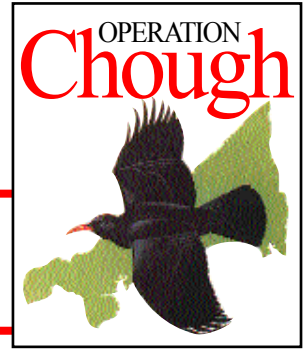


# Paradise Park Wildlife Sanctuary

www.paradisepark.org.uk



December  
2003

## CHOUGH UPDATE

### Two Pairs Progressing After Early Losses

Almost from the outset it became clear that the released birds were forming two distinct groups. One was composed of the single "A" pair, and the other made up of the "B" pair and the two single female birds. These two groups showed very different habits - the "A" pair showed no sign of territoriality, and began ranging far and wide. The second group became very sedentary, taking up residence in a small geographical area.



In a freak accident, the female from the "B" pair drowned in a cattle trough, and we had hoped that this would be the last of our losses. Unfortunately one of the single female birds was killed by a Peregrine Falcon at the end of August. It is a strange irony that the conditions which have proven so favourable for the return of Choughs, are the same as those of their main predator. Where Choughs are likely to breed, so are Peregrine Falcons.

As the days went by, it was clear that the Choughs were very aware of their predators - they were seen on several occasions mobbing the local Peregrines, as well as the less threatening Kestrels nearby. This behaviour was very promising, showing that the birds did indeed have a good awareness of predators, and that their flying skills were improving daily.

Both of the dead birds were taken to post mortem by Vic Simpson, who confirmed the Peregrine strike. Other tests taken at the time of PM showed

the birds to be in generally healthy condition. We were also taking samples of the birds' droppings where possible, and these were monitored for potential parasites. None were found.

As the days drew shorter and the weather worsened, we noticed a marked change in the birds' behaviour. One thing that was immediately apparent was the change in their flying. The birds were now positively enjoying the space, and could perform the most remarkable aerial feats, often in gale-force conditions.

The feeding behaviour also changed, with the birds moving inland during the day, rather than feeding on the coast as in summer. The more sedentary birds developed an interesting routine involving the nearby herd of organically fed cattle. It was noted that the birds could always be found in fields that had previously been grazed by the cows - after a two to three day time-delay. The reason for this were presumed to be that after two days the cow pats were dry enough to turn over, and that this time gap allowed the manure to be colonised by insects.



We noticed how the birds were adapting to weather conditions, for example feeding in the leeward side of any available Cornish hedges when windy. It was noticed that the birds were drinking dew in the early morning, wiping it from the grass as they probed for insects.



A single Chough in the winter sky

In November and December we began to get reports of a single bird around the Land's End area. This has now been confirmed as one of the young males from the Lizard group. We had thought that the Lizard group would spread as the younger birds began searching for mates.

In December, this single bird continues to be seen around Land's End. The two surviving pairs from our release are still being monitored - one pair still remaining fairly settled, and the other being more elusive. At this point it is hoped that as the days lengthen, both pairs of birds will move into settled habits and may even prepare to breed.

Ray Hales Jan 2004

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