

Crane species of Namibia

BLUE CRANE (*Anthropoides / Grus paradisea*)

Red Data Book status

Critically Endangered in Namibia, population declining

Numbers

Overall: 20 000

Namibia: 60 (maximum)



Distribution and abundance - overall

- Smallest range of all the world's cranes - endemic to southern Africa, with most of its range in South Africa
- Total population of approximately 20 000
- Three separate sub-populations, with no movement between them
- Utilises grasslands and pans, croplands, pastures
- Feeds on seeds and flowers from grasses, frogs, reptiles, fish, insects
- Egg-laying between August and April, mainly September – January
- Often forages alongside Grey Crowned Crane and Wattled Crane
- Threats include poisoning, collisions with power lines, habitat loss to urbanisation, afforestation and crop farming

In Namibia

- No evidence of movement to/from Etosha population
- Found only in dry and wet grasslands and pans in Etosha NP and grasslands immediately north, mainly in wetter areas of this region and associated with perennial springs and isolated waterholes
- A survey in the late 1980s estimated not more than 80 birds; a follow-up survey in

1996 estimated a maximum of 60 birds, suggesting a possible 25% decline in 6-8 years

- Distributed in pairs or trios but groups of up to 30 birds sometimes occur
- The single most important site where birds gather to roost is Andoni water hole
- Egg-laying between December and March, peak in February, 1 – 3 eggs.

Threats - why are Blue Cranes declining in Etosha?

- Low rainfall
- Expanding human populations in northern Namibia
- Increasing presence of cattle in grasslands north of Etosha
- Snares, collisions with power lines
- Borehole drilling in the north may reduce permanence of Etosha's springs
- Genetic inbreeding?

Actions

- 5-yearly total population assessments
- Maintain water levels at critical waterholes (e.g. Andoni and Twee Palms)
- Investigate genetic status
- Colour-ringing study to determine survival, movements and habitat use



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WATTLED CRANE (*Grus carunculatus*)

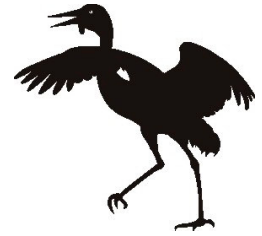
Red Data Book status

Critically Endangered in Namibia, population stable

Numbers

Overall: 8 000

Namibia: 200



Distribution and abundance - overall

- Largest and rarest crane in Africa, with an estimated total population of only 8 000
- Largely restricted to southern and central Africa - wetland areas of Zambia, DRC and the Okavango Delta - with an isolated population in Ethiopia of a few hundred birds
- Major stronghold lies in Zambia which supports c. 4 500 birds
- In southern Africa, centered on Okavango Delta in Botswana, with 1 300 birds
- Feeds on small amphibians and tubers, small reptiles, small mammals, insects, grain, tubers, rhizomes
- Egg-laying March – September (Okavango and Caprivi), year-round with a peak in April – September (Zimbabwe and South Africa)
- Threats include wetland degradation by drainage, damming and afforestation, direct disturbance and poisoning
- Utilises large low-lying wetlands and swamps in northern Namibia, and ephemerally flooded pans
- Small numbers found on floodplains of Okavango, Kwando and Chobe rivers and in ephemeral pans near Tsumkwe; also Oponono, Oshituntu, Mahango, Sishika channel, Linyanti swamps
- Little known about breeding in Namibia – only 4 records

Threats

- Degradation of wetlands, though most are protected in conservancies or are remote and rarely visited by humans
- Flow regulation (*e.g.* proposed weirs) on major rivers
- Increased, uncontrolled tourism
- Ability to recover from natural disasters or disturbance is limited because:
 - rear only one young
 - reach sexual maturity as late as 8 or 9 years old

In Namibia

- Namibian population, estimated at around 200 birds, is an overflow of the Okavango population
- Feeds on small amphibians and tubers
- Recorded regularly in 13 wetlands

Actions

- Regular population assessments
- Research on movements of individuals through radio/satellite tracking
- Enhanced protection of Nyae Nyae pans – a potential nursery area for subadults



Crane species of Namibia

GREY CROWNED CRANE (*Balearica regulorum regulorum*)

Red Data Book status

Near Threatened in Namibia, population stable/decreasing

Numbers

Overall: 58 000 - 77 000 (8 000 - 12 000 southern Africa; 50 000 - 65 000 East Africa)

Namibia: < 50



Distribution and abundance - overall

- Occurs from southern Uganda and Kenya southwards to the Eastern Cape, S. Africa
- Found only in southern Africa and southern Angola, population estimated at 58 000 – 77 000 birds (the related Black Crowned Crane is found further to the north of Africa)
- Largely associated with wetlands but also forages in nearby dryland habitats
- Utilises the grass fringes of wetlands, feeding on frogs, reptiles, insects and also seed heads and grass tops
- Three discrete and fragmented populations, largest of about 2 800 birds found in E and NE South Africa
- Overall decline of 20% in last three generations
- Begins egg-laying in spring with a peak in December – January (South Africa); December – February (Zimbabwe)
- Threats include poisoning, wetland degradation and disturbance

In Namibia

- Utilises the grass fringes of wetlands, feeding on frogs, reptiles, insects and also seed heads and grass tops

- In Namibia found only in grasslands N of Etosha, Zambezi and Okavango rivers, rarely seen in Etosha:
 - this population was estimated at < 50 birds in late 1980s
 - recorded mainly at Lake Oponono (6 records between 1994 and 1999)
- No breeding records in Namibia

Threats

- Generally, degradation of feeding and breeding habitat, poisoning, collisions with powerlines.
- In Namibia, human use of Lake Oponono by opportunistic hunters and trappers; competition with cattle

Actions

- Research on populations elsewhere in Namibia
- Assessment of breeding after good rains
- Direct protection
- Education of herdsmen on importance of Lake Oponono, and on the collection of snares and baits