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APRIL 2017 CRANE CENSUS

Our last annual wet-season crane census at Etosha National Park took place from 3-8 April 2017, with a final count of 13 adults/subadults. This is slightly lower than the previous year's count of 16. However, this year eight chicks were counted, of which six have fledged – a result that is encouraging, compared to only two chicks last year. This is probably a reflection of the relatively wetter conditions during the preceding summer.

Hanjo Böhme kindly assisted with a supplementary count the week before the main census. Gabriel Shatumbu and Sethi Guim of the Ministry of Environment and Tourism (MET) were able to ring one of the chicks, surviving from a very late second clutch of two at Twee Palms (NEF; first recorded on 2 May 2017), on 14 June 2017; the other earlier chicks were unfortunately all at the fledging stage and could not be captured. This is the second year running that a second clutch has been recorded for Blue Cranes at Etosha, with two second clutches being recorded in 2016. For the first time, breeding was recorded in the north at Andoni waterhole, although the nest became flooded.

As we now know, our wet season counts are usually lower than those during the dry season, once the birds return to the Park (2016's maximum during the dry season remained at 23 birds, the same as for 2015). For this reason, we again did not carry out a dedicated summer aerial survey but continued to count opportunistically throughout the year. (PTO)

Exciting news is that a record number of 32 cranes was counted at Andoni on 25/9/17 by Thomas Kornelius and reported by Gabriel Shatumbu, both of the MET. A further good count of 26 at Andoni was obtained by Toni Hart on 2/10/17. We are very keen to see if these numbers will be sustained.



Family group of Blue Cranes with chick at Charitsaub waterhole in the Etosha NP (photo Ann Scott)



First breeding attempt recorded at Andoni waterhole in the north of Etosha (photo Angus Middleton)



(L to R) Mike Scott, Sethi Guim and Gabriel Shatumbu during the 2017 summer crane census at Etosha National Park (photo Ann Scott)

MORE CRANE NEWS AND VIEWS



Visit by the International Crane Foundation

We were pleased to catch up (briefly) with our good crane friend Dr Rich Beilfuss (left), the President and CEO of the International Crane Foundation (www.savingcranes.org) in Swakopmund on 27 October 2017. Rich was part of the founder group that put together the Namibia Crane Action Plan, on which the activities of the Namibia Crane Working Group are based, at a workshop at Etosha in May 2004 (see our first newsletter in June 2004 and also No. 47). We are grateful to the ICF for providing long-standing encouragement and support to our crane conservation activities in Namibia.

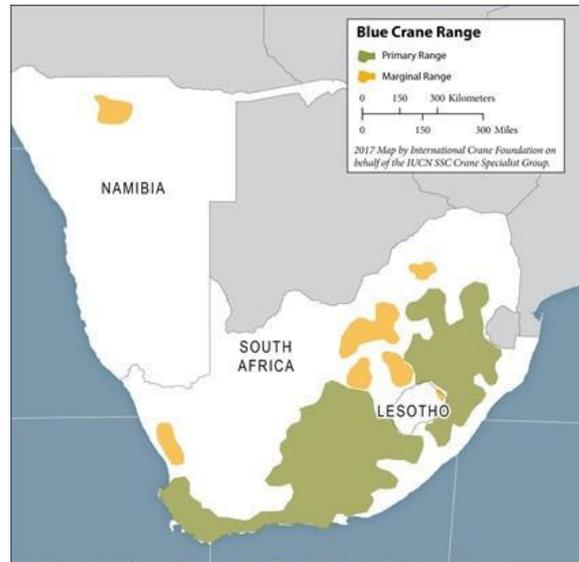
New range maps for the world's 15 crane species



IUCN Species Survival Commission
Crane Specialist Group (email mirande@savingcranes.org)

The IUCN SSC Crane Specialist Group is pleased to announce that the range maps for the 15 species of crane produced on behalf of the Crane Specialist Group have been completed. An announcement has been placed on the Crane Specialist Group's webpage on the International Crane Foundation website (<https://www.savingcranes.org/announcing-new-range-maps-for-all-15-crane-species/>).

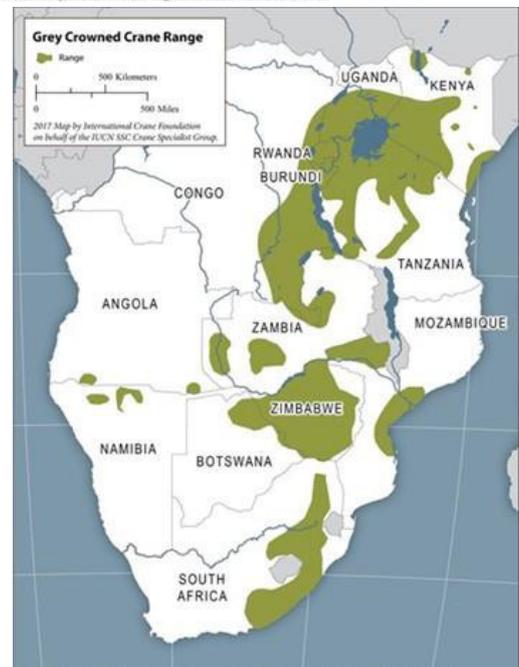
These maps will be an integral part of the updated global *Crane Conservation Strategy* (CCS) which the Group aims to publish in 2018. It is making significant progress on completing this landmark publication. In the meantime, these maps have great value and are available as low resolution images (see examples on right) on the ICF website (<https://www.savingcranes.org/where-do-cranes-live/>).



Harris J, Miranda C, editors. In Preparation. Crane Conservation Strategy. International Crane Foundation, Baraboo, Wisconsin.



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KAZA (Kavango-Zambezi) Bird Counts

7/2/17 Jason Gilbertson (jgilbertson@ppf.org.za)

I am the new KAZA (Kavango-Zambezi) Monitoring & Evaluation Technical Officer and we are busy developing a database to help promote wildlife conservation in the KAZA region. We are using different indicators and two of these indicators are the Wattled Crane and the Ground Hornbill, of my understanding you might be able to help us with. We are trying to collect information on sightings of these birds in the KAZA region (I am contacting you for the Namibian KAZA sightings) to create population counts per year.

If you have any data on the number of sightings please let me know or let me know who you think would, any information would be really appreciated. We don't have anyone working in the field but if we found and useful information regarding these birds we would be happy to share with you and we would acknowledge you on our website and the maps we produce.

Thank you for your time and help.

Jason Kane Gilbertson | KAZA Monitoring & Evaluation Technical Officer

KAZA | PEACE PARKS FOUNDATION

Tel: +27 (0)21 880 5100 | Direct Tel: +27 (0)21 880 5129 |

Fax: +27 866800345

Blue Cranes in Botswana?

24/6/16 Rob Simmons (Rob.Simmons@uct.ac.za)

I just read a review of the Birds of Botswana (by Pete Hancock) in which it states that Blue Cranes are known to have bred on the Makgdikgadi Pans up to 2000. Did you know that and have you been in touch with Pete about Namibia's Blue Cranes being there?

Ed: Yes, see below (and also Newsletter No. 47):

25/10/10 Pete Hancock (birdlifemaun@gmail.com)

I've always been on the lookout for Blue Cranes in Botswana, although they are never seen these days. None were seen during the waterbird counts, and there are none at Lake Ngami nor at Lake Xau which is currently filling.

The place where they used to occur (and apparently there were even chicks recorded) was from the eastern Makgadikgadi, just east of the eastern boundary of the national park. To the best of my knowledge, they've not been seen there for quite a while. They also have been recorded from the Good Hope area in southern Botswana in the past, near the border with South Africa, but I've not heard of any recent reports.

My conclusion is that your missing birds are not in Botswana. When large numbers of Wattled Cranes from Botswana went 'missing' some years ago, we wishfully thought that they were in Angola (it was the most likely place and one for which we had no information) – well, this was really wishful thinking, because speaking to John Mendelsohn and Mike Chase and others who have done

quite a bit of work in Angola, there are definitely very few Wattled Cranes there. So we are forced to conclude that the birds are dead, and I'm afraid the same is probably true of your Blue Cranes, regrettably.

Let me know if your cranes do turn up – I'm always happy to be proved wrong in cases like these.

Blue Crane report from Zambia

30/3/17 Kerry Morrison, International Crane Foundation / Endangered Wildlife Trust Partnership (kerrynm@ewt.org.za)

A quick note that I am currently in Zambia and learnt recently that someone spotted 3 Blue Cranes in Sioma Ngwezi on the south-western side of Zambia. They were there around 2 years ago.... They are doing aerial surveys in the next 2 months over the area, and I have asked them to keep an eye open for Blue Cranes....

Blue Cranes feeding on elephant dung

4/5/16 Carl Mitchell, Wildlife Biologist (Retired); Wayan ID 83285 USA (mitch@silverstar.com)

Thank you for sending the latest Namibian Crane News. Great photos of blue cranes. Always an interesting read. Regarding your observation of a blue crane feeding on elephant dung. We never collected any quantitative data on the phenomenon, but Greater Sandhill Cranes (*Grus canadensis tabida*) summering at Grays Lake National Wildlife refuge, Idaho, USA, often fed on or near cattle dung. Causal observations by a number of people indicated that such dung either attracts or shelters a variety of invertebrates, including beetles, various larvae, and earthworms. If you flip over the dung, you'll see lots of such invertebrates. We suspect that this cattle dung is an attractive source for cranes to feed on these particular items.

This is in a wet meadow system, so I imagine in an arid system like Etosha, it might be even more attractive for some invertebrates. Indeed, under some conditions these "hotspots" (if such they be) might be critically important in



Adult NBZ picking up prey items from fresh elephant dung in the Chudop area on 8 April 2016: is this an adaptation for successful feeding during dry times? (see newsletter No. 55; photo Ann Scott)

blue crane foraging. I've also seen Ground Hornbills foraging in fresh elephant dung in Kruger. Just a thought.

Ed: Thank you for these interesting inputs. Yes, as mentioned in newsletter No. 55, elephant dung and its associated fauna must be a wonderful source of food for cranes and other creatures. We have had reports of the cranes feeding amongst elephant dung at Etosha, and observed it ourselves in April 2016 during a dry spell (see photo on p5 and newsletter No. 55, p3 – information that we repeat, for the sake of interest). Mostly, when the birds are present during the rainy season, food is more plentiful from a variety of sources (invertebrates on plants or in the ground; grass seeds). We were particularly struck by the fact that the above bird was feeding on fresh elephant dung at this time, which could be an indicator of the relative dryness of the current rainy season. During the dry season the cranes move off to the communal grazing areas to the north of Etosha, where the cattle dung may provide a similar source of food.

Crane chicks and predation

5/5/2017 Mick D'Alton, Overberg Crane Group, SA
(mandjaldalton@omail.co.za)

Thanks for the interesting newsletter that we received. The developments with and dynamics of your birds are fascinating.

Funnily enough after I had started reading about the chicks I had this thought as to how the chicks survive in this hostile area where I would not like to spend a few weeks walking around a waterhole on my own. You then raise the question later on with the picture of the lioness. Here with us (in the Overberg, Western Cape) we lose a few birds to predators and raptors and I have quite often found where adult birds have been caught while sitting on a nest, probably by caracal. I have noted that this very often coincides with bad weather, rain and wind and I suppose that is because the conditions affect the birds' senses and render them more vulnerable to surprise. Although not so easy to record, raptors must also take their toll. We found a Martial Eagle on a freshly caught juvenile Denham Bustard the other day and the Jackal Buzzards may also target the small chicks. The adults though are formidable protectors when chicks are threatened and we had a bird really threaten the vehicle recently.

CRANE SIGHTINGS THROUGHOUT THE 2016-2017 BREEDING SEASON AND START OF THE 2017-2018 SEASON

The second section of this newsletter (below) consists of detailed records of sightings and photographs of cranes made over the past months.

Thank you one and all for your interest and enthusiasm in sharing this information, which makes an invaluable contribution towards piecing together a picture of the cranes' movements and activities. Unfortunately, space does not permit the use of all the photographs you have sent us, but they are much appreciated. (*Note that the specific queries raised by some of the observers have already been answered by email.)

A summary of recently observed ringed cranes is provided below, for easy reference to the sightings mentioned in this newsletter:

Recently observed ringed cranes		
Ring	Summer	Nest site occupied/breeding
NHD	2006	Halali Seepage
NHF	2006	Charitsaub
NHH	2007	Charitsaub
NBN	2008	Halali Seepage
NBW	2008	
NBZ	2008	Chudop
NHM	2009	Salvadora
NCJ	2014	Nebrownii
NCK	2014	(Nebrownii)
NCN	2016	
NEF	2017	