The Corncrake *Crex crex*, listed as Vulnerable by BirdLife International (2000), was found by Ludlow and Kinnear (1934) in the west of Xinjiang (Chinese Turkestan) more than seventy years ago. Prior to the 1990s there were no further reports, leading many authors to conclude that it was a very rare bird in China (Cheng Tso-hsin 1987, Collar et al. 1994). However, Hornskov (1995) reported this species in Xinjiang in 1995, and we observed it at a number of localities in Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous Region during May and June 1998, and June-July 1999 and 2000 (Lewthwaite et al. 1998, Ma Ming and Wang Qishan 2000, Ma Ming 2001). These observations appear to constitute the first records from the Chinese part of the eastern Tianshan and Altay Mountains.

In Xinjiang, the Corncrake has been found in oases, river valleys and subalpine grasslands at 600–3,700 m. It is usually found in cultivated fields of sesame, alfalfa, wheat and barley, or grassland not far from water. In the harvest season (June to July) it can be found in orchards and scrub near farmland.

We consider the Corncrake to be quite common in Xinjiang, with 2–4 birds per km² estimated at most recording localities. In the Ili River valley (Xinyuan) a density of 6–8 birds per km² was estimated. Using these data, we have calculated a preliminary population estimate of 1,500–3,000 individuals in China (Ma Ming and Wang Qishan 2000). This suggests that the species may have previously been overlooked, probably because most observers lacked experience of its distinctive call. Alternatively, the species may have extended its range from the west to the east of Tianshan.

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### REFERENCES


