

THE CORN CRAKE (*Crex crex*) IN NEW YORK STATE, WITH COMMENTS ON ITS OCCURRENCE IN THE WESTERN HEMISPHERE, 1833-2017.

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When Ken and Sue Feustel reported a Corn Crane (*Crex crex*) to the New York State Birds listserv on the morning of 7 November 2017 (Feustel 2017, Feustel 2018), it was the first ever sight record by birders of a living Corn Crane in New York State (NYS), and the first known occurrence since 1963. Lincoln (1998) listed six specimens collected in NYS: four at the American Museum of Natural History in New York City (AMNH) and two at the State Museum in Albany (NYSM). In addition to these, AMNH #1026 was received from the Central Park Zoo 4 April 1894, and is a skeleton (not skin), and AMNH #75834 flew aboard the steam ship “Bostonian” in the English Channel ca. 17 October 1901 and was brought to this country and obtained by the Museum. Of the seven NYS records that include site data, six came from Long Island (all from Suffolk County except for AMNH #12537, which indicates only “Long Island”), and one from inland NYS in Albany County. Of the six NYS records with reliable dates, five were found in the narrow date range of 1-7 November, and four were collected within the brief period 1880-1888.

The Corn Crane is a highly migratory rail, breeding in the Palearctic from coastal north-western Europe to Western China and migrating primarily to eastern/southern Africa (de Burgos and Olmos 2013). Like other migratory rails, most notably Purple Gallinule (*Porphyrio martinicus*: Farnsworth *et al.* 2015), but also Spotted Crane (*Porzana porzana*), which has occurred 11 times in Greenland (Boertmann 1994) and twice in the eastern Caribbean, at St. Martin and Guadeloupe (Norton *et al.* 2015), Corn Cranes are prone to long distance vagrancy. In our hemisphere, vagrant Corn Cranes have occurred most often in Greenland (25 records from Greenland through 1994, plus three more since then: Boertmann 1994, Boertmann pers. comm.), in Atlantic Canada, in Bermuda, and along the coastal northeastern United States. Table 1 summarizes 35 records from Nunavut, Newfoundland, Nova Scotia, St. Pierre et Miquelon, Maine, Massachusetts, Rhode Island, Connecticut, New York, New Jersey, eastern Pennsylvania, Maryland, Bermuda, Guadeloupe, and Brazil. The month of detection is available for 29 of 35 records. No fewer than 26 of these 29 were found in fall: September (5), October (11), or November (10), with others in

January (1 or 2), May (1), June (possibly one), and August (1). The uncertainty between January and June arises from the specimen from Cumberland County NJ in 1856; the ledger entry and most publications indicate January, whereas the specimen label itself indicates June. Curiously, Ball (1944) mentions this specimen at the end of his note concerning a Connecticut specimen, stating that the actual date should be June, “according to Stone.” Thus far we have been unable to find any published statement by Stone clarifying this matter (the record is not mentioned at all in Stone 1937), so it remains unknown whether Stone knew more than what is written on the label.

The broad overall range of fall dates is not surprising for a cryptic, secretive species capable of making further movements after initial arrival in the Western Hemisphere. Interestingly, all seven Bermuda records occurred before November, as did four of seven records from Canada and nearby St. Pierre et Miquelon, and the single record from Guadeloupe. Furthermore, all five September records were from these easterly sites. In contrast, of 14 records from the USA, seven were in November and one (or two) in January. This geographic disparity in dates of detection raises the question of whether the later dates of occurrence to the west and south reflect secondary movements post-arrival.

We contacted three museums (AMNH in NYC; NYSM in Albany; and the Academy of Natural Sciences in Philadelphia (ANSP)). We asked them to re-evaluate the ages of their specimens, and if possible, to verify the sexes of these specimens. To assess the age of Corn Crake and related rails, one examines the shape of the medial secondaries in a spread wing, and/or the shape of the primary tips (e.g., see the Yellow Rail account in Pyle 2008, or Green 2004, cited by Pyle). The remiges of juveniles are more pointed than those of adults, and individuals retaining juvenile remiges can be aged as Hatching-Year during August-December and Second-Year during January and later.

The results of our inquiry via data reported to us by museum personnel is interesting. In terms of sex, seven specimens could be determined confidently: three males and four females. However, in terms of age, of 11 specimens (five at AMNH; two at NYSM; and four at ANSP), eight were HY/SY age. Furthermore, AMNH #75834 (not included in the table, details above), was also a HY/SY bird. The only three adult birds recently examined by museum personnel are held at AMNH (#64859, 2 November 1880; #64860, 1 November 1888; and #12537, pre-1900). Most of the pre-1900 specimens were collected after being shot; the two most recent specimens, January 2016, PA and November 2017, NY, were victims of cat predation (PA) and vehicle impact (NY). Two images showing the November 2017 bird found on Long Island are shown on page 45; for additional information regarding this record see Uda (2017) and Feustel (2018).

We recommend that museums with Corn Crake specimens re-evaluate the age/sex of those specimens. It would be interesting to know if other specimens previously described as “adult” were actually HY/SY birds. Similarly, for future occurrences of Corn Crake in this hemisphere, we urge photographers and

Table 1. Records of 35 Corn Crakes (*Crex crex*) known from the Western Hemisphere, including Bermuda, the West Indies, and South America, 1833-2017. Boertmann (1994) summarizes 25 records from Greenland through 1994, and three since (pers. comm.). BAMZ is the Bermuda Aquarium, Museum and Zoo; YPM is the Yale Peabody Museum; see text for other abbreviations.

Date	State/Prov	Location	Sources	Age	Sex	Comments
ca. 1833	MA		Anon. 1833	-	-	
25 Oct 1847	Bermuda	Pembroke Marsh	Baird <i>et al.</i> 1884 Cooke 1914	-	-	
Fall 1854	NJ	Salem, <i>Salem</i>	Walsh <i>et al.</i> 1999 Boyle 2011	HY	-	ANSP #6493
June* 1856	NJ	ca. Bridgeton, <i>Cumberland</i>	Walsh <i>et al.</i> 1999 Boyle 2011	HY	-	ANSP #6492; *label indicates June whereas ledger indicates January; see text
ca. 1857	RI	Cranston, <i>Providence</i>	Editor 1884	-	-	specimen Roger Williams Park Museum
1859	NF	St. Shott's, Cape Race	Godfrey 1966 Dunn <i>et al.</i> 2002	-	-	
Oct, ca. 1874	NS	Pictou	McKinlay 1899 Godfrey 1966	-	-	also Dunn <i>et al.</i> 2002 "shot in a boggy, swampy situation"
2 Nov 1880	NY	Oakdale, <i>Suffolk</i>	Dutcher 1888 Bull 1974	Ad	f	AMNH skin #64859
5 Nov 1883	NY	Cohoes, <i>Albany</i>	J. Bopp 2017 <i>pers.com</i> Bull 1974	HY	f	NYSM #7212 (formerly #463)
18 Aug 1885	NY	Amagansett, <i>Suffolk</i>	Dutcher 1886 Bull 1974	HY	-	AMNH skin #64858
20 Oct 1887	CT	Saybrook, <i>Middlesex</i>	Clarke 1887 Ball 1944	Ad	m	also Dunn <i>et al.</i> 2002 swamp thicket adjacent to salt meadows
ca. 1 Nov 1888	NY	ca. Montauk Pt., <i>Suffolk</i>	Dutcher 1890 Bull 1974	Ad	f	AMNH skin #64860
14 Oct 1889	ME	Falmouth, <i>Cumberland</i>	Brock 1896 Dunn <i>et al.</i> 2002	-	-	
pre 1900	NY	"Long Island"	Bull 1974	Ad	m	AMNH skin #12537; also P. Capainolo, pers. comm.; from Mus. Comp. Zool. 28 Jun 1937
28 Nov 1900	MD	<i>Worcester</i>	Stewart & Robbins 1958	-	-	MD/DC Rarities Committee #1999-088
11 Nov 1905	NJ	Dennisville, <i>Cape May</i>	Walsh <i>et al.</i> 1999 Boyle 2011	HY	-	ANSP #48498; wheat field

24 Sep 1928	Nunavut	Cape Dorset, Baffin Island	Godfrey 1966 Dunn <i>et al.</i> 2002	?	?	
28 Sep 1928	NF	St. Shott's, Cape Race	Peters & Burleigh 1951 - Godfrey 1966	-	-	
18 Oct 1943	CT	Orange, <i>New Haven</i>	Ball 1944 VertNet.org	-	f	YPM #950; "Redbush Farm, one mile east of Housatonic River"
2 Nov 1963	NY	Orient, <i>Suffolk</i>	Latham 1964 Bull 1974	HY	f	NYSM #2565 (formerly #24890)
2 Oct 1978	Bermuda	Pembroke Dump	Amos 1991	-	-	A. Dobson, D. Wingate, pers. comm.
13 Oct 1981	Bermuda	Hog Bay	Amos 1991	-	-	A. Dobson, D. Wingate, pers. comm.
27-29 Sep 1982	Bermuda	Paget	Amos 1991	-	m	specimen BAMZ; 68 g, emaciated; A. Dobson, D. Wingate, pers. comm.
22 Oct 1989	SPM	St. Pierre	Mactavish 1990 Dunn <i>et al.</i> 2002	-	-	
24 Sep 1991	Bermuda	Southampton	Dobson 2002	-	-	crushed on road, not preserved; seen by D. Wingate, pers. comm.
2 Oct 1991	Bermuda	St. Davids	Dobson 2002	-	-	killed by cat; skeleton possibly preserved; seen by D. Wingate, pers. comm.
4-5 May 1993	NS	Brier I, <i>Digby</i>	Dunn <i>et al.</i> 2002 AB 47: 390			
28-30 Nov 1997	NS	Little Harbor, <i>Shelburne</i>	Mactavish 1998	-	-	photographed
2 Nov 2002	NF	Cape Race	Mactavish 2002	-	-	described as 21 st record for NA
28 Sep-2 Oct 2003	Guadeloupe	Petite-Terre	Norton <i>et al.</i> 2004	HY		photographed
5 Oct 2003	Bermuda	Airport, St. David's	Norton <i>et al.</i> 2004	-	f	specimen BAMZ; 120 g, no fat; D. Wingate, pers. comm.
28 Nov 2012	Brazil	Fernando de Noronha Is.	de Burgos & Olmos 2013	-	-	
5 Oct 2014	ME	Monhegan Island, <i>Lincoln</i>	Bevier 2018	HY	-	photographed
early Jan 2016	PA	<i>Wayne</i>	J. Weckstein, <i>pers. comm.</i>	SY	m	ANSP #203182 victim of cat predation
7-9 Nov 2017	NY	Cedar Beach, <i>Suffolk</i>	Feustel 2018	HY	m	AMNH skin #841733; hit by car 9 Nov 2017

birders to assess age and sex as critically as possible. A bias toward HY/SY individuals is expected among vagrant birds of many kinds (Howell *et al.* 2014), but changes in the age ratio and in the overall rate of vagrancy can be indicative of demographic trends within portions of the breeding ranges from which vagrants originate (Veit 2000).

Perhaps the most notable finding to emerge from our re-assessment of Corn Crane records from throughout the Western Hemisphere is the relatively large number of records from recent decades, compared to earlier periods. Each of the four ten-year intervals preceding 2017 yielded at least three Corn Crane records, with five from 1988-1997 and four from 2008-2017. In contrast, four of the eight ten-year intervals from 1898-1977 yielded zero records, and the only ten-year intervals prior to 1978 that yielded more than two records were 1878-1887 (4) and 1848-1857 (3). At a broader scale of 40-year intervals, the most recent period 1978-2017 yielded 15 Corn Crane records, compared to just two from 1938-1977, four from 1898-1937, eight from 1858-1897, and five from prior to 1858. It is possible that, despite the major declines in most western European Corn Crane populations during the 20th Century, one or more populations have been growing in recent decades and acting as a source for potential future records of vagrants to the Western Hemisphere.

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PHOTO GALLERY FALL 2017



Figure 1. Corn Crane (*Crex crex*), photographed on the afternoon of 8 November 2017 along Ocean Parkway at Cedar Beach, Suffolk County, Long Island, New York. Photo © Robert DeCandido, PhD. See articles pp. 2-10.



Figure 2. Note the absence of gray feathering above and below the eye, typical of a young bird. The bird was found dead the next morning and confirmed as a Hatching-Year male. Photo © Robert DeCandido, PhD.