IUCN SSC Crane Specialist Group

2020 Report

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Chair

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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 to provide an understanding of the interface between cranes and agriculture that we will then use to address threats to cranes across this landscape, providing 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 2020

Assess

Research activities

i. Although no progress was made on improving our understanding of crane poisoning, seven crane biologists in Africa attended a virtual course presented by Andre Botha. The purpose of the course is to better understand wildlife poisoning and learn how to handle a poisoning scene to ensure personnel safety

A family of Vulnerable Wattled Cranes,
Bugeranus carunculatus
Photo: Jacquie Van der Westhuizen

whilst collecting the correct information and accurately managing the scene. The IUCN SSC Crane Specialist Group organised a side event at the 13th Meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species (CMS COP13) on 'Reducing Impacts of Poison on Migratory Birds from Agricultural Chemicals and Poison Baits'. The session's goals were to review impacts of accidental and intentional poisoning on various migratory bird taxa in Asia and to identify the next steps to be taken to understand and reduce impacts. Case studies documenting mortality on cranes, Great Bustards (*Otis tarda*) and Anatidae indicated common problems and needs. Experience to reduce mortality of vultures in Europe following ingestion of poison baits used to kill predators provided valuable models for potential application to migratory birds in Asia. Proposed next steps include monitoring and research to identify high risk areas, document mortality, and establishing a shared database; identification of chemicals; collaboration with toxicologists; work with decision makers on policy and enforcement; train volunteers to rescue birds and local enforcement officers to identify species; training in handling and testing of samples; better understanding of motivations and socio-economic aspects; and highlight human health aspects to government agencies and other stakeholders. (KSR #32)

ii. The Research and Monitoring Group submitted a manuscript titled 'TELEMETRY AND MARKING IMPACT ON CRANES: AN ISSUE PAPER' to the *Proceedings of the North American Crane Workshop*. This paper is the culmination of a Symposium on issues surrounding the marking of cranes, presented at the conference in January 2020 and following up on a group discussion initiated at the European Crane Working Group in December 2018. A survey of crane members is also underway to obtain information on their use of marking, telemetry and any potential ill effects to cranes. GSM tracking studies continue for Siberian and White-napped Cranes in East Asia, identifying new sites and changes in habitat use. Results are used to improve the protection and management of these critical sites. GSM studies on Demoiselle Cranes (*Anthropoides virgo*) provide new information on migration routes and threats, especially illegal hunting and poisoning. (KSR #12)

Plan

Planning

i. The objectives and actions of the *Crane Conservation Strategy* have been summarised into an easy to use and reference outline. This will be shared, for action, with the IUCN Crane Specialist Group membership in 2021. However, many of the objectives and actions to reduce threats to cranes across their range are already in action, and progress has been made in many areas. For instance, detailed Conservation Action Plans are being developed for four migratory East Asian crane species to be approved by national governments. A 'Conservation Action Plan for the Cambodia-Viet Nam Population of Eastern Sarus Cranes (2020–2030)' was completed with input from local government organisations. (KSR #16)

Policy

i. Awareness materials around the poisoning threat were produced and distributed at core crane sites in China, and messaging was incorporated into awareness activities. (KSR #27)

ii. In South Africa, one Nature Reserve was declared, supporting Grey Crowned Cranes. In Russia, Kytalyk was upgraded to a National Park and has been officially placed on a candidate list for World Heritage Site status. In Mongolia, the Khurkh and Khuiten River Valleys have formally been upgraded to a national-level nature reserve. (KSR #27)

Vulnerable Blue Cranes, *Anthropoides paradiseus*,
flying next to powerlines in South Africa
Photo: Wicus Leeuwner

A family of Vulnerable Blue Cranes, *Anthropoides paradiseus*,
in KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa
Photo: Jacquie Van der Westhuizen

Poisoned Least Concern Eurasian Cranes, *Grus grus*,
and Least Concern Ruddy Shelducks, *Tadorna ferruginea*
Photo: International Crane Foundation

Wucheng Elementary School environmental education
Photo: Jin Jiefeng

Act

Conservation actions

i. Good progress was made on the African Eurasian Migratory Waterbird Assessment's International Single Species Action Plan for Grey Crowned Cranes. Ongoing monitoring of Grey Crowned Cranes in South Africa, Zambia, Uganda, Kenya and Rwanda provides us with information on the trends in the population. In both South Africa and Rwanda, stable to increasing trends have been recorded. We also now have baseline breeding productivity data from South Africa, Uganda, Rwanda and Kenya, against which we can monitor trends. Crane ringing efforts in Uganda and Rwanda and satellite tracking of cranes in Rwanda are starting to provide us with crucial information on the movement patterns of the species and the threats they face. Poisoning, powerlines, illegal and legal trade, invasive species, disturbance, and the encroachment of agriculture into their wetland breeding habitats are being addressed in all the critical range states for Grey Crowned Cranes. This work is happening through integrated community-based conservation efforts and direct threat mitigation. (KSR #37)

ii. Synchronised surveys were completed in spring, fall and winter with a maximum of 5,521 Siberian Cranes counted, indicating a population increase. Changes in habitat use and foraging behaviour were documented, including the increased use of agricultural lands, with changes in protection and management strategies. It was noted that a renewed threat of an outlet dam at Poyang Lake could significantly impact the lake ecosystem. To ensure migratory connectivity, we are working hard to promote the necessary conditions at enough wetlands each year to support Siberian Cranes. Due to the project's awareness and partnership efforts, local authorities are releasing water to create suitable habitat at critical periods. With many important changes in crane behaviour, habitat threats, and opportunities for more significant impact, in 2021 we will do a substantial re-look at the situation across the East Asia Flyway. This will include developing new strategic plans for securing Siberian Cranes as well as White-naped and Red-crowned Cranes. (KSR #37)

iii. Research and proactive approaches to powerline mitigation in South Africa, through the Endangered Wildlife Trust/Eskom Partnership, continue to reduce the threat of powerline collisions and electrocutions to cranes. The distribution of Blue Cranes (*Anthropoides paradiseus*), Grey Crowned Cranes and Wattled Cranes (*Bugeranus carunculatus*) was included in developing a collision sensitivity map for South Africa that will guide all future powerline developments and the reactive mitigation efforts underway. As Blue Cranes are particularly affected by powerline collisions, a specific Blue Crane collision risk model will be developed through research currently underway under the International Crane Foundation/Endangered Wildlife Trust Partnership. Eskom and the Leiden Conservation Foundation support this work. We are also gathering additional information on the collision and electrocution threat to Grey Crowned Cranes in Uganda. (KSR #27)

Network

Capacity building

i. Most training courses were delayed due to COVID-19. Training for volunteers for a monitoring network continued. University students were trained in China to work with community awareness programmes and reduce disturbance to feeding birds. (KSR #17)

Synergy

i. In-person meetings were delayed due to the pandemic. Online meetings and communications, as well as small group meetings, keep all four networks active in the interim. (KSR #29)

Acknowledgements

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Summary of activities 2020

Components of Species Conservation Cycle: 4/5

Assess	2	II
Plan	3	III
Act	3	III
Network	2	II

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

KSR: Key Species Result