



November 2006



Founder members of the Namibia Crane Working Group at Etosha, May 2004

THE NAMIBIA CRANE ACTION PLAN People and cranes sharing habitats in harmony in Namibia

The Namibia Crane Action Plan Project was initiated by the Namibia Nature Foundation (NNF) in May 2004 and is being implemented by the Namibia Crane Working Group. As many of our readers have come on board subsequently, it seems appropriate to review our progress with the plan, now in its third year.

Our original project objectives were:

- To *assess* the crane conservation situation in Namibia;
- To draft and implement a *strategic action plan* that promotes crane and wetland conservation in Namibia in terms of the sustainable use of natural resources; the development of income generating opportunities; training, awareness and environmental education; and trans-frontier co-operation; all with the emphasis on community involvement;
- To build collaboration in the form of a *crane working group* for crane and wetland management at local level, between communities, Ministry of Environment and Tourism regional staff and scientists.

THE NAMIBIA CRANE ACTION PLAN

1. Co-ordinate conservation effort and promote networking
2. Obtain information and data
3. Conserve crane habitats
4. Promote conservation awareness/education
5. Build capacity
6. Develop area-based crane management strategies

In 2005 we focused on the following actions:

- The ongoing *implementation of the crane action plan*;
- An *annual crane meeting* for representatives from Namibia's five crane areas and other interested parties, with report-backs on progress and strategic planning for the coming year;
- A *basic guide training course* for the above representatives from crane areas, with special emphasis on wetlands, cranes and other birds, in partnership with Wilderness Safaris Namibia; and
- The *development of crane educational materials* (including a crane resource book).

What have we achieved in 2006, and what are our plans for 2007?

Ongoing implementation of the crane action plan

Crane conservation activities are coordinated on an ongoing basis. There is a good working relationship and frequent communication both on a local level and internationally (including with the SA Crane Working Group and its participant organizations, and the International Crane Foundation/ Endangered Wildlife Trust Partnership), and our circle of supporters is widening continually.

Newsletters and the development of a website

Our activities are reported regularly in our newsletters, with regular contributions by project participants. An attractive website was established this year and is regularly updated with new information and pictures. Contributions are always welcome!

Small local workshops to implement the resource book and discuss local crane strategies

Workshops/discussions were organized in Kavango (Rundu and Shamvura Lodge), Caprivi (Kasika and Impalila Conservancies), Bushmanland (Tsumkwe) and Etosha (Park staff and North Central representatives) and our resource book has been successfully implemented. Local crane groups are now active in all the crane areas, and good progress is being made with the implementation of local crane strategies.

Development of further awareness materials

Our talented artist, Kasha Ostbloom has produced a beautiful design that can be used both for an awareness poster and a t-shirt. The MET has kindly printed some of these posters as a start, while we are looking for a sponsor to produce larger numbers of both posters and t-shirts in 2007.



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Aerial/ground survey of Wattled Cranes

A successful aerial/ground survey of Wattled Cranes was completed at Nyae Nyae pans, Bushmanland in May 2006. We are now investigating satellite telemetry for Wattled Cranes in this area in 2007, as part of an international programme in co-operation with the ICF/EWT Partnership, BirdLife Botswana and others.

Namibia's own Blue Crane Project



How can Blue Cranes survive in an arid and predator-rich environment such as Etosha?

Why was this project launched?

This year we launched an exciting research and conservation project on Namibia's Blue Cranes, in view of the *Critically Endangered* status of the species in this country and a growing concern for the survival of its isolated population - the only one outside South Africa, and whose numbers appear to be declining. Our partners are the MET, the Polytechnic of Namibia and NNF, with further support from *The Overberg Explorer* and Wilderness Safaris Namibia.

Blue Cranes are the world's most range-restricted crane species and occur mainly in SA (in highveld grasslands, the eastern grassy Karoo regions and the grain belt of the Western Cape). The curious and highly isolated breeding population of these cranes within Etosha NP and on the grasslands to the north poses a genetic and conservation puzzle. According to preliminary sampling, they may be genetically different from SA cranes, begging the question: how can they remain in Namibia with apparently very little intermixing with SA birds? The second question is, what is special about these grasslands and how do cranes survive in a predator-rich area such as Etosha? We are investigating the conservation and ecological factors that have shaped this population, and will compare these findings with what is known about other Blue Crane populations, as a basis for a species management plan in Namibia.

In particular, we are looking at these questions:

- What is the current size and age composition of the Namibian Blue Crane population?
- Which habitats do the Blue Cranes in Etosha use on a seasonal basis, and are there critical areas outside the Etosha NP?
- Do the Etosha birds possess specific behavioural adaptations to survive in a habitat that is (a) dry and hot; and (b) rich in predators?
- Is the Namibian population genetically separate from the main population in SA?
- What are the limiting factors/threats to the Namibian population, as a basis for a species management plan?
- How does the ecology of the Namibian Blue Cranes differ from other populations in SA?

Good progress to date

A strong and motivated team has completed two combined aerial/ground surveys this year. In April, after an exceptionally wet season, a minimum of 60 adults and seven juveniles were recorded, more than half in the Lake Oponono area, north of Etosha. This total compares well with the previous estimate of 60 birds (49 adults plus 11 juveniles) in 1994. During the April 2006 survey, two pairs of chicks were fitted with large green colour bands with an individual reference code by the MET, assisted by an enthusiastic group of local crane conservationists from North Central. In August 2006, a dry-season count produced only 29 cranes, again mostly north of Etosha. Two of the above chicks ringed on 26 April 2006 were resighted 50 km away, at Andoni waterhole, on 22 August 2006, and the family group is now observed regularly at this site.

What are our plans for 2007?

It is a priority to fit several cranes with satellite and radio tracking devices to determine where they go. Crane chicks will be marked with large, individually marked colour rings. Students will be found to assist with the research. Two surveys are planned, for April 2007 and August 2007. These actions are well timed to coincide with the centenary of Etosha NP, for which the Blue Crane is an appropriate flagship species!

Thank you!

We would like to thank our many friends – both in Namibia's crane areas and elsewhere - for the ongoing interest, encouragement and support over the years; and in particular the Namibia Nature Foundation for three years of funding through the Local Environment Fund, supported by the Swedish Embassy (SIDA).



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