

Choughs

Topic: Choughs

Choughs



Introduction:

The chough, pronounced 'chuff' like rough, is a glossy black bird with bright red bill and feet. Once common across the UK, it is now found only in small patches of coast in Wales, Cornwall and some of the Scottish islands. Its name is founded in the 'chee-ow' sound that the bird makes. The chough is part of the same family as crows and jackdaws and shares their high intelligence. They are renowned for their aerial acrobatics, soaring high above coastal cliffs, swooping and wheeling around each other. People often say that choughs look as if they are playing and really enjoying flying.

A good place to see choughs is the coast of the Llŷn peninsula. Choughs need a specific habitat in order to thrive. They feed on tiny invertebrates like ants and so need vegetation that is kept short enough for them to forage but long and varied enough for invertebrates to thrive. The grass is kept at its perfect height either by grazing animals or by the harsh wind and salt in coastal cliff areas. The species is vulnerable to changes in farming practices that make the habitat unsuitable for feeding.

Choughs have long been a fascination for people. Hundreds of years ago they, along with other members of the crow family, were kept as pets. One of the most famous legends to feature these fascinating birds is that of King Arthur, and it is said that he did not die in battle but instead his soul migrated into the body of a chough.

Coastal heathland:

There are a few different types of heathland in the UK. Choughs make their home in coastal heathland. These open landscapes comprise mainly of small, hardy shrubs such as heather and gorse, patch-worked with grazed farmland. The strong winds and very salty air of the coast mean that vegetation cannot grow particularly tall and trees can not take hold. They are home to a specialised set of plants and invertebrates that in turn feed larger birds and animals. Open lowland heathland is a rarer habitat than rainforest and west Gwynedd is one of the areas of the UK that still has a significant amount.

Further research keywords:

Pyrrhocorax pyrrhocorax, Cornish chough, heathland, corvid, Llŷn Peninsula, British Trust for Ornithology, grazing, bird ringing, conservation, red-billed chough

30 mins



Heathland hunt

Activity guide:

Equipment required:

- Printed species sheets (L_C_1)
- Reward tokens
- Sheet of facts

To play the game:

This game can be played outside with children running to stand behind the correct answer or in a classroom with children voting for the correct answers with slips of paper with their names on or putting their hands up. The instructions below are for the outdoor version.

1. Lay out the photos of the six species on the floor with enough space around them for the children to gather.
2. Read out the facts one by one. The children run to whichever species they think the fact is referring to.
3. The children behind the correct species are given a token.
4. Keep repeating until someone reaches six tokens.
5. The facts and species can then be discussed as a class.

Heathland hunt



Facts:

- We can reach speeds of 45mph - **Hare**
- We give birth to between 6 and 20 live young - **Adder**
- We have a wingspan of 20cm - **Stonechat**
- We nest in sea caves, old mine workings, abandoned buildings - **Chough**
- We need to use the sun to warm up - **Adder**
- It has sharp spikes to deter grazing animals - **Gorse**
- We pair for life - **Chough**
- We can frequently be seen sitting on the top of gorse bushes - **Stonechat**
- We are thought to have been introduced into the UK in Roman Times - **Hare**
- Can be used as a yellow dye - **Gorse**
- Is also called 'ling' - **Heather**
- We love to eat ants - **Chough**
- It used to be used to make brooms - **Heather**
- It smells of coconut - **Gorse**
- We have a sharp loud call that sounds like two stones being hit together
Stonechat
- It can live for over 40 years - **Heather**
- We do not dig burrows but shelter in 'forms', which are shallow depressions in the ground or grass - **Hare**
- We have red eyes - **Adder**

Photo by Vincent van Zalinge on Unsplash

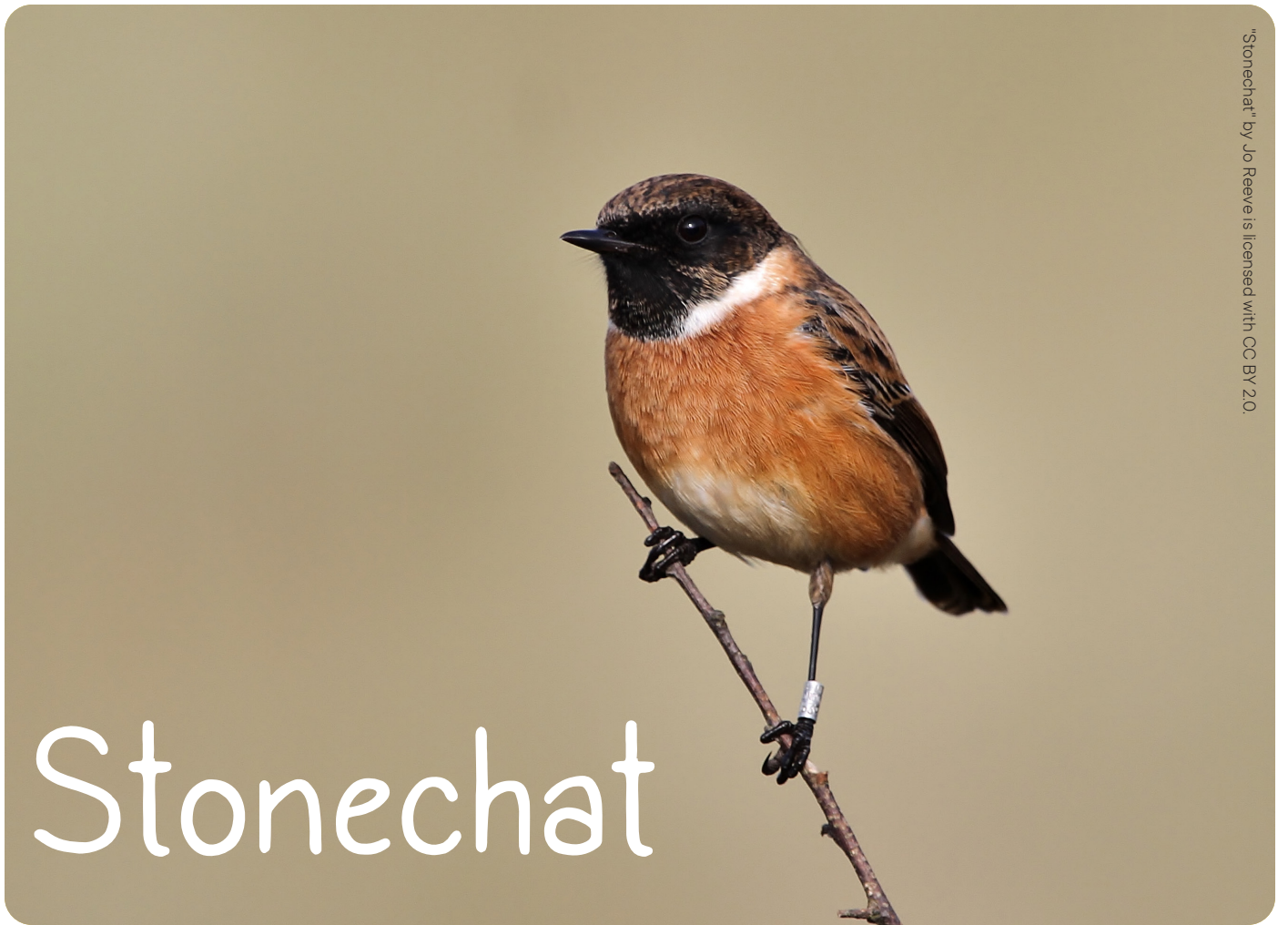


Hare

Chough by Jean-Jacques Boujot is licensed with CC BY-SA 2.0.



Chough



"Stonechat" by Jo Reeve is licensed with CC BY 2.0.

Stonechat



Photo by Svetlana Smitsyna on Unsplash

Heather



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Gorse



Adder

"Adder - Yateley Common" by naturalengland is licensed with CC BY-NC-ND 2.0

1 hr



Legends worksheet

Activity guide:

Equipment required:

- Print the 'Legends' worksheet for all pupils
- Pencils or pens

To complete the sheet:

1. Discuss the idea of legends and how they were used to explain a lot of the natural world before science.
2. Each pupil uses their worksheet to map out the main points of their legend on the story board and draws pictures to accompany them.

Legends



Choughs are part of many legends. Their playful acrobatics and cleverness have inspired many stories. Write your own legend about chough, and fill in the boxes below with drawings and words that tell your story. Remember to plan ahead because you only have six boxes to tell your whole story.

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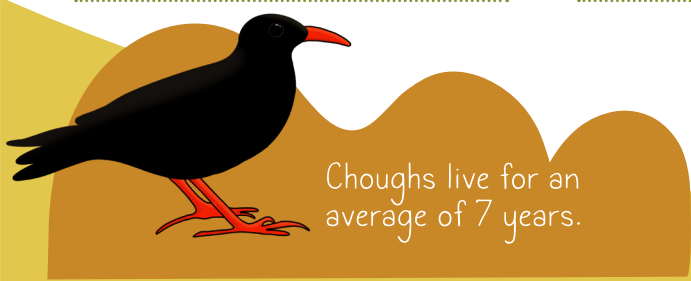
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Choughs live for an average of 7 years.