

> A certain ability to adapt

The main predators of choughs are **Northern goshawks, peregrine falcons and Eurasian eagle owls.**

There is high **mortality** during **nesting**, at the egg or chick stage, with only 1 or 2 chicks fledging out of a clutch of 3 to 5 eggs.

Their recent **adaptation to human activities** does not seem to have a direct impact on their numbers. Choughs are opportunistic and will take advantage of a free meal. They have even been seen accompanying mountaineers at the summit of Mont Blanc. Please remember, though, we do not recommend feeding these wild birds, particularly with bread, since many of them cannot digest wheat gluten.

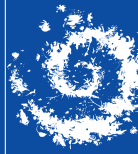
They are having to adapt to global warming and changes in farming practices by seeking out ever higher and cooler altitudes, which means fewer food resources.

In addition to this, the forecast of climate scenarios with warm winters and springs could affect population dynamics, particularly for the females. Rapidly melting snow means drier grasslands, which in turn means lower insect productivity at the crucial time for females when they are in the throes of reproduction.



Expert opinion

- 1/ **FALSE.** Very fragile in its first year. Only 1 or 2 chicks fledge out of a clutch of 3 to 5 eggs. After this stage, the chances of survival are very high (87 %).
- 2/ **TRUE.** The domination of the males means that the females have less access to food.
- 3/ **TRUE.** Couples pair for life and nest in the same place every year.
- 4/ **FALSE.** The first year, the young birds have brownish legs.



The Alpine chough



Family: Corvidae

Size: 38 cm (pigeon)

Lifetime: 11 years

Incubation: 20 days

Egg laying: 3 to 5 eggs

Altitude: from 2000 m up to 3500 m

Distinctive features

- ✓ Expert at aerobatics
- ✓ Lives harmoniously in a colony of several hundred birds
- ✓ The most melodious of the crow family

At the start

> A bird that delights the mountains

A high altitude species found from Morocco to Europe and as far south as the Himalayas.

In France, they are present in the Alps, the Pyrenees and Corsica. "Choughs in constant movement bring an incomparable element of life to the harsh, deserted high-altitude landscapes." (Géroutet)



Habitat

> It has a taste for cliffs and high altitudes

A cavity nester, choughs need rocky cliffs with crevices where they can build their nests and shelter for the night. Exceptionally, this might be an old disused building, like the Fort de Ronce at Mont-Cenis, for example. Their average nesting altitude in the Alps is 2000 m.

They search for food between the upper limit of the forest and the lower limit of the snow in alpine grasslands, moorlands and freshly mown meadows. They are not adapted to life in the forest. It is in winter that they come closest to human activities, gleaning food in villages, ski resorts and refuges.



Daily life

> A communal life

During the nesting season, choughs live in colonies of around twenty couples which form larger, more erratic groups of up to 500 birds when the young fledge.

The group frequents the meadows in the valley bottom, 1000 to 2000 m lower than their resting area, pecking about here and there in small colonies. Early in the afternoon, they instinctively come together and the whole group spirals up like a swarm, cawing loudly. They then go back to spend the night in dormitories on the rock faces. This is known as daily transhumance.

> Not to be confused with its cousins

Often incorrectly called a "jackdaw" (another species from the crow family that rarely lives above 1000m), the Alpine chough with its yellow beak (*Pyrrhocorax graculus*) is very similar to the red-billed chough (*Pyrrhocorax pyrrhocorax*) whose home it shares.



True or false? *Answers: on the last page*

- 1/ It is a fragile species and survival is difficult.
- 2/ Choughs are macho.
- 3/ They are faithful to their partner and their breeding site.
- 4/ They have red legs from birth.