



### CRANE FOCUS: WHERE HAVE ALL THE BLUE CRANES GONE? Second crane survey supplies more questions than answers

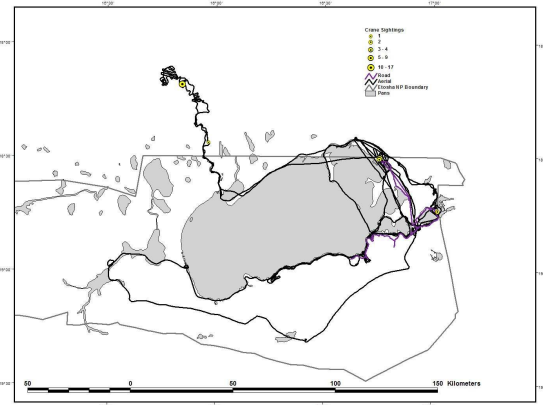
This article is based on a report kindly provided by **Holger Kolberg** (DSSS, Ministry of Environment & Tourism; Email: holgerk@mweb.com.na)

It was time to follow up on the crane survey done at Etosha National Park in April 2006, when we obtained a good count of a minimum of 60 adults + 6 juveniles (see Namibia Crane News No. 18). Our faithful team of crane counters assembled itself with anticipation at Namutoni on 21 August 2006: our pilot Dr Nad Brain and Basilia Shivute from Wilderness Safaris Namibia, Peter Cunningham and Peter (jnr) from the Polytechnic of Namibia, Holger and Claire Kolberg of the Ministry of Environment & Tourism and Mike and Ann Scott of the Namibia Crane Working Group. Immanuel Kapofi (MET) did not take part this time as he had the important business of getting married to take care of – congratulations and good wishes, Immanuel!

Our survey took place from 22-24 August 2006, in order to obtain dry season distributional data for the small population of Blue Cranes within the Park and in the area just to the north of it. At this stage of the year we were expecting the cranes to be concentrated at waterholes along the pan edge, and therefore easier to count than in the wet season with its long grass. We were thus hoping to get similar (or even higher) numbers during this survey. We planned to do an intensive search both by air and vehicle of all the areas where Blue Cranes were expected to occur, based on past records and observations.



Etosha Pan in the dry season – so different from the April survey, when all was wet and muddy!



Map showing the area covered by air (black line) and the area covered by vehicle (purple line) and Blue Crane sightings (yellow circles). (Map by Holger Kolberg, MET).

During the three-day survey we covered 2 000 km by air and more than 500 km by road but at the end of it our total tally of birds seen was 29 (including at least two juveniles) - less than half the number seen in April. Most of the birds were outside the Park, to the north in the Ekuma area. This decrease in numbers is certainly not due to a lack of effort. We actually managed cover a larger area by vehicle than in April and also had a more intense search by air. This then begs the question: where are the remaining birds, and, are the birds we saw the same ones that were seen in April?

However, one exciting observation was the group of four cranes spotted at Andoni that turned out to be the adults with the chicks that were ringed by Holger and Wilferd & Team near Doringdraai in April. It was gratifying to know that they had "made it" but it also illustrates that the birds do move around quite a bit. We also spotted two Crowned and eight Wattled Cranes in the Lake Oponono area.



A pair with two juveniles ringed during the April 2006 survey was spotted at Andoni waterhole.



### Next steps:

- An absolute priority now will be to fit a couple of birds with satellite and radio tracking devices to determine where they go.
- As many birds as possible must be marked with colour rings so that individual birds can be identified in the field to make sure that we are seeing the same birds.
- Ring resightings will be requested by "Wanted – crane sightings" posters for visitors to the Park.
- Planning for students to assist with the research.
- Planning for the next survey – April 2007.

We thank Chris Brown and Rob Simmons for their ongoing advice and support, and Wilferd Versfeld for his assistance. We are grateful for funding supplied for this survey by *The Overberg Explorer*, through the NNF Sundries Trust, and also to Wilderness Safaris Namibia and the Polytechnic of Namibia for their support.

### EIGHT WATTLED CRANES COUNTED AT MAHANGO GAME PARK DURING JULY 2006 BIRD COUNTS

When not duelling with lethal black mambas, **Mark Paxton** (Email [shamvura@iway.na](mailto:shamvura@iway.na)) of Shamvura Lodge, Rundu finds time to do regular bird counts at Mahango Game Park. Thanks, Mark for this entertaining extract from your report!

On our arrival at camp we found the rest of the crew bright-eyed and busy-tailed, rearing to go and full of enthusiasm. We first headed out towards the Botswana border and Nova-de-Marsh, leaving Tom at camp where he insisted he had life-threatening car problems to attend to. We found the conditions out there quite interesting with the river water level still being very high for this time of year and masses of residual water in the adjoining floodplains. There were however some significant sandbanks emerging which offered perching/hunting space for the usual scattering of Cormorants, Darters etc. with the vegetated banks yielding regular clusters of Egrets and Herons. Going quite slowly we put up a fair amount of Black Crakes and when we later went into the Kwetche side channel we saw our first Moorhens, and Pygmy Geese. The Nova-de-Marsh channel floodplains also kept us quite busy with White-faced Whistling Ducks, Comb Ducks and hundreds of feeding Spur-winged geese with extensive scatterings of Great White Egrets and some Open-billed Storks. We also saw our first group of four adult Wattled Cranes flying over the river. We finished

off the day at sundown on the extensive Kwetche side channel watching a little group of Pygmy Geese skimming low over the lily-covered back water with an elusive Moorhen occasionally popping out of the papyrus clotted bank. All the while Horsti had been quietly and contentedly going with the flow of our over observant and vocal crew with Christa making loudly sure that I had noted down every singer Squacco Heron on my tape recorder. He hardly said a word unless we saw Goliath Herons when his description of "Daardie @\*?+@ Groot Reier" left no doubt in my mind that his observational skills had not failed him. However on the expansive Kwetche side channel there were none of these elusive little avian delights and Horsti seemed to need some diplomatic cheering up and I asked him what he had seen and why so quiet? He replied that he needed to concentrate as he was counting the water lilies and seemed put out at the disturbance when we all rolled about laughing and choking on our sundowners. He then maintained he had lost count at seven million three hundred and forty five thousand two hundred and twenty three, and refused point blank to do a recount without a stiff Schnapps (or seven).

### CRANE NEWS FLASHES

- **Linda Millington** and her friend **Nan** recorded two Wattled Cranes at Mahango NP on 3/9/06.
- **Immanuel Kapofi** informed us on 8/9/06 that at Namutoni they received 10.3 mm of rain. It started raining on 7/9/06 at 18h00 and stopped around 23h00. In fact, there was thunder and lightning that caused a fire near Aroe. They went there that night at about 20h00 and tried to eliminate the fire. No casualty was encountered, and the area that was burnt is less than a 1/3 of the total block. No cranes were seen in or around the area next day.
- A short report on the April 2006 Blue Crane survey was published in *Africa Birds & Birding* (**Rob Simmons et al.**: August/ September 2006, p51): "ETOSHA BLUES – Cranes hang on in Namibia". This report will be posted on our website in due course ([www.nnf.org.na/CRANES/index.htm](http://www.nnf.org.na/CRANES/index.htm)).
- Congratulations to **Liz Komen** of NARREC on the production of a comprehensive booklet, "Poisons and pesticides – A guide to safe use". The incorrect use of poisons and pesticides poses a very real potential threat to both wildlife and people, and the availability of this information is timeous. Contact Liz at Email [liz@narrec.schoolnet.na](mailto:liz@narrec.schoolnet.na) for details.