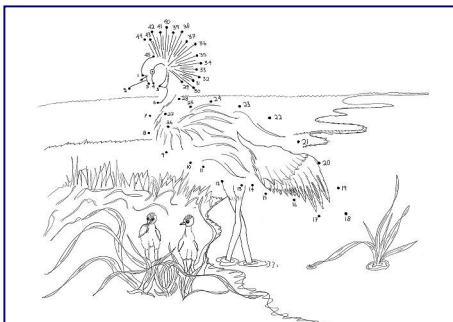




October 2005



Crane activity book

The attractive art work for our new crane activity book for Namibia has been completed by Kasha Ostbloom. Above is a sample page! The main text will be in English. Certain key sections are also being translated into Silozi, Rukwangali, Oshiwambo, Afrikaans and Ju/'hoan. We hope to go to the printer by the end of the month, and to make this useful 20-page resource available to teachers in our crane areas early next year.

July 2005 Wetland Bird Counts

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Namibia's loyal wetland bird counters once again delivered the goods in July/August in the twice-yearly wetland bird counts. In total, 141 704 birds of 112 species were counted at 21 localities. Wilferd Versfeld counted 18 Blue Cranes at Oponono, and four Crowned Cranes at Oponono and two at Oshituntu. Mark Paxton counted ten Wattled Cranes at Mahango in Kavango.

Crane custodian boards - Northern Cape

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"Crane Custodian" boards have been presented to forty conservation-minded farmers who are contributing to Blue Crane conservation in the Northern Cape's Eastern Karoo. Most of these boards have been put up on farm gates and fences, some on very prominent routes. This very worthwhile initiative is supported by Vodacom and the SA Crane Working Group.



CRANE FOCUS

In which habitats do Blue Cranes survive best?

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Bradley Gibbons submitted this interesting observation (based on Irish, J. 1994. Biomes of Namibia. Navors. nas. Mus., Bloemfotein, p 568). The Etosha Pan, having a savanna climate, is characterised by vegetation typically of the Nama-Karoo and Grassland biomes. This is caused entirely by the edaphic (soil) factors in the areas - such as the calcrete hardpan for the Karoo vegetation and shallow soils or saline soils in the Grassland (although no true Grassland biome is found in Namibia). With the largest population - within an unchanged/natural environment - of Blue Cranes of South Africa being in the Nama-Karoo biome, this could suggest that the habitat that Blue Cranes can survive best in is the Nama-Karoo?

Wilferd Versveld replies: I cannot comment on the Nama/Karoo habitats as I do not know them; but most of the Blue Crane sightings in Etosha NP appear to be in sweet grassveld on lime, and in Andoniveld (described by Le Roux *et.al.* 1988 as shallow soils within a meter above the level of the pan, quite saline and more or less alkaline, with a pH of about 8.5). The Andoni grassveld is a small area on the plain around the Andoni waterhole, in the north-east of the park.

In the first reference (Irish 1994 p 55) it also states that smaller parts of the Nama-Karoo biome extend into the interior margin of the central Namib Desert in Namibia. So why do we not have cranes down south? Maybe this needs some investigating.

Ed: Possibly it's the combination of those two habitat types with small pans/wetlands, that the cranes appear to need for roosting, especially when bringing up small chicks with predators around?

SACWG IS 10 YEARS OLD!
Congratulations to the South African Crane Working Group, which celebrates 10 impressive years of crane conservation this year!