



May 2005

CRANE NEWS FLASHES

This new section in our newsletter brings you our news updates. Please keep in touch, and send us your items!

Co-ordination and networking

- A big thank you to NNF and SIDA for approving funding for the operation of the Namibia Crane Working Group for 2005!
- Comprehensive information on the Namibia Crane Action Plan and working group has been forwarded to NNF to produce a webpage on their website.

Information and data

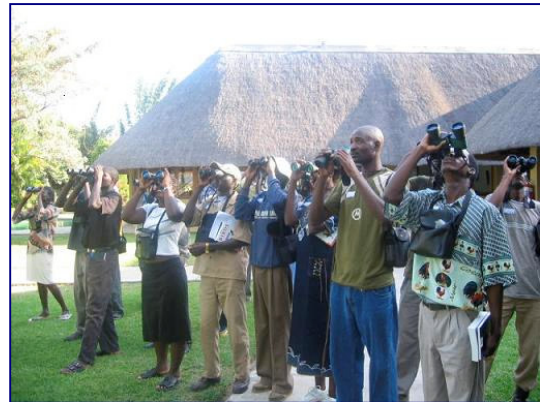
- A proposal by researchers from the United States and South Africa to research the population genetics of Blue Cranes in both SA and Namibia is being investigated. Namibia is the only country other than SA in which these cranes occur, and our small population of about 50 birds is of especial interest to geneticists.
- AWAC is in the process of developing a proposal to capture and attach satellite transmitters (PTTS) to juvenile Wattled Cranes in Botswana, and we look forward to hearing whether any of these birds end up in Namibia.

Awareness and education

- Look out for our article on the Namibia Crane Action Plan in the latest edition of "Conservation".

Area-based crane management strategies

- We are looking forward to hearing about progress with implementing the local crane strategies which you put together at the Bushmanland workshop - who's going to be the first local group to supply this feedback?!



CRANE FOCUS 1)

BirdLife guiding course on Caprivi by Sandra Slater-Jones, Field Co-ordinator, Caprivi Transboundary Linkages Conservancy Programme, Conservation International

We have just finished the Bird Life South Africa (BLSA) Bird Guiding Course at Kasika and Impalila Conservancies in Caprivi (5 to 14 May). The course was run by Duan Biggs, an accredited BLSA Guide Trainer. It was an excellent course, and the guide trainees (nine from Kasika Conservancy, eight from Impalila Conservancy, one from Mayuni Conservancy) gained a lot of new knowledge during the course and have been given a development programme to develop their skills further. Aldrin (Mayuni Conservancy) and Constance (Kasika Conservancy) gave feedback from the Bushmanland Workshop in March 2005 to the other guide trainees. Cranes and their importance, status and conservation were discussed with the group. Impalila guide trainees said that although they do occasionally see Crowned Cranes, there are no longer Wattled Cranes in their conservancy. Kasika guide trainees said that both Crowned and Wattled Cranes are still seen in their conservancy. The guide trainees want to start a bird club in the area, and this could perhaps be incorporated with efforts to establish a local crane working group in the area. Kasika and Impalila guide trainees have requested support i.e. funds, materials and advice to establish a conservancy bird club.

Lloyd Camp of Wilderness Safaris Namibia will be conducting a guide training course with the same guide trainees from 28 May to 2 June 2005. We will ensure that crane conservation and awareness are also incorporated into the course. Perhaps this course will provide the opportunity to discuss possibilities and means of setting up a local bird club/crane working group.

CRANE RESOURCE BOOK ON THE WAY!

We are pleased to report that the production of our long-awaited crane resource book is well on its way! The artwork is being done by Kasha Ostbloom, the daughter of Tim and Laurel Osborne. Kasha lives in Alaska (although she was born in Africa), and has already sent us some lovely drawings by email. The 20-page book will include information on our cranes, and activities, puzzles and pictures to colour in. We hope to produce the book in several local languages, so that it can be used in all our crane areas.



CRANE FOCUS 2)

Blue Crane Routes in the Western Cape by Vicki Hudson, field worker of the Overberg Crane Group

In the early 1990s, after a bad spate of Blue Crane poisonings in the Western Cape, Ann and Mike Scott (now Namibia Crane Working Group) initiated the Overberg Crane Group – a conservation partnership between Cape Nature Conservation and the farming community. Due to the abundance of the cranes in the Overberg area, one of the objectives of the group has always been to try and make the Blue Crane in the wild an economic asset to the farming community through its tourism potential.

With 10 years of groundwork in crane conservation carried out by Overberg Crane Group, coupled with the support of the Open Africa Initiative, the farming community and finance from ENGEN, the development of a Blue Crane Route in 2001 was a pioneering step in this direction. To date four Blue Crane routes have been developed in the Western Cape around Caledon, Bredasdorp, Heidelberg and Porterville with a further two areas, Darling and Riebeek Kasteel, also wishing to develop a route of their own.

How were the routes set up?

Various people with tourism ventures on their farms, or involved with tourism coupled with an interest in Blue Cranes, were approached and asked if they would like to become involved with the project. Those that were interested participated in two workshops facilitated by Open Africa, which got people thinking, fact-finding and working together to build up a route with their community. The final results were then all compiled and put onto their website (www.africandream.org) and presented at the launch function party.



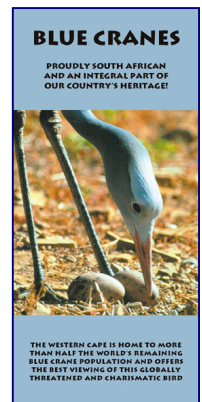
Special challenges

Setting up and keeping a tourism route alive requires a lot of hard work from the participants! Some of the problems and challenges we have experienced include:

- Maintaining momentum once the route has been launched.
- Effective communication amongst all participants in a farming area is difficult.
- Marketing (road sign regulations are very strict; brochures are essential to back up the information on the website) and funds to carry this out and develop new routes.
- Confusion with regard to numerous similar initiatives, each functioning independently with different agendas
- Nature of the cranes - they are nervous, sensitive to disturbance, vulnerable during the breeding season and move seasonally; the demand for captive cranes is an ever-present threat.
- Limited involvement of people outside of farms.

What has worked well?

- Having a very good local knowledge and credible reputation amongst the community.
- Using Open Africa's formula and expertise to get a route up and running.
- Tourists enjoy a brochure and the option of a route that they can physically drive along to see cranes.
- Using local tourism offices as a base.
- Referring enthusiasts to specific farms on routes where the farmers are involved with other crane conservation projects on a regular basis e.g. colour ringing of chicks, the National SA Crane Census.
- Media coverage to promote routes.
- Having a key co-coordinating person in the area to follow through with suggestions, network new ideas and answer inquiries.



Co-operation is the key factor!

Developing tourism routes seems to be a very popular concept and there are numerous different routes which have been developed and are in the pipeline in the Western Cape – the Wine Route probably being the epitome of success and what most routes aspire to become. As long as the Overberg Crane Group continues to carry out its crane conservation work, momentum will be maintained and future predictions for the routes look positive!