# IUCN SSC Crane Specialist Group

2019 Report

Kerryn Morrison

## Chair

Kerryn Morrison

## Red List Authority Coordinator

BirdLife International

## Location/Affiliation

International Crane Foundation/Endangered Wildlife Trust, Johannesburg, Gautang, South Africa

## Number of members

320

## Social networks

Website:
https://www.savingcranes.org/crane-specialist-group/

## Mission statement

The mission of the IUCN SSC Crane Specialist Group is to promote the study of cranes and their threats, develop and disseminate solutions to those threats and enhance conservation of cranes and their habitats worldwide.

## Projected impact for the 2017-2020 quadrennium

By the end of 2020, we will have a good understanding of the current situation for each of the world's 15 species of crane, forming the foundation for a Crane Conservation Strategy that aims to address the key threats to each of the cranes across their distribution range. Published literature through personal experiences will be assessed and provide an understanding of the interface between cranes and agriculture that we will then use to address threats to cranes across this landscape, and provide the opportunity to use cranes as a flagship for biodiversity in agricultural landscapes. We will also have improved the situation for cranes across their range over this period.

## Targets for the 2017-2020 quadrennium

### Assess

Research activities: (1) publish and disseminate the Cranes and Agriculture Handbook; (2) estimate the impact of poisoning on threatened crane species and identify strategies; (3) implement the 1,000 Crane Tracking Project; (4) set up the Research and Monitoring Working Group, starting with crane tracking and movement studies.

### Plan

Planning: (1) publish the Crane Conservation Strategy; (2) implement the Crane Conservation Strategy; (3) develop a user friendly resource of the Cranes and Agriculture document.

Policy: (1) advocate for reduced poisoning at hotspots; (2) secure or upgrade level of legal protection for three or more crane sites.

### Act

Conservation actions: (1) implement the Single Species Action Plan for Grey Crowned Cranes (*Balearica regulorum*); (2) implement the Conservation Plan for the Eastern Population of the Siberian Crane (*Leucogeranus leucogeranus*); (3) estimate the impact of power lines on threatened crane species and work with power utilities in high impact areas to reduce/mitigate their impact.

### Network

Capacity building: complete four field training courses.

Synergy: hold regular meetings of species-level networks for Red-crowned Crane (*Grus japonensis*), White-naped Crane (*Grus vipio*), Hooded Crane (*Grus monacha*) and Black-necked Crane (*Grus nigricollis*).

## Activities and results 2019

### Assess

Research activities

**i.** *Cranes and Agriculture: A Global Guide for Sharing the Landscape* has been distributed widely across the range of cranes, both in hard copy and in digital format. It is also readily available online at https://www.savingcranes.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/cranes_and_agriculture_web_2018.pdf. The publication was used as the basis of an IUCN World Conserva-

Blue Crane family in the Overberg of the Western Cape
Photo: Ciming Mei

Siberian Crane family in Jiangxia, China
Photo: Ciming Mei

tion Congress motion which has been accepted for further comment: Motion 006 "Promoting harmony between cranes – flagships for biodiversity – and agriculture". (KSR #43)

**ii.** Key areas around the world where poisoning impacts on cranes have been identified. This includes in particular, China, Kenya and Zambia. A number of other countries have also been identified where smaller numbers have been poisoned. The issue of crane poisoning was raised at the IUCN Species Survival Commission Leaders' Meeting in Abu Dhabi in 2019. At the Thirteenth Meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals (CMS COP13), a side event on 'Reducing Impacts of Poison on Migratory Birds from Agricultural Chemicals and Poison Baits' was organised by the IUCN SSC Crane, Bustard, Duck, Swan, Goose, and Vulture Specialist Groups, International Crane Foundation and China Biodiversity Conservation and Green Development Foundation. Impacts of accidental and intentional poisoning on a variety of migratory bird taxa in Asia were reviewed and indicated common problems and needs. Experience in reduction of mortality of vultures in Europe following ingestion of poison baits used to kill predators provided valuable models. Proposed next steps include: conduct monitoring and research to identify high risk areas; document mortality and establish a shared database; identify commonly-used poisons; collaborate with toxicologists; work with decision makers on policy and enforcement; train first responders to collect and handle samples, volunteers to rescue birds, local enforcement officers to identify species, and laboratories to test samples; assess motivations and socio-economic aspects of poisoning; and highlight human health aspects to government agencies and other stakeholders. (KSR #32)

**iii.** Although the 1,000 Crane Tracking Project has been discontinued due to various reasons, we did record some interesting and valuable information from those trackers that worked. Ten Siberian Cranes showed differences in use of staging areas among seasons and years associated with increasing variability in water availability due to climate change and human development. The results showed the international importance of shallow water wetlands in the semi-arid region of Songnen Plain and Liao River Plain. Siberian Cranes increasingly fed in corn fields posing a huge risk of illegal poisoning. In 2019, the Wildlife Science and Conservation Center of Mongolia (WSCC) colour-ringed 34 White-naped Cranes, and marked 18 White-naped, two Siberian, five Demoiselle (*Anthropoides virgo*), and one Eurasian Crane (*Grus grus*) with GSM GPS tracking devices (co-financing from the Chinese Academy of Sciences). Results will be published in 2020. WSCC is monitoring eight Eurasian and over 100 Demoiselle Crane nesting pairs. Between 2016 and 2019, researchers deployed 35 GPS tracking devices on these Demoiselle Cranes (co-financing from the Max-Planck Institute of Animal Behavior in Germany), which wintered in Rajasthan and Gujarat states in northern India. Results will be published in 2020. Finally, a number of Blue Cranes (*Anthropoides paradiseus*) were fitted with GSM GPS trackers in the Western Cape of South Africa. Results will be published between 2020 and 2021. (KSR #12)

**iv**. Meetings with the European Crane Working Group, North American Crane Working Group, and six countries in the East Asia Flyway have been held to both raise the awareness of some of the challenges from crane ringing/banding and to establish a global community of practice to improve crane ringing and tracking projects. An online platform is under development for greater collaboration and information sharing. (KSR #12)

**Plan**

Planning

**i.** The *Crane Conservation Strategy* was published in 2019 and has been distributed both in hard copy and electronically; it is available online at https://www.savingcranes.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/crane_conservation_strategy_web_2019-1.pdf. The Strategy is being used to further develop species-specific crane conservation action plans for Siberian, Red-crowned, White-naped, Hooded, Black-necked Cranes, and the rapidly declining Cambodia/Vietnam population of Eastern Sarus Cranes (*Grus antigone*). These plans are being developed with broader stakeholder involvement from range states with a goal of endorsement by governments in 2021. (KSR #15)

**ii.** The objectives and actions in the *Crane Conservation Strategy* for 19 direct threats, seven indirect threats, and two conservation tools will be converted into an Excel spreadsheet that can be distributed according to species, region, or responsible organisation to the relevant Crane Specialist Group members to promote and monitor implementation. The Hunting and Poisoning Work Team has been

Ringing Blue Crane in the Western Cape, South Africa, Feb 2019
Photo: A Lacy

Testing a safer design for crane transmitter
Photo: A Lacy

initiated and worked with IUCN SSC to communicate with Saudi Arabia to enforce laws and reduce mass slaughter of migrating Demoiselle Cranes advertised on the internet. Actions have been undertaken to address poisoning of cranes in East Asia (see activities and results reported for the target "Estimate impact of poisoning on threatened crane species and identify strategies" above). (KSR #16)

Policy

**i.** A plan has been developed to address the poisoning issue in Zambia, but funding is currently limiting. Although discussions have been held around the other poisoning hotspots for cranes, a plan is yet to be developed to address this and advocate for reduced poisoning. In China, information on risk of poisoning is included in presentations and awareness materials around emerging hotspots, but further assessment and action are needed. (KSR #27)

**ii.** The International Crane Foundation (as part of the International Crane Foundation/ Endangered Wildlife Trust Partnership, or ICF/ EWT Partnership) is signing a long term co-management Agreement with the Zambian Department of National Parks and Wildlife and WWF Zambia to improve management capacity, law enforcement and community engagement for the Kafue Flats in Zambia, the most important site for Wattled Cranes (*Bugeranus carunculatus*) and an important site for Grey Crowned Cranes. Twenty-seven (27) Conservation Agreements have been signed in East Africa (Kenya, Rwanda and Uganda) with local communities to secure crane habitats in return for benefits and livelihood options that the communities receive. In Russia, the provincial-level Kytalyk Wildlife Refuge was officially upgraded to a national-level National Park. In Mongolia, the provincial-level protected area at the Khurkh and Khuiten River Valleys was upgraded to a national-level Wildlife Refuge. In South Africa, over 98,000 ha of land is under negotiation to become protected areas; these are critical areas for cranes along the Drakensberg escarpment. The ICF/EWT Partnership team have facilitated the declaration of approximately 3,000 ha of land as Nature Reserves for cranes in South Africa in 2019. (KSR #27)

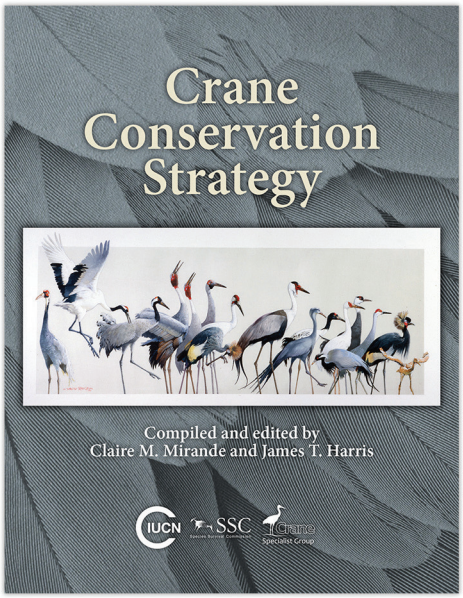
**Act**

Conservation actions

**i.** The first meeting of the African Eurasian Migratory Waterbird (AEWA) International Grey Crowned Crane Working Group was held in July 2019 in Uganda. Following an update on the status of and threats to Grey Crowned Cranes in each country, participants at the meeting developed a three-year implementation plan, highlighting activities required in each of the countries across the cranes' range. Of particular note was the increase in poisoning events across parts of their range, the severe impact the drought had on breeding productivity, the threat of alien invasive plants in breeding sites, now in parts of East Africa, and the ongoing threat of small scale agricultural expansion into wetlands. Significant progress had been made to address some of the key threats to cranes and their habitats across several of the range states. Uganda was elected as the Chair of the Group, with Kerryn Morrison as the overall Coordinator of the Plan, with co-coordinators agreed upon for the East African subspecies (Dr Adalbert Aine-omucunguzi) and Southern African subspecies (Tanya Smith). (KSR #37)

**ii.** 2019 was a good year for Siberian Cranes. Breeding success was high due to favourable conditions on the Arctic tundra. High counts were recorded at staging and stopover sites and, despite low food plant productivity at Poyang Lake, cranes were able to utilise the lotus ponds for meeting their feeding needs. Three important events occurred this year. One was the approval to upgrade Kytalyk to a National Park. The two others concerned high-level events, one to affirm the commitment of Jiangxi Province to migratory waterbird conservation at Poyang Lake, the second to build on the Disney project to develop a long-term strategy for four species of cranes throughout the East Asian Flyway. (KSR #37)

**iii.** Data collection for the project "Assessment of the impact to cranes from a newly constructed transmission line" in the state of Wisconsin, US, has been completed. The analysis is still being finalised, and we anticipate a completed document will be presented to stakeholders in 2020. In 2019, the inaugural African conference on linear infrastructure – called African Conference on Linear Infrastructure and Ecology – was held in South Africa. Here, more than 115 delegates from over 20 countries discussed the impacts of power lines on birds. Crane Specialist Group members participated in discussions around addressing power line impacts on Grey Crowned Cranes in Uganda whilst highlighting the work to date in South Africa in addressing the threat of power lines to cranes. This has resulted in relationships with Power Africa being developed and strengthened. The NABU Crane Centre (Germany) registered 193 dead cranes (58 bird collisions with power lines, 16 other reasons like wire fence or eagle attack, 119 cause




Crane Conservation Strategy
Photo: Crane SG

unknown), with power lines representing the highest mortality factor. The European Crane Working Group is working with utility companies to mark or place power lines to reduce impacts. The Ministry of Natural Resources Directorate of Biological Resources in Yakutia, Russia, is conducting a state examination of projects of industrial facilities with power lines and providing recommendations for installing bird protection as needed. (KSR #27)

**Network**

Capacity building

**i.** A training course on wetland hydrology and social sciences was conducted in Mongolia by the Wildlife Science and Conservation Center of Mongolia, International Crane Foundation and US Forest Service, for 14 participants from five national universities, two institutions from Mongolian Academy of Sciences, and one river basin administration. A new environmental education curriculum was launched in a local elementary school in fall semester 2019 in China and eight teachers from local schools were trained to teach the curriculum. (KSR #17)

Synergy

**i.** A landmark East Asia Crane Flyway Workshop in October brought together representatives from the six countries of the Flyway. This will mark the beginning of stronger international cooperation by Flyway countries for all crane species and build on the Disney Siberian Crane project model. The workshop also saw the launch of the 2020 Year of the Cranes in East Asia initiative to raise the profile of and support for cranes in the region. The 7th Black-necked Crane Network Annual Meeting was held at Gahai National Nature Reserve, in China, with 118 participants from 57 organisations in the US, India, Bhutan, and 12 provinces in China. There were 33 presentations on status and conservation of Black-necked Cranes, wetland protection, habitats, ecological biology, management, and education. Participants discussed the Black-necked Crane Action Plan and how to further strengthen cooperation and coordination among the three Black-necked Crane range countries – China, India, and Bhutan. (KSR #29)

**Acknowledgements**

We would like to thank the International Crane Foundation (ICF) for hosting the IUCN Crane Specialist Group, the ICF/Endangered Wildlife Trust Partnership for supporting Kerryn Morrison's involvement as the Chair, and ICF for supporting both Claire Mirande's and Elena Smirenski's involvement. We would like to extend a really special and big thank you to Dr Jane Austin for the many hours that she provided to the Specialist Group in finalising the *Crane Conservation Strategy* over this last year – she added huge value to the team involved in this mammoth task. Kerryn specifically would like to thank Claire Mirande and Elena Smirenski for all of their efforts over the last year in keeping the membership up to date, finalising the *Crane Conservation Strategy* and in general assisting wherever needed. To all of our members, we thank you for your input into the *Crane Conservation Strategy* and to Claire Mirande, Anne Lacy, Gunther Nowald, Elena Ilyashenko and Jane Austin in particular who have initiated discussions and activities that need to be taken forward from the Strategy. Thank you, too, to Claire Mirande, Elena Illyashenko, Christie Craig and Tanya Smith for testing the Green List Criteria for Siberian and Blue Cranes, respectively. We appreciate our numerous members who constructively led species or geographic subgroups for cranes, including the European Crane Working Group, North American Crane Working Group, Crane Working Group of Eurasia, International Red-crowned Crane Network, Black-necked Crane Network, East Asian Crane Network, and many others. To all of our partners around the world and to our many donors and supporters – thank you. Crane conservation efforts require multi-stakeholder/multi-sector involvement, and our achievements have only been made possible with the input of all of our members, partners and donors.

**Summary of activities 2019**

Components of Species Conservation Cycle: 4/5

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Assess | **4** | ▮▮▮▮ |
| Plan | **4** | ▮▮▮▮ |
| Act | **3** | ▮▮▮ |
| Network | **2** | ▮▮ |

Main KSRs addressed: 12, 15, 16, 17, 27, 29, 32, 37, 43

KSR: Key Species Result