



July 2005

## National Blue crane census proposed

The Namibia Crane Working Group is investigating a national Blue Crane census, to obtain an update on numbers. This proposal corresponds with the recommended actions from the Red Data Book account for Blue Cranes (see Namibia Crane News No. 6). The last count in December 1994 provided a total estimate of 49 adults and 11 yearlings. It will be interesting to see whether the population is still declining after the recent good rains. Ideally the census would include an aerial survey of Etosha and the grassland areas to the north, together with ground surveys. We are still deciding on the best time of year for the census, bearing in mind that we would like to pick up as many juveniles as possible. Any incidental observations of the other two crane species would also be noted, but a full census of the latter species would probably be more feasible after the rainy season, when the non-resident Wattled Cranes visit the Nyae Nyae pans. You are welcome to contact us with any comments and suggestions!

## Caprivi bird conservation/tourism grows! Sandra Slater-Jones (Conservation International - Chobe Project: Field Facilitator)

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- At the Eastern Caprivi Tourism Work Group meeting held at Ichingo Lodge on 7 July 2005, four lodges based in the Kasika and Impalila Conservancies expressed interest in supporting the conservancies with establishing their own bird club e.g. in the form of compiling bird lists and providing information and advice for developing the club. Anyone interested in supporting the bird club financially and/or who would like a copy of the proposal is invited to contact Alfred Sibongoat, email [kalaharisands2000@yahoo.com](mailto:kalaharisands2000@yahoo.com).
- Kasika and Impalila Conservancies on the Chobe Floodplain, Caprivi, have opened their tourist activities (cultural, makoro, bicycle, walking) including birding trails! To book an activity, please phone the conservancy reservation and transfer partner, Janala Tours in Kasane: +267 625-1775. Guides are fully trained with certificates from BirdLife SA, Wilderness Safaris and Emergency Management/First Aid. Although there are not many endemics in the Caprivi strip due to its close proximity to other countries, the area has many "specials". The newly trained guides are geared to



Enthusiastic Kasika and Impalila guides out birding  
(Photo: Sandra Slater-Jones)

help bird enthusiasts find Rosy-throated Longclaw, Black Coucal, Luapula Cisticola, Slaty egret, African Skimmer, Swamp Boubou, Western Banded Snake Eagle and other exciting species like African Finfoot Lesser Jacana, Pygmy Geese and Pel's Fishing Owl.

- The *Open Africa Initiative* has expressed interest in incorporating Kasika and Impalila Conservancy tourism activities into the "Open Africa Zambia Route" currently being investigated. They will meet with the conservancies in August to discuss opportunities. More of this later! (Also see newsletter No. 9 for details of Open Africa's involvement in Blue Crane routes in the Western Cape, SA.)

## First AWAC newsletter

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The vision of AWAC (the African Wattled Crane Programme) is "Healthy wetlands for the coexistence of cranes and people in Africa". The first AWAC newsletter includes regional report backs from participant countries including Botswana, DR Congo, Ethiopia, Malawi, Mozambique, Namibia (an outline of our crane action plan and a report on progress over the last year), South Africa, Tanzania, Zambia and Zimbabwe.

At the November 2004 AWAC meeting in SA, five regional collaborative projects were discussed around which the future of AWAC could be shaped, namely:

- Reducing the captive trade of Wattled Cranes;



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- Monitoring regional Wattled Crane movements using satellite tracking;
- Controlling the invasive weed *Mimosa pigra* in important crane areas such as the Kafue Flats (Zambia) and Boyo Wetlands (Ethiopia);
- Assessing the impact of fire on Wattled Cranes;
- Evaluating the benefits and costs of cattle grazing vs indigenous wildlife grazing on Wattled Crane feeding grounds.

AWAC colleagues are invited to work together to develop concepts and proposals for collaborative action! Congratulations to Rich and Kerryn on this initiative! Please contact either of them if you would like to receive this and/or future issues of the newsletter.

### What are Blue Cranes eating?

**Vicki Hudson (Field worker - Overberg Crane Group, Western Cape)** Email vickih@global.co.za

When out walking with confiscated Blue Crane chicks (as part of their rehabilitation process) I have seen that they eat the small "dung beetles" that are under, in and around the dung of cattle. The size of the beetles varies but they are often much like "koffiepit" beetles. The chicks go mad about the beetles and when they are small and not yet able to turn dung pats over they wait avidly for me to do it so they can get at these hard-shelled beetles. Could this be what the Blue Cranes at Etosha are finding amongst the elephant dung at Twee Palms (see newsletter No. 10)?

### CRANE FOCUS

**Second crane awareness survey by the Kavango Crane Working Group Mathias Mpepo and Dorothy Wamunyima ("Every River has its People" Project)**

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The second crane awareness survey in Kavango was conducted on 22-25 June 2005 (see newsletter No. 7 for report on first survey). Four communities, namely Rupara, Kehemu, Shamvure and N#Goabaca, were visited. Individuals including the Headmen/Indunas were interviewed to learn from their past experience.

Three crane species once occurred in the early 1970s in areas that we visited. An enthusiastic resident of Shamvura still remembers the "noisy" cranes in the floodplains. He last saw cranes three years ago in the

area. A resident at Rupara last saw cranes in 1972. Wattled Cranes are currently seen at areas like Mahango Game Reserve, Nova de Mark Ranger Station, Pica Pao and Buffalo. Mr Victor Katanga, an area ranger of Buffalo's Cove, spotted two adult Wattled Cranes on the ground as recently as on 10 June 2005.

The people said that cranes have disappeared because of war, low rainfall, illegal hunting and wild fire, human interference, uncontrolled animal husbandry and destruction to the wetland habitats. One interviewee said Blue Cranes occasionally prefer dry habitat compared to Crowned and Wattled cranes.

Interested members of local artists said that very few people in the region do promote crane themes as they do not know about them, so "Thanks for the information", he remarked. The crane awareness should target schools, Youth against Crime groups, local Conservancies and out of school youth artists. Elder people would love to see cranes back in the system again. A small group of interested people could be organized to visit crane sites. The Group also suggested displaying crane information during the Kavango Trade Fair this year, normally held in September.

The group consisting of learners from various schools, out of school youth groups and woodcarvers is ready to promote crane themes in culture through art and wood carving to revive the memories about cranes. The group can easily form school clubs and the Crane Working Group will help to establish these clubs. This needs coordination at regional level. *The "Every River has its People" project is supported by NNF and SIDA.*



The Critically Endangered African Wattled Crane  
(Photo: International Crane Foundation)