



Grus Grapevine



July 2006



First SACWG/Darwin workshop held at the EWT offices on the 4th July 2006

Editorial



Dear Crane Enthusiasts

The 1st of July heralded the start of the Darwin Initiative project and collaborators from across the country gathered in Johannesburg to plan the project. We spent long days staring at flip charts and racking our brains to ensure that it all runs smoothly over the next three years. It was also the first time that Rajan Amin and Richard Pettifor of the Zoological Society of London could put faces to all the contributors to the proposal. We made good progress and some rather serious field work will start in October. I would like to make use of this opportunity to thank all the participants for making time available to attend and especially to Richard and Raj that gave up three weeks of their short English summer in exchange for a grey, cold Highveld.

The Agricol National Crane Count takes place on the 28th-29th of July and anyone that has farmer friends, please encourage them to participate. The count has received substantial media coverage so we hope that we will have a good response this year.

Many reports are filtering through of people sighting ringed cranes. I would like to urge anyone that goes out craning to keep a look out for colour ringed birds and forward the colour codes to me or your nearest SACWG contact. The information is valuable to us and as part of the DI project we will analyse all ringing re-sightings to get a grip on crane movements.

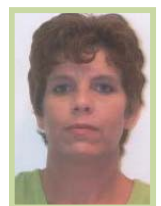
Good news is that the Mbombela municipality has been taken to task by the Mpumalanga Wetlands Forum because of their disregard of our environmental laws by approving developments in wetlands. It made headline news and hopefully this egg on the face will spur them on to take pride in their environment.

Regards

Leon

News from the office

Sharon Magro



It feels like only yesterday when we were running around trying to sort out the last minute preparations for the first SACWG/Darwin workshop. On the 4th of July, the first workshop was held at the EWT offices. Participants from SANBI, CSIR, ADU, OCG and the SACWG staff from outside Gauteng arrived at 09h30 to be welcomed with champagne by Richard Pettifor. A bit early for some, but never the less enjoyed by others. (Names not mentioned)

The rest of the week the SACWG staff together with Richard and Rajan had an in depth brain storming session for the way forward. By the Friday we had a detailed schedule drawn up of what needs to be done over the next year. Exciting, yet hard work lies ahead for all.

Thank you to all who participated in the workshop and we look forward to the next one, with luck, we will have it outside Gauteng.

Thanks to Lufthansa Airlines we have finally been able to buy spotting scopes for the field coordinators, an asset long overdue.

The AGRICOL Crane census forms were mailed on the 17th – 19th July and this year we have placed them on the EWT website. We received great exposure about the crane count this year, to name but a few publications – The Natal Witness, The Tribune, Die Burger and our very own Leon Theron was on SABC2's Morning Live on Tuesday, the 25th July.

Should anybody want to participate in the National Crane Count, please go to the links below .

http://www.ewt.org.za/SACWG_NCC_English_Datasheet_2006.doc

http://www.ewt.org.za/SACWG_NCC_Afrikaans_Datasheet_20061.doc

Crane news around South Africa

Wakkerstroom Crane Project

Glenn Ramke, Regional Coordinator



The month started in an interesting and exciting way with four days of discussions on how we tackle the sometimes daunting prospect of the Darwin project! It was stimulating and thought provoking to be together and with Richard and Raj, debating thoughts and ideas on the way forward over the next three years. The one glaringly clear point that came to the fore time and again is that there is a great deal to do and that the only way to do this is work together in a big team effort. So here goes – let's do it for the cranes!

En route to Johannesburg for the above, I called in to the Platrand area and it was great to see some 500 Blue cranes in a number of flocks. It was a good omen for the week ahead and added some incentive to what we hope to achieve.

The whole month has in fact been rather pleasant – for mid-winter! Even the weather has not turned out to have been the extreme cold expected – but promises of icy days are still about and even though days have been mild to summery, many very cold nights were reminiscent of my early and very cold times in Wakkerstroom.

One day, I had a call from a very excited young farmer - on whose farm there are every winter, a flock of Grey Crowned cranes numbering around 50 – 60 and a smaller number of Blue cranes, - to say "Glenn, daar is 'n groot Lelkraan wat bly met vyf Bloukraanvoëls en die Mahems. Dit is die eerste keer dat ek 'n Lelkraan gesien en dit is op my plaas". And there it stood in all its majestic glory, tall and elegant, diminishing the Blue Cranes in size but for all of that, it appeared to my human ideas that it was reliant on its Blue relatives for both their company and security – and the Blues certainly did not leave WC to its own devices for an instant! Actually, even though it is always great to see a Wattled crane, it saddens me to see it having to join up with other cranes as there is just not enough of its own kind near enough for it to become a part of a flock.

Then I was delighted to get a call from a farmer near Memel to say the Wattled Crane he had told me about a few months ago was there again. He had reported a ringed bird but when I wanted to go out there, it had moved off. Now it was back but he had noticed it is minus a foot. Whether it has not had this foot for a long time or just lost it, no one is sure. The farmer only purchased this farm late last year and that was when he first saw the bird. Anyway this WC, also consorting with Blue cousins, flies strongly, seems to be feeding well and walks reasonably well on its footless leg. And it still has its rings – it is one Andre Botha and I ringed in the Luneberg district in January 2001 so we can but hope for the best for it.

The day around the Memel area was so rewarding with some really good interaction with landowners – even though I speak English! From the reaction of people who I had met with Bradley before he left, I felt it is worthwhile to pop out there and touch base reasonably regularly.

Another pleasing thing was the response received from an article I sent to the Harrismith newspaper. There has been any number of farmers calling to tell me of cranes and Bald Ibis on their farms and really so thrilled that someone is taking an interest. The disturbing thing I have heard all too often is that a number of them have over the years 'phoned "...bird places" and told them of these flocks but no one has taken the trouble to follow up, even with a 'phone call. Is this a lesson or what? On my next visit to that area, I will be staying with a family who I have never met but called after the above article and offered me accommodation – a very keen and interested farmer who used to do the CAR count.

Another contact has a grain feed company in the town and has offered the use of this as an information source for the cranes and Bald Ibis! I think this is all so great and exciting and my imagination is running away with me – time and distance are the only problem here. I have not met this person either, but asked him if he would get information on the crane census into the paper which he was so pleased to do! Nice contact.

The Bald Ibis breeding season is almost upon us again. In fact, last Sunday I went to two colonies and at one there was not a bird in sight but the other, which started early last year too, had about 37 pairs in nest sites, 3 sitting and a couple of pairs building – so they are well on the way.

Hope everyone out there is keeping fit and not succumbing to any dreaded lurgies!

Central Karoo Region: WWF Crane Conservation Project **Bradley Gibbons, Regional Coordinator**



When a farmer near Richmond reported that he saw 700 cranes on his farm during the month, I thought he must have been kidding. So, I went out to the farm and investigated. At first, we saw one flock of about 300 birds and thought that was all the birds that there were and assumed that his 700 was equivalent to 300. We then counted more cranes and got to a figure of 622. However, there was another part of the flock some metres away from the main flock. Together, they totalled 716 birds! So, his number of 700 cranes was quite correct (and there were even more birds). It was certainly one of the biggest flocks I have ever seen and it also seems like most of the Karoo birds are presently on his farm.

I also went on holiday to Florida, America from the end of June until 8 July. While in Florida, I saw 9 Sandhill Cranes (that are easy to identify with their red streak above their eyes and brown colour). It was really a lovely experience to see Sandhills. There were also Crowned Cranes present at the Animal Kingdom of the Walt Disney World Theme Park, just to remind me of home.

Richard Pettifor, (from the Zoological Society in London – in charge of the Darwin Initiative Project with cranes in South Africa) was met on 11 and 12 July in Johannesburg and we discussed the Darwin Initiative Project that has started with South African Crane Working Group staff.

Eastern Cape Region: Rand Merchant Bank Crane Conservation Project **Mark van Niekerk, Regional Coordinator**



I attended the first of a series of the Darwin Initiative workshops in Johannesburg from the 3 to 7 July. This was a fantastic opportunity to provide input into the work programme that will essentially shape crane conservation in South Africa in future. The work load will significantly increase; however, fieldwork will be more focused on collecting data relevant to achieving a conservation strategy for cranes.

The Grey-crowned Crane chick that was collected from Queenstown early in June, after it had been illegally removed from the wild, is doing exceptionally well under the care of Thiro and Anri Wink, at their rehabilitation facility in Barkly East. They are once again thanked for their ongoing support of the project.

Two power line interactions were investigated this month in which one Crowned Crane succumbed. The reports have been submitted to Eskom and the EWT/ Eskom Strategic partnership. Land owners are thanked for being proactive and for the reporting of incidents.

A presentation on crop depredation by Grey-crowned Crane was given to the Department of Economic Affairs, Environment and Tourism (DEAET) in Umtata on the 14th. This provided a fantastic opportunity to network with various role players within the former Transkei area. Several of the emerging farmers are experiencing problems with crop depredation by cranes, within this area. Advice on mitigation measures was provided, and further collaboration will take place in future with this department.

The pair of Wattled Crane in the Maclear area is currently sitting on a nest containing two eggs! Hopefully the chick will be raised successfully this year. Two pairs of Wattled Crane, as well as a juvenile, were seen on the Gatberg wetland on the 20th. This appears to be a new pair in the area, possibly from Barkly East. Hopefully the pair will settle on this wetland and begin breeding in the near future. The Working for Wetlands team must be acknowledged for their efforts in creating suitable habitat for these birds and promoting crane conservation. It would appear that numbers are slowly increasing, with five known pairs of Wattled Crane now in the North Eastern Cape!

The largest flocks of Grey-crowned Crane seen this month were seen on Mondamin of 233 birds on the 19th and 237 birds on the 22nd. This is the largest flock recorded to date, and 17 of these birds were juveniles! Unfortunately none of the birds seen had any rings.

Highveld Grassland Region: Nestlé / Anglo American Crane Conservation Project
Gavin Shaw, Regional Coordinator



Another busy development month was experienced this month. I commented on the Loidos Residential developments scoping report near Dullstroom for a low-key residential development and forwarded my comments on to them and the relevant authorities. I commented on the Bon-Ja-Ani residential development near Machadodorp as a higher impact area residential development. Objection was noted for the dams planned for the property and for the way in which some of the development has been planned. I sent these comments on to the consultants and the relevant authorities. A posting of intent was made in The Lowvelder newspaper announcing exemption for a low-key residential development in Middelpunt near Dullstroom from complying with the National Environmental Management Act. The size and impact of the development was assessed by myself and found to be small enough to not appeal against the decision of the Mpumalanga Department of Agriculture and Land Affairs to grant the exemption. Comments have been formulated for the concept plan for the Amersfoort East Coal Methane Exploration Project for its consultants. These comments have, as yet not been forwarded to the relevant consultants as further details are awaited for inclusion and finalization. Photographs were taken of the campsite development at the Dullstroom town dam to be included in a letter to the Emakhazini Municipality as motivation for a response on their illegal residential expansion of the town facilities. The letter will be formulated later in the month of July and forwarded to the municipal manager for her response.

I attended a meeting of the Mpumalanga Wetlands Forum in Ermelo. The main issue was the lack of support from Municipal level in and on the efforts of the forum. The meeting was filmed by SABC1 News and Broadcast on the 21 July at 7pm as news headlines. The main focus of which was non-compliance of Mbombela Municipalities' application of the NEMA and Water Act. This was the final effort in months of negotiations to get the Municipality to heed efforts by the forum in changing their wetland management strategies. The segment was approximately 2 minutes long and featured a brief filming of participants including a nice shot of myself in EWT branded clothing.

I also met with the management staff of Verloren Valei to discuss the arrival of the Wattled Crane breeding pairs and whether or not their efforts for this years burning proposal were on track. I also discussed the business plan and the responses from both SACWG management and the representatives of the Highlands Crane Group.

The Wattled Cranes at both the Lakenvlei and Verloren Valei Wetland sites seem to have lost interest in nesting once again. On the second visit to Lakenvlei however it appeared that the pair seemed to be displaying nesting behaviour once again.

KwaZulu-Natal, KZN Biodiversity Programme

André Rossouw



I attended the very interesting Darwin Initiative workshop in Johannesburg from the 3rd – 7th of July 2006. This very informative workshop will assist in guiding the future crane data collection and data storage. The week in Johannesburg further gave me the opportunity to thoroughly research the acclaimed bowling club.

For the remainder of the month the majority of my time was spent splashing around freezing cold wetlands to monitor the breeding status and success of the Wattled Cranes. On one particular chilly day the water surrounding one of the nests were frozen and I had to literally break my way through the ice to get to the nest. Why do the Wattled Cranes have to breed in winter?

There are quite a few young and very cute chicks running around already, and soon we will be running around the wetlands as well trying to ring the new birds.

I have also managed to collect another egg (the 3rd of the season) for the Wattled Crane Recovery Programme. The egg was collected on the 15th of July 2006 and taken to Ralph Correia for incubation. The egg hatched on the 19th of July and was collected by Jeanne Marie on the 21st of July and taken to the Johannesburg Zoo where it is doing exceptionally well.

I visited the Cedarville area to monitor the Blue Crane flock that congregate on the farm The Meads during the winter months and managed to count 160 birds of which 2 were colour ringed in the Eastern Cape.

SACWG Projects and Partners

Conservation Leadership Group

Janis O'Grady



Good dynamic relationships being forged between the CLG and other organizations in KZN e.g. the BEEP partners (Ezemvelo KZN Wildlife (Community Conservation Officers and their managers), Blue Swallow Working Group, Cape Parrot Working Group, Oribi Working Group, Ground Hornbill Working Group) and with the Wildlife and Environment Society of SA. We are also working on strengthening ties with the Department of Education based in Pietermaritzburg.

The REWs all participated in a very successful workshop at WESSA in Howick. Samson planned a very full programme with presentations by all REWS as well as partners from Wessa, EWT and EKZNW. A new Eastern Cape contact who is a rural teacher on the Wild Coast could assist the REWs to do their work better. We wish there were funds to employ Loyiso Mdiya permanently – a man with a passion for environment and environmental education!

Samson Phakathi was nominated for the Eugene Marais Conservation Award for July for his hard work as REW Coordinator.

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Newsletter information

The Grus Grapevine is monthly newsletter of the South African Crane Working Group (SACWG) of the Endangered Wildlife Trust (EWT) in South Africa.

The Grus Grapevine aims to encourage national, regional and global participative networking and exchange of crane and habitat conservation news, ideas and information.

The Grus Grapevine is put together and edited by Leon-Jacques Theron. To send a news item or a question, email leont@ewt.org.za

If you no longer wish to receive this newsletter, please send an email to leont@ewt.org.za with the message 'Unsubscribe Grus.'



Organisational information

SACWG Vision:-

The harmonious coexistence of natural crane populations and people on the same land.

SACWG Mission:-

Ensuring the survival of South Africa's three crane species, their natural habitats and associated biodiversity, by promoting an improved understanding of crane biology, identifying and mitigating human induced threats, encouraging participation and cooperation of communities and institutions, for the benefit of cranes and people.

The SACWG manager is Leon-Jacques Theron, leont@ewt.org.za

For more information about SACWG and the EWT:

SACWG WEB PAGE: www.ewt.org.za/cranes

THE END