



November 2004

Annual crane meeting at Tsumkwe & bird count at Nyae Nyae pans in March 2005



The idea of an annual crane meeting at Tsumkwe in March 2005, combined with a crane count at Nyae Nyae Pans, was proposed by Dr Chris Brown of the Namibia Nature Foundation and has been met with enthusiasm by the Ministry of Environment and Tourism staff at Tsumkwe, Dries Alberts and Jakob Kolbooi. This meeting will provide a platform for reporting back and evaluating progress on our projects, networking and exchanging ideas and doing strategic planning for the next year. We would also like to use the opportunity to involve the local school children in crane and wetland awareness activities.

The meeting will be combined with a course in basic guide training, which Lloyd Camp and Marleece Jordaan of Wilderness Safaris Namibia (WSN) have kindly agreed to organize. Two representatives from each of our five crane areas will be nominated for this course. A few qualified WSN guides will also participate and share experiences. The course will have a special focus on wetland, bird and crane conservation. We hope to incorporate the contributions of the local community in terms of culture, tracking, wild dogs, elephants and other aspects, and to involve Sakkie von Plato, who has been counting the wetland birds on the pans for many years. The cost of the course will be covered by US-AID funding. Catering and accommodation will be basic, in dormitories or camping in own tents at Klein Dobe in the Nyae Nyae Conservancy.

Please make a note of **the provisional dates: 28 February-5 March 2005** (or 18-23 April), depending on when the rains, and cranes, arrive! In January 2005 we hope to circulate a detailed programme for the meeting, and to call for expressions of interest in attending. At this stage we would like to make provision for at least two representatives from each crane area to participate in the crane meeting and bird count. Please think about identifying suitable candidates for

the guide training course. They should be persons with a keen interest in crane and wetland conservation. Ideally, preference should be given to persons in need of an opportunity to generate an income. Any comments and suggestions are welcome, especially in terms of possible sponsorships for our get-together!

AWAC workshop

Lotto Kuushomwa of North Central and Jakob Kolbooi of MET, Tsumkwe represented the NCWG at the African Wattled Crane Programme (AWAC) training workshop in Wakkerstroom, SA in November 2004. Thank you, Rich Beilfuss and Kerryn Morrison of AWAC for making this possible! We look forward to bringing you a report-back on this exciting workshop in due course.

Awareness and education

- Kavango Crane Awareness Project: Dorothy and Mathias Mpepo are busy with a series of visits to local communities in Kavango to promote crane awareness and should soon be supplying feedback.
- Shirley Bethune is promoting crane awareness among the Wetland Working Group of Namibia. Welcome on board, Shirley - we look forward to working together. Please contact Shirley (email bethune@africaonline.com.na) for details on their excellent "Wetlands of Namibia" booklet/poster.
- A big thank you to Maggi Barnard of *The Namibian* for the good coverage on our activities on 29 July and 28 October 2004.
- Holger Kolberg of DEA (MET) is looking for good quality slides of cranes in Namibia for his crane poster - please contact us if you know of anyone who can help.
- We also need crane pictures in large numbers for promoting awareness in schools - please keep an eye open for postcards or other sources of pictures of cranes and let us know where they are available.

Crane data and information

- Chris Brown recently completed an aerial survey on the floodplains of north-east Namibia, with sightings of several pairs of Wattled Cranes - more about this in our next newsletter.
- We also hope to include Rob Simmons' draft Red Data Book species account on Blue Cranes in our next newsletter, for comment.
- A reminder to test out our crane data sheets (let us know if you need copies forwarded to you). Any information on possible breeding records of cranes would be especially interesting - look out for groups of two adults and one or two younger birds.



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CRANE FOCUS

We are pleased to bring you the first of our in-depth articles on cranes, below. Thank you Lotto Kuushomwa and your team for this initiative!

North Central Crane Survey

by Lotto Kuushomwa (Team leader), Gabriel Fillipus and Erastus Sakaria (representing Titus Shivolo)



Lotto
(right)
&
Gabriel
(left)



On the 21st - 22nd August we visited the Etaka Canal to Kunene River, we followed the canal and we asked people here and there. One of the key people we asked was Mr Malakia, a traditional councillor in the area. He told us that cranes used to be widely seen in the area, however after independence cranes became less due to high human population growth and disturbed environment. Mr Malakia stated that different rain patterns also contributed to the decrease or extinction of cranes.

From Onesi we drove following the Etaka canal and we met with Mr Kelimwe at Okahao area. He also gave us a very interesting history on cranes. Even though he is very old he can still remember the area very well where he used to see crane birds. He is a retired school principal and now a cattle farmer. He said that, one of the factors is the rapid population increase which happens to expand agricultural and cattle breeding schemes in the densely populated area. Wetland habitats such as Otamanzi water body, are being totally degraded and are no longer an environment for crane breeding and movement habitat. As a result cranes are no longer known by the young generation in this area, where they were once common. He said there is now a very small if any population across the area. He finally concludes that cranes have been faced with a very unpopular welcome from human development activities, disturbances, loss of wetland and breeding ground as well as killing. Mr Kelimwe appreciated the good efforts of trying to help to revive the life and bird conservation and to keep the environment in balance. He said he will take part through his support to this initiative.

From Okahao we travelled following the canal and visited Ms Aina Nkandi at Uuvudhiya, a place commonly known to be habitat of cranes but today very few are observed in the area and it is known as "Omayamakolwa". Uuvudhiya is about ± 30 km N/W Oponono. She told us that cranes nowadays are very rarely seen in the area due to disturbance of the environment and increase of human demand for utilization of all resources on a non-sustainable basis.

From Uuvudhiya we followed the river towards Engombe water pan where we spoke to one cattle herder who told us that nowadays cranes are too rare. They used to be in the area back 25 years ago. He emphasized the problems/ threats, more or less the very ones echoed by Mr Kelimwe. The following are felt to be the factors that brought the situation of the unavailability of cranes: high human population pressure; intensive and agricultural competition; development schemes; trampling by too many animals; fires; and land degradation.

From Engombe we travelled to Oponono following the river, the lake was just a stone's throw from Gabriel Fillipus. We spoke to Mr Mbenzinkwaya, a local headman and the first settler at Oponono ±25 years ago. He told us that during the seventies, Oponono and other lakes in the vicinity were habitat for Grey Crowned Cranes. He indicated that cranes or Omayamakolwa/ Omagogani, as better known in the local name, are still seen in the lake and grazing areas.

From Oponono we drove around and met Mr Martin Amupolo, a farmer and a school principal in the nearby area who also is one of the local historians. He likes telling stories about environment and was fond to tell us crane stories, unfortunately in Oshiwambo (but we hope to bring you a translation).

The crane story is:

"Gogani Iyanankele Iyandema ndekutsakaneka nde kutsokati yina ta umana ngaye te tshoodha kiikango tatu toola omeenya komadhiya tatu tsomitse mevi".

He said cranes used to be seen in wetland habitat such as Tsaadhiya, Oponono, Uulili, Ombwana and Ontunda, 10 km west of Oshakati. He said they usually flew from southerly direction into the mainland, when flying at the same time they are crying. Elderly people interpret them according to how they behave, crying or playing. In many instances they predict good luck e.g. more rainfall and/or a bumper harvest.

They are difficult to be traced; they laid their eggs besides the riverbanks. They fed themselves with insects and grass. Culturally they are very much important. It is a firm belief that any person finding a crane's egg is a lucky person. They laid one to two eggs. Mr Amupolo is a keen bird's friend and recommended that he would wish to be part of the crane working group. We had also an opportunity to talk to various people in the region and lots of loving and interesting stories in Oshiwambo. We hope to send you all these stories/photos.

GENERAL RECOMMENDATIONS

- **All people we met recommended that there is a dire need to spearhead the conservation efforts for the cranes, but not only cranes as well as the various biological diversity.**
- **Promote information that enhances awareness on the importance of the extinct species.**
- **Establish a committee to strengthen the initiative.**