

### 3.3 Chough Option

**Definition:** the chough option is available to farmers who farm within a targeted area along the North Antrim coastline of the Antrim Coast, Glens and Rathlin Environmentally Sensitive Area (ESA) on which the chough feed. An individual plan is drawn up for each field entered into the option. The most suitable option will be decided at the outset of the agreement and will be noted on the farm management map.

**Aims:** to maintain and enhance grassland and cliff slope habitat for feeding chough and thereby increase the numbers of nesting chough within the targeted chough area.

**Biodiversity objectives:** this option contributes to the NI Biodiversity Action Plan targets for the Chough and the Irish hare.

#### Management requirements

**Grassland entered into chough option** - see individual field management plans for management required.

- Grassland fields must be grazed to create a sward height of less than 5cm. This should be achieved through mixed grazing, grazing some fields all year through, topping of grass tussocks and by staggering silage cutting dates.
- Spreading scrub/trees, particularly gorse (whin), must be controlled.
- Rushes must be controlled by cutting from 15<sup>th</sup> July to 15<sup>th</sup> March only.
- Application of pesticides, herbicides, sheep dip or other material is not permitted.
- No poaching.

**Other farm habitats** - within the chough option area, fields identified as habitat (for example, species rich grassland) or arable options (for example winter stubble) will be classified as that habitat. Applicants will be paid for these options and receive the relevant management plans for these.

## **Further advice**

Noxious weeds such as thistles and ragwort may be controlled with herbicides, applied using a weed wiper or spot sprayer.

Management plans are provided for participants in the **Environmentally Sensitive Areas and Countryside Management Schemes**

