to obtain individual faecal samples for three of the four chicks after patiently waiting at each feed. All three tested positive for syngamus nematodes. The fourth bird is proving harder to sample as it disappears out west with its parents each morning.

We have so far managed to trap and treat two of the chicks. We are still trying with the third. The chick we treated in July has shown a great deal of improvement which is encouraging.

Perils of living in the wild

One of the wild chicks had to be caught up for a second time this month. **Beanie baby** had plastic thread entangled around her foot. It was quite a mess and needed cutting. Luckily there was no damage and she was free to re-join her parents. The other good news is that she had put on weight since the last catch-up to treat her for syngamus. We can't hear her wheezing or sneezing anymore suggesting that the treatment has worked.



Durrell vet nurse, Teresea Bell, examining one of this year's wild chicks. Photo by Liz Corry



Plastic sack thread entangled around the foot of one of the wild chicks. Cut loose prior to photo being taken by Liz Corry

Upholding tradition

We received report this month from a family who live close to the release site. They were pleased to see three choughs chilling out on their roof taking in the local scenery. We see a similar sight at Crabbé on the granite farmhouse and in Mourier Valley.

What is particular nice about this photo is the choughs sat on the witches' step, or pièrres dé chorchiers in Jèrriais. These are flat stones jutting from chimneys of granite houses in Jersey. According to Channel Island folklore, these small ledges were used by witches to rest on as they fly to their sabbats, i.e. meetings. In doing so the homeowner would be looked on favourably by the witch. One witch, Marie Pipet, from Guernsey was said to possess the power to turn herself into a chough!

Choughs at Oak Farm, La Rue de Sorel.
August 2017. Photo by Hilary Morris



Enrichment ideas for the captive choughs

Project student John Harding was set the task of designing enrichment feeders for the choughs in the zoo. Gianna, the tame chough, took up the role of R&D assistant and put them to test. She probably did more eating than assisting, but it still helped John find a winning design.

He also learnt a great deal as he discovered that 'product placement' is just as important as design. There are certain areas within the aviary, mainly on the ground, that Gianna does not like going to. In some cases it was a matter of gaining her confidence. In others she just outright refused to go and therefore a waste of time putting enrichment there.



Gianna inspects the workmanship. Photo by Liz Corry

RED-BILLED CHOUGH *Pyrhacorax pyrrhacorax*

September 2017 Report

Elizabeth Corry, Bird Department

Further photos and videos can be seen at www.birdsontheedge.org

“Delicious autumn! My very soul is wedded to it, and if I were a bird I would fly about the earth seeking the successive autumns.” – George Eliot

If that bird happens to be a Jersey chough, substitute “earth” for Les Landes and “successive autumns” for lots and lots of insects. For the first time since the choughs have been living at liberty, the entire flock have snubbed their morning supplemental feed in favour of wild pickings out at Les Landes.



Choughs taking flight at Les Landes Racecourse. Photo by Liz Corry

They have been flipping over and picking apart cow pats, probing the grass on the spectators’ stand at the Racecourse for crane fly larvae, and scouring the cliff face for anything else they can prise out of the ground.

This is obviously encouraging news for the project. The choughs are clearly content and they are gaining popularity with the public, both locals and tourists who delight in watching their antics. Especially the flying displays.

For the lone observer tasked with keeping track of all 38 choughs it is a roller coaster of emotions; pride, joy, irritation, despair etc. The blessed things don’t stay still nor in one group and it is near impossible to read leg rings. Add to that the inevitable sod’s law factor and you get



A group of choughs (under the arrow) and starlings foraging in the spectators’ area of the Racecourse. Photo by Liz Corry

events such as (1) Racecourse tractor mowing back and forth along your observation site (2) friendly kestrel spotting lunch slap bang in the middle of the foraging chough flock sending them scattering just as you are half way through counting said flock and (3) random 10 minute hail storm!



La Nethe Falaise is a favourite spot for the choughs to hang out when they are up at Grosnez. Photo by Liz Corry

There is, however, one trick of the trade that can be deployed and moments of need. It should only be practised by a trained professional. It can only be practised by a trained professional since without the recognition from the foster-reared and hand-reared choughs it probably wouldn't work and you would be left looking like a right *Parus major* (one for the bird geeks).

Like any species, the offer of free food is too tempting and providing I can get close enough in an area where the birds do not feel threatened I can get the choughs to gather together in one place. Note in the photo the choughs closest to me are **Ubè** and **Vicq**, both foster-reared, and a couple of the older adults who have known me for four years.



Thirty of the choughs getting a sneaky supplemental feed at Les Landes Racecourse. Photo by Liz Corry

It is possible to identify most of the leg rings when the choughs are this close. Right up until the point when sod's law example number 2 comes into play. After that, only the clingy types stay behind begging for more free food.

For the past few weeks the maximum number of choughs at any one time has been thirty-four. There should be thirty-eight. The individuals who appear to be absent most often are **Lee** and **Caûvette**, their chick **Pink**, and **Carmine** another wild chick hatched this year.



Carmine, a wild chick from this year, was last seen at the aviary on September 2nd. Photo by Liz Corry

Whilst it would be nice to assume **Pink** is with her parents, both chicks are of an age now not to be dependent on their parents. Furthermore they were both showing signs of having nematodes back in August. Failed attempts to catch them up in the aviary meant that they were never treated before they were last seen at Sorel at the start of September.

It is quite possible that **Carmine** and **Pink** have sadly perished. Ever optimistic we will continue monitoring the population and ask the public to keep their eyes (and ears) open.



RED-BILLED CHOUGH *Pyrhcorax pyrrhcorax*

October 2017 Report

Elizabeth Corry, Bird Department

Further photos and videos can be seen at www.birdsontheedge.org



A few of the Jersey choughs signalling dinner time. Photo by Liz Corry

As October drew to a close it was achingly apparent that the chough flock was down from 38 to 36 individuals. The two wild-hatched females who went missing in September had still not made an appearance, forcing us to reluctantly record them as missing presumed dead.

This is the first time we have lost wild-hatched birds post-fledging period. One can't help feel a sense of responsibility. These individuals were known to have a nematode infection, but attempts to medicate them had failed before they went missing. All we can do now is monitor the remaining choughs to ensure the same fate doesn't befall them.

So we did, and guess what...two of the adults started sneezing. **Egg** and **Helier** began with the 'I'm not sneezing, just clearing my nostrils' subtle sneeze. After a few days **Egg** stopped whereas **Helier** continued and progressively worsened.

After a few failed catch ups due to jammed hatches, intelligent corvids, and of all things Portuguese forest fires (see 'Sepia skies' below) **Helier** was finally locked in the aviary allowing her to be treated by the vet team. She was released back into the wild straight after her worming injection and appears to be much improved.

Nematodes are part of the natural ecosystem. Choughs feeding in the wild will be exposed to them and have to tolerate or succumb. This year is turning out to be the worst since the project began in terms of number of infected birds and fatalities warranting further investigation.

Sepia skies

Having worked at Sorel for several years now you would have thought that everything that could go wrong in a catch up had done or at least been theorised and accounted for. Hinges sticking on trap doors, birds not showing up or not hungry enough to want to go inside, mountain bikers zooming past scaring the flock into the air, etcetera. Not once had we thought to account for Caribbean hurricanes and Portuguese forest fires!

On the morning of the first planned attempt to catch up **Helier** the skies in Jersey, and parts of the UK, were looking very ominous. Walking around Sorel it felt like someone had put a sepia filter on the world. Frustratingly my camera phone kept adding its own filter so the photos below don't fully set the scene.



On 16th October 2017 the skies above Jersey turned a sepia colour. Photo by Liz Corry

Low cloud filled the skies throughout the morning. Around lunchtime the sun made an appearance, but looked more like Mars than our beloved sun. There were no horsemen on the horizon so instead of embracing impending doom I turned to the Gods of Google.

An explanation for the near apocalyptic conditions was provided by the BBC. Remnants of Hurricane Ophelia passing over the south of England and Channel Islands were dragging dust from the Sahara and smoke from the devastating forest fires in Portugal and Spain across our skies.

I tried explaining this to a very confused flock of choughs who were clearly conflicted about what time they should go to roost. One might think this would be advantageous to someone trying to lock birds in an aviary. Nope. Instead it meant they just sat and stared at me in their perplexed state. A twenty-minute stand-off resulted in a dejected keeper walking away left to come up with a Plan B.

Roost check

Plan B failed. In fact it wasn't until Plan E was executed that we were able to lock the sick chough in the aviary. The new plan arose from the need to know who was roosting in the

aviary in case we had to lock in the sick bird for longer than a day. There was a small chance she roosted in the aviary already rather than the quarry. If so, all we had to do was wait until the birds had gone to roost and quietly shut the external hatches.

Cut to the scene of a person in dark clothes vaulting a field gate at night only lit by the stars and the dim headlights from a teenager's car (one assumes from the discarded firework packaging and soda cans found the next morning) idling at Sorel Point.

The operation provided extra information other than **Helier's** roosting site. A total of twelve choughs were roosting inside the aviary including **Dusty** the very first wild-hatched chough and the two females who follow him.

Kevin and **Bean** were hanging around outside the aviary. They could have used one of the external roost spaces at the aviary or simply flown over from the quarry at first light to forage nearby. The other interesting find was the kestrel who shot out of the external roost box when I arrived in the morning to check on the choughs.

There are no photos from *Operation If this doesn't work we're screwed*. So instead here is one taken at Les Landes when checking for signs of choughs at sunset.



Sunset at Les Landes. Photo by Liz Corry

The Women's Institute expedition to the north coast

Earlier in the year the ladies of La Moye WI had invited me to give a talk about the choughs. Several of their members were already aware of the project, but had not realised that the historic breeding sites for Jersey choughs were in fact along the coastline at La Moye.

Enthusiasm for the project continued to grow as the evening went on, fuelled by the obligatory tea and cake, and by the end of the night a trip to Sorel was penned in the diary.

After a few clashes in the calendar a small group from La Moye finally made it up to the north coast this month. Glyn walked them around the conservation fields and release site. Not all of the choughs were present, but certainly enough to make an impact and

demonstrate their amazing flying skills. I sadly missed out as I was in England, but from the looks on their faces I think they enjoyed it.



RED-BILLED CHOUGH *Pyrhocorax pyrrhocorax*

November 2017 Report

Elizabeth Corry, Bird Department

Further photos and videos can be seen at www.birdsontheedge.org



Choughs took flight this month to explore the west coast of Jersey. Photo by Trevor Biddle

Having spent most of November on holiday or in bed overdosing on Lemsip, I thought I would get away with not having to write anything this month. However, as is now tradition, it is times like these when the choughs start hitting the headlines. So, thanks entirely to public sightings, I have the following news to share.

New sightings for November

There have been a couple of positive sightings of choughs at Petit Port and Corbiere once again. We never know every individual involved, but we do get at least one or two positive sightings of choughs in the area each year around this time and this year we have had some positive identification like Roy Filleul's photo of **PP003** at Corbiere and **Mary** with friend in the NT Field.

Staff at Simon Sand & Gravel Ltd had a surprise sighting of two choughs flying around their buildings on 3rd November. They managed to film it and post on their Facebook site. Since then we have been receiving reports of choughs making the most of St Ouen's Bay. It tends to be 2 to 3 birds at a time, no large groups, and they are seen in the same places (although there could be observer bias in that).

We had a report of a chough drinking from the water's edge at the St Ouen's Pond Scrape (in front of the Eddie Buxton hide) which is personally very exciting as I've only ever seen them drink from the aviary water tray and the sheep bowzers.

Kempt Tower and Les Mielles nature reserve are becoming popular with at least three of the choughs. Thanks to Trevor Biddle's photo of them down at the Scrape (south of St Ouen's Pond) we know the identities of the three explorers; **Pyrrho** and wild-hatched siblings known to us as **PP004** and **PP005**. Rather interestingly these three have been a trio since the start of this year and observed carrying nesting material towards the quarry back in spring.



Three sub-adult choughs spotted by a member of the public near the Scrape, St Ouen's Bay. Photo by Trevor Biddle

It is likely that people are seeing the same three in the area, but without leg ring information this cannot be confirmed. Understandably that is information is hard to obtain, it is amazing just to get photos. All this knowledge feeds back into their long-term management plan so if you do spot choughs out and about in Jersey please do send in your report to birdsote@gmail.com or call **01534 860059** and leave the details.



Two choughs in the NT Field, St Ouen's Bay. 5-11-2017. Photo by Glyn Young

Chough numbers in Jersey dealt another blow

One chough who will not be venturing further afield anymore is **Egg**. We had a rather sad report from Ronez Quarry of a dead chough found behind the door inside one of their buildings. On collection of the body the leg rings told us the bird was a captive-raised female known as **Egg**. What we did not know was the cause of death since the body looked to be in good condition and time of death fairly recent. She was taken to the Zoo's veterinary team for *post-mortem* analysis.

X-rays ruled out any kind of trauma. She was underweight, but there was no evidence that she starved to death. Syngamus was present, but at a very low encounter rate. Internal investigation showed problems in her lungs and presence of acanthocephalans, a type of parasitic worm also known as thorny-headed worm. Once again we cannot say for sure that these factors caused the death, but certainly played a part in her demise. We are waiting on histology results for further information.



Post mortem examination of Egg. Photo by Hester Whitehead



Captive-reared chough, Egg, collecting nesting material at Sorel back in April. Photo by Liz Corry

This brings the chough population down to 35 individuals; 12 males, 23 females. It also means we have lost a potential breeding female. **Egg** was partnered with **Dusty** and for a second year in a row had made a nest although nothing came of it. We will now need to keep watch on **Dusty**. Will he form a new pairing in time for the next breeding season only a couple of months away? Will **Chickay** finally get her chance after spending two loyal years following him? More importantly was **Egg's** cause of death a one-off or is something sinister afoot?

Julian Hume

Julian Hume and Lindsey Hubbard visited the aviary on 13th November. Julian, better known for his work with extinct bird species was excited to watch such an exuberant, and very much living, species!



Julian Hume and Lindsey Hubbard at Sorel on 13th November. Photo by Glyn Young

Extension request for release aviary

The release aviary at Sorel was originally granted a five-year lease of life under States of Jersey planning regulations. As this comes to an end this month we have submitted a request to extend permission a further five years.

We still have a group of choughs using the aviary as a roost site (not to mention kestrels and barn owls). There is still a need to recapture birds for veterinary treatment as demonstrated in last month's report. The aviary facilitates this need.

In the long term we are also looking at introducing new blood lines into the population which would require soft-release of captive reared individuals. We still aim to remove the aviary at some point in the future, but for now there is still a clear need for the structure.

More information and opportunity for public comment can be found on the States website <https://www.mygov.je//Planning/Pages/PlanningApplicationDetail.aspx?s=1&r=RC/2017/1537>.

The required planning notification went up at the aviary on 9th November and has, thanks to high winds, been replaced four times!

RED-BILLED CHOUGH *Pyrhocorax pyrrhocorax*

December 2017 Report

Elizabeth Corry, Bird Department

Further photos and videos can be seen at www.birdsontheedge.org



As the year drew to a close and daylight hours dwindled to their annual low, the choughs spent more and more time at Sorel close to their roost sites.

Chough movements in December

There was one intriguing public report at the start of December suggesting a new roost site. Farm workers at West Point Farm, St Ouen, had been seeing a pair of choughs in their barns around 7am each morning. At that time of year sunrise occurs around 7.40am. Was the pair roosting in the barns or being 'the early bird that catches the worm' and leaving Sorel before everyone else to find food out west?



Choughs leaving the feed site at Sorel. Photo by Liz Corry

The day of the report, and each day since, there have been 35 choughs at Sorel for the feed. The sun sets not long after with a dozen or so choughs staying at the aviary and the rest heading east, presumably to the quarry.

Another reason to stay close to Sorel is the supplemental feed. Now that winter has set in the availability of wild food is low and the need for calories high. December has not been particularly cold – in fact there have been a few balmy days where shorts were an option (for keeper not bird).



An unusually warm day in December enjoyed by the choughs. Photo by Liz Corry

However, our tiny island has taken a constant battering over the past weeks with gale force winds of 40 to 60 mph. It is bad enough walking or driving in it. Imagine being a 300g bird trying to fly or trying to stay grounded whilst searching for food in the soil.



24 hours later! Photo by Liz Corry

Apart from a demand for more food the choughs have on the whole fared ok so far with the bad weather. They are making the most of the sheep being confined to the aviary field. It is tugging season with one lucky ram confined to two fields with a flock of ewes. Lots of dung with maybe the odd tasty insect morsel inside.

Syngamous strikes again

There have been two cases of Syngamous infection this month. Luckily I was able to trap the birds, **Lee** and **Duke**, within a couple of days of symptoms showing. They evaded capture on the first day of trying, partly due to the hatches not budging when released. The second day their hunger in the increasingly cold wet weather spurred on their motivation for staying inside the aviary and the hatches closed. Much to the relief of the vet on call over Christmas as it was 23rd December.



Never easy trying to trap choughs who refuse to go inside. Photo by Liz Corry

Whilst **Lee** had been our major cause for concern due to gaping and repeated sneezing, it was **Duke** who sounded the most congested once we had him in the hand. He also had a lot of mucus around his nares which we rarely see.

Once they had received their wormer injection they were released and left to feed on the pellet and insects at the aviary. Remarkably there have been no observations of sneezing since that day. However, do bear in mind the gales/fog/heavy rain/sleet (often in the same day) have meant that there is little incentive to hang around at Sorel observing birds.

We have tried. Body weights have been obtained for several of the birds. Not consistently to show any trends, but enough to know the choughs getting on the scales are not underweight. These of course will be the more confident individuals and/or ones that have low parasite loads. We have a new type of scale that the birds will use. A lot cheaper than the flat Kern scales (£20 versus £150).

They are not intended as outdoor scales so I have had a few attempts at weather-proofing. The current one needs improving as the birds are unsure. Once they have approved the design plans we can make several weighing stations to place around the aviary ensuring we cater to all of the choughs.

Prototype weighing station using digital kitchen scales. Photo by Liz Corry



Gianna's dilemma

Towards the end of November keepers at the zoo started to notice Gianna our foster mum having issues. She was crash landing when flying. Gianna is tame and she lets keepers get extremely close. She lets me open her bill to check for infections or blockages if needed. It was easy to see that the source of Gianna's mobility problems was her eyes.



Jess Maxwell with Head Vet Andrew Routh examining Gianna's eyes. Photo by Bea Detnon



Gianna's left eye was starting to show signs of cataract. Furthermore, there was no reaction in her right eye. She was taken to the Vet Department for further examination. Photos were sent to a UK specialist who confirmed she had cataracts in both eyes.

Since the initial assessment there has been a noticeably downturn in her ability to move around. Understandably as her vision deteriorates her confidence in everyday things like hopping from rock to rock has decreased. She has been moved to an off-show aviary close to the Vet Department so she can receive the best attention from keepers.

Despite everyone's love for Gianna we have to accept that her future is murky. There is the option of an operation to remove the cataracts. As you can imagine this is very specialised,

expensive, and relies on the individual being strong enough to undergo the operation. If the operation option is not feasible her quality of life will then need to be carefully considered.