



Rain at Lake Ngami, Botswana

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Anyone wishing for a mind-blowing experience should get to Lake Ngami (approximately 700 km along the tar road from Windhoek). The lake had strong flows of water into it in 2004 and again in 2005. During a brief stop-over on 27 October 2005, I was astounded by the number of birds, and I would recommend that all Namibian birders pay the lake a visit. In December 2004, just under 60 000 waterbirds were counted there, including some Wattled Cranes (Brewster, C.A. 2005. A survey of waterbirds at Lake Ngami in December 2004. *The Babbler*: 46: 25-31). Previously, up to half a million Redbilled Teal have been reported there. We observed one pair of Wattled Cranes in December 2004, but I know that many more Wattled Cranes have been seen there at other times.

Pete Hancock comments on the above news:

BirdLife Botswana, Email: pete@info.bw

Soon after Lake Ngami filled last year (for the first time in over a decade) a large variety of waterbirds descended on the area. Among them were small numbers of Wattled Cranes, which settled down to feed for several weeks on the shallowly flooded grasslands on the south side of the lake. Their presence contributed to the lake's status as an Important Bird Area under the BirdLife system, and also to the lake's being gazetted late last year as a *No Hunting Area*. The cranes were among almost 100 species of waterbirds that frequented the lake until it dried up at the end of summer 2004/5. It refilled during August this year, and has been equally spectacular although, depending on this season's rain, it may dry up earlier. Should any birders from Namibia plan to visit the lake, they are welcome to contact me for information on conditions at the lake.

Crane website news

Alice Jarvis & Tony Robertson

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Our own web site is currently under development and we hope to have a draft version ready early next year. It will include information and resources relating to Namibia's cranes including newsletters, action plan, red data book species accounts and maps and information, and contact details of relevant organisations and individuals. It will also include a News section with information on recent and upcoming events. Please contact me if you would like to contribute to the web site.

In our next newsletter we hope to bring you details of the latest initiative to incorporate data from the existing avifaunal database into the Namibian Biodiversity Database, a powerful database already available online (<http://www.biodiversity.org.na/index.php>).

Ed: All past issues of our newsletters are also available on the website of the International Crane Foundation (http://www.savingcranes.org/conservation/our_projects/article.cfm?cid=4&aid=90&pid=34). Thank you, Betsy Didrickson, Librarian of the Ron Sauey Memorial Library for Bird Conservation at ICF!

CRANE FOCUS

Progress reports on local, area-based crane strategies

1. Etosha National Park

(Ministry of Environment and Tourism)

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& Immanuel Kapofi: Chief Warden, Namutoni

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1: Continue to collect data form entries for cranes

Data are up to date. Kapofi is now planning to be assisted with ringing of the upcoming breeding season's offspring. It seems that Blue Cranes in the Namutoni area are still using Andoni Plain.

2. Promote crane awareness through the Namutoni Environmental Education Centre

Yes, Warden of EEC has carried out these activities when they get learners at the centre through the year.

3. Liaise with CBNRM officer in the north to promote crane conservation in the Oponono area

Apart from Oponono area, Kapofi has visited King Kauluma community hall, whereby he briefed the community about cranes in Namibia as whole.



Juvenile Blue Crane at Etosha NP (Photo: Tony Heald)



They also requested MET to give learners a free entry permit into Etosha so that they can familiarize themselves with Nature. Two neighbouring schools have already visited Etosha after the arrangements.

4. Distribute crane newsletters to Etosha staff and neighbouring farmers

Wilferd distributes the newsletter to all interested parties. Most staff at Namutoni read and receive newsletters. The problem is for the community, because there is no photocopy machine toner. But Kapofi makes some computer prints for the community.

5. Build capacity and train local staff to do bird counts

Yes, staff are very interested in bird counts, they also report where they have sighted cranes in the park. They have reported that they have not seen cranes outside the park. They are therefore encouraged to look carefully everywhere.

New actions:

1. Etosha Ecological Institute game drives

Kapofi is planning to join the EEC on their game driving. This will be done if the EEC warden is not available and also if groups/learners need more information about cranes in Namibia.

2. Ringing

We will need some ringing equipment for next breeding season. It will be good if I can keep some ringing equipment at Namutoni and train staff.

3. Plain pastures

It seems that cattle that feed next to the park and in the plain outside of the park may have a negative impact on crane movements. The plain used to be full of cattle after the rainy season until the next rainy season; presently cranes are not often sighted here.

4. Breeding sites

Will the Blue Cranes still breed at Twee Palms or might they change their breeding site? Kapofi therefore would like to monitor the breeding sites fully this upcoming breeding season. Namutoni cranes are mostly concentrated on Andoni Plain, thus the question arose.

Additional comments

Since this August the most concentrated area of foraging in Namutoni was at Andoni Plain. Cranes have been sighted here most of the time searching for insects. Eleven cranes were counted here on 2 October 2005. They were feeding on white larvae. Andoni water hole did not dry up this year, whereas Twee Palms (a breeding site of blue crane) dried up in September. It's really surprisingly not to sight cranes here. There were no chicks among those seen and counted at Andoni Plain. However this water hole is always busy with game. Next closest is Mushara water hole, 25km away.

2. Caprivi

Reporting by Edward Libuku (Head Ranger KC), **Kelvin Maswahu** (ranger IC), **Alfred Sibongo** (Kasika Conservancy) **Godfrey Chupo** (manager Kasika), **Sandy Slater-Jones** (CI), **Carol Murphy** (IRDNC)
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1. Radio programmes

Not done yet. Beaven Munalu, head of NRM team IRDNC will be approached to see if he can help conduct a radio programme on cranes in KC and IC.

2. Collect information on cranes

The rangers in Kasika and Impalila included cranes into their event books as one of the animals to monitor. Rangers conduct patrols of the area and therefore through the event book system the rangers are able keep records of all cranes sighted in the conservancy area. Two Wattled Cranes were sighted in KC (central conservancy between Itantwe and Makoma) in April by a ranger. Zero sightings were recorded in IC (Wattled Cranes have been sighted in the past in IC during flood season, but none this year).

3. Outreach/awareness in communities, schools

Kasika and Impalila conservancies hope to establish a bird club, and part of the activities proposed is to raise awareness in schools about special birds in the area such as the cranes. A proposal has been sent to NNF to try to secure funds, and feedback is being awaited.

4. Zone areas for special crane/habitat protection

Not yet done.

5. Implement anti-poaching measures

Rangers are aware of the importance of cranes and have cranes included in their event books. No events of crane poaching have been recorded this year. Rangers in both conservancies say poaching of cranes and eggs is not a big problem.

6. Bird guiding courses

Bird Life SA conducted a local bird guiding start up course in Kasika Conservancy (KC) and Impalila Conservancy (IC). Seven trainee guides from KC and seven trainee guides from IC participated and received certificates at the end of the course.

7. New actions

7.1. Crane activity books to be taken to schools.
7.2 Open Africa conducted its first workshop on 7 November with Caprivi conservancy participants to discuss opportunities for conservancy tourism activities and campsites. These will be included in the Zambian/Namibian route and displayed on the Open Africa website www.africandream.org. Activities to be marketed include birding trails. More details of this to follow!