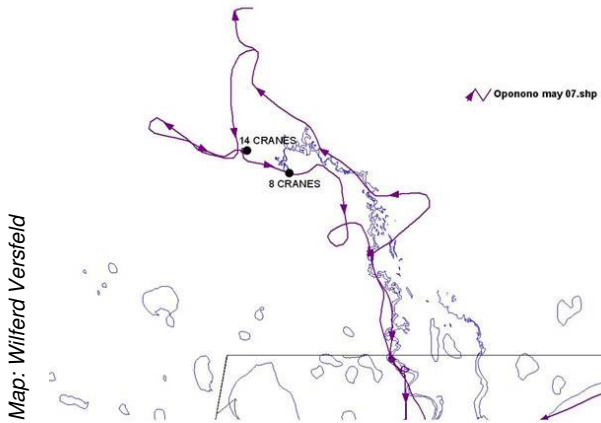




## The Etosha Blues – one of the world’s most mysterious crane populations?



Map: Wilferd Versfeld

On 24 May 2007, a group of 13 Blue Cranes was spotted by Wilferd Versfeld during a flight over the Lake Oponono system. On 29 May, Wilferd and Hannah Thomas found a group of 8 cranes, including the radio-tagged bird (see newsletter No. 29, May 2007). The radio-tagged bird disappeared on the 29th and the other birds stayed in that area. On 30 May they found 14 cranes near to where the group of 13 had been seen. The above map shows the flight path for 24 May (8 cranes) and the place where 14 cranes found on 30/5/07. This corresponds with the areas at Lake Oponono where larger concentrations of cranes were found during the aerial census in April 2007 (newsletter No. 29, May 2007).

At the end of June, two (unringed) cranes were seen within the Park, at Andoni, by Nigel Beriman. Apart from these, no other cranes have been reported within the Park since the end of May by MET staff, and none despite a thorough search by Peter Cunningham (30 June-1 July) and Mike & Ann Scott (16-20 July).

### Dr Rob Simmons & Hannah Thomas

FitzPatrick Institute, University of Cape Town  
Email Rob.Simmons@uct.ac.za

25/6/07: Rob reports that Hannah had a remarkably productive nine days in Oponono and she found some very interesting things. They are busy with a draft paper. She watched cranes with difficulty up at Oponono. Provisional findings include:

1. The cranes were quite faithful to a particular patch of veld;
2. They roosted there, not in water;



Shallow pan in which 2 Blue Cranes and 6 Wattled Cranes were observed in the Lake Oponono area in April 2007  
(Photo: Ann Scott)

3. They stripped grass seeds with their bills like a giraffe stripping leaves;
4. They had a large flight distance (500m); one of the reasons could be the use of firearms in the area (she heard gun shots);
5. The cranes showed interesting defensive postures when bombed by two Ospreys(!)

Probably most important realization is that there is a potential threat at Lake Oponono in terms of human presence there (and people shooting), and the cranes have become incredibly skittish. This is of concern, given that the cranes appear to favour these areas when things get tough in Etosha. This is where extension work becomes vital ... so there is a very valuable role for the extension and community work started in the last chick ringing session.

### Wilferd Versfeld

MET Etosha Ecological Institute  
Email versfeld@mweb.com.na

29/7/07: Have just got back from the Oponono count, very successful with all three species. Found them in the same place at the southern end of the water on the open plains where there are not many people or cattle - the same place we found them with Hannah. Found 22 Blue Cranes, 15 Crowned Cranes and the next morning there were 2 Wattled Cranes with the blues. When I went closer they moved off and I never saw them again. Was sure none were marked as the flight distance is still big but took some time with the telescope and am sure none have rings. [This is almost the same situation as when Hannah left in early June: 21 blues plus a wattled juvenile].

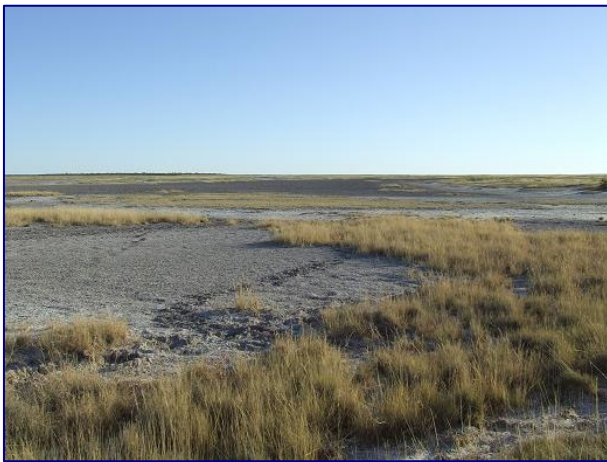




## Immanuel Kapofi

MET Area Warden, Namutoni East  
Email kapofii@mweb.com.na

7/6/07: I hope you are doing well. Here we are surviving the coldness. It is very cold. We have not yet spotted any cranes walking/flying or feeding yet near Namutoni. Fisher's Pan is about to dry completely (see attached photo taken one hour ago by myself) we have a little hope that cranes might return to the pan, due to the dryness of the pan so soon. Last year the pan was full at the same time. Twee Palms is having water but very reasonable.



Fischer's Pan was almost completely dry in June 2007  
(Photo: Immanuel Kapofi).



The roost site discovered near the causeway at Fischer's Pan in February 2007 (see inset & newsletter No. 26, February 2007) is now completely dry (Photo: Ann Scott).

## Charlie Paxton

Shamvura Camp, email shamvura@iway.na

1/7/07: We had 3 Wattled Cranes in the Shamvura Floodplains in June, they were seen twice.

## Kavango Birds Club

Steven Maseka brings us exciting news from Rundu!

"As a nature concerned person, especially towards bird conservation, and a chairperson of the Kavango Birds Club. I am jolly glad to give you a report of what the club is doing so far and the progress of the club. The club got four members, who are currently busy educating communities about use of poison on birds, deforestation, wildfire and collecting of bird eggs. The club is looking forward to you including it in some various surveys, projects and workshops, so that the club can also raise some skills and funds. The members of the club are all unemployed. I would like you to let us know what is happening with the Namibia Crane Working Group as the club is doing it also.

Looking forward to meet you sometime.

With our club motto: **KNOW YOUR BIRDS.**

**KNOW YOUR ENVIRONMENT.**

Yours in bird conservation

Steven Maseka

Chairperson Kavango Birds Club"

### OUR MOTTO:

Know your birds. Know your environment.

### WHO ARE WE?

Kavango Birds Club comprises a team of people with expertise and practical experience in birds who were trained by the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds, UK and Namibia Nature Foundation (see newsletter No. 29, May 2007).

### WHAT IS OUR AIM?

- + To ensure the long term conservation of birds in Namibia through creating awareness, preserving habitat, and conducting research and education.
- + To familiarize the Namibian public and foreign visitors with Namibia birds living around Okavango River and sewage ponds.
- + To raise skills, knowledge and understanding among our communities about the importance of birds.

### ACTIVITIES: WHAT WE HAVE DONE!

- + Organize and coordinate seasonal bird counts (autumn, winter, spring and summer).
- + Educate our local people about birds and their environment to protect them in such a way that it brings income.
- + Playing drama related to birds and their habitat.

**CONTACT the Chairperson (Steven Maseka)  
at Cell 081 203 9870**



The Namibia Crane Action Plan is supported by Namibia Nature Foundation

Namibia Crane Working Group co-ordinators: Ann & Mike Scott

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