NAMIBIA
Crane Working Group

Namibia Crane News 44

incorporating cranes and other wetland birds

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ETOSHA CRANES STAY PUT AT ANDONI UNTIL THE FIRST RAINS

Thirty-five Blue Cranes have been recorded consistently at Andoni since June-July 2009, apparently the sum total of this species for Etosha National Park and surrounds (see newsletter No. 43, p3). After some good early rains, however, three pairs have been seen again at the south-eastern edge of the Pan on 20-22/10/09, intent upon taking up their breeding territories for the next season. Is it possible that these three pairs could have moved in from elsewhere?

We were fortunate to visit the Andoni gravel pit during the afternoon on 24/9/09, accompanied by Wilferd Versfeld, who has been monitoring the cranes' movements regularly. The birds were in a tight group, sharing the water hole (which still holds water from the last rain season) with an amazing array of birds including 56 White-backed Vultures, 15 Lappet-faced Vultures, two Bateleur, about 3 500 teal (mostly Red-billed), Black-winged Stilt, Kittlitz's Plover, Chestnut-banded Plover, Blacksmith Plover, Three-banded Plover, Yellow-billed Egret, Cattle Egret and a Black-necked Grebe. Wildebeest, springbok and Burchell's zebra were also present. Seven of the cranes were ringed, but too far for identification (apart from NHD; and possibly an F?). At 16h00 the cranes started moving off to the west in the direction of the Pan, which also still has water. Wilferd picked up a clear signal from the subadult fitted with a radio transmitter (frequency 151.190) in March 2009.

Next day at 08h10 we spotted three of the cranes flying towards the other gravel pit, outside the Park (see newsletter No. 43, p3). The water in the pit was almost dried up. We examined the surrounding area and found the remains of "uintjies" (Cyperaceae) that had been dug out of at the roots of the well-grazed grass – possibly by the cranes? (see newsletter No. 34, p4). By 09h35 all 35 cranes were again back at the Andoni gravel pit. They were feeding amongst the wildebeest and zebras, and we observed them "combing" the grass stems for seeds with their bills. The grass was noticeably longer than at the gravel pit

Top: Wilferd Versfeld radio tracking the cranes near Andoni on 24/9/09 (*photo Ann Scott*)
Centre: 35 Blue Cranes at the Andoni gravel pit on 3/9/09 (*photo Wilferd Versfeld*)
Bottom: The 35 cranes on 24/9/09, sharing the gravel pit with many other birds (*photo Ann Scott*)

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outside the Park. Further details of the cranes' movements are supplied below by our dedicated observers.

14/8/09
Wilferd Versfeld (WV), email wversfeld@met.na
Went to Andoni yesterday. Found 35 cranes again, all at the gravel pit outside the park, see photo graphs of short grass compared to gravel pit inside the park. The gravel pit outside only has mud, and at about 11h00 they all flew to the gravel pit inside the Park and waded into the water. Very few other animals on plains inside Park, and grass very tall. Could not get close enough to read colour rings, but counted 6 colour rings. If my records are correct we have colour ringed only 13 birds so far in total. Radio transmitter working well.

24/8/09 WV
This number of 35 is all I have seen recently, have not heard of any others being seen around. They seem to go to the gravel pit at lunch time. They are still overnighting at the Pan. We can now keep tabs on them via the radio-tracked bird.

7/9/09 WV
Went to Andoni last Wednesday. Found 35 cranes again. 19 of them were at the gravel pit outside the park with 4 feeding along the fence on the outside. At about 12h00 they all flew to the Andoni gravel pit inside the Park and then I found the 35 there. The outside gravel pit water has dried up and only has some mud left, so the game will have to go up to Okashana to drink. The gravel pit inside is still full of water and the cranes have been joined by thousands of Red-billed Teal.

The well-grazed grass at the gravel pit north of Andoni (outside the Park) provides an opportunity for the cranes to feed on "uintjies" (*Cyperus* sp.) during the dry season (*photos Ann Scott*)

9/9/09 WV
I was up at Andoni today. It was a cool day with a strong south-easterly wind. The cranes were about, found transmitter bird in a group of 24 on the edge of the main pan west of Andoni. They were walking on the water's edge, facing into the wind and pecking (feeding?) in the mud. At the Andoni gravel pit there were 7 cranes giving a total of 31 birds today. Of the group of 7 at the gravel pit, they were in two groups of 3 (2 adults and 1 chick) and 4 (2 adults and 2 chicks), no rings on any.

5/10/09 WV
Was up at Andoni last Monday 5th and saw 33 cranes, will be going that way next week to do the vultures and check on them also.

10-11/10/09
Hermann Cloete, email omburu.design@yahoo.com
We saw 35 cranes at Andoni during a recent visit to Etosha.

23/10/09 WV
We have had some nice early rains so the cranes have started moving already. On 20/10/09 I saw 2 on Chudop Triangle, 2 a few hundred metres west of Twee Palms. On 21/10/09 I saw 8 at the Andoni gravel pit - the radio bird was there; and on 22/10/09 a tourist reported 2 cranes to the east of the Halali turn off (Halali seepage), one with a ring. Still only a few other animals on the Andoni grassland.

24/10/09
Immanuel Kapofi, email kimmanuel@yahoo.com
Good news on Namutoni Cranes: I am happy to present you today that I have counted 34 Blue Crane at Andoni water hole on 24/10/2009. They were associated with blue wildebeest and zebra. Grass in the area is still tall and I could detect no rings on legs. The water disappeared very late this year at Andoni plain, and Fischer's Pan is already half full by the first rain. Most aquatic birds are already back at Fischer's Pan and feeding all over the pan water. I have recorded over 50mm of rain at all three rainfall gauges in Namutoni. I therefore expect more chicks of cranes this year in Namutoni area.

NEWS FROM KAVANGO

Kavango Bird Club receive their NATH certificates

Dorothy Wamunyima, email dorowams@gmail.com
& **Allen Kafene & Team**, email
kavangobirdclub@yahoo.com

Members of the Kavango Bird Club officially received their certificates for three NATH Level III guide training courses at the Country Pilot Partnership (CPP) launch in the region on 3/8/09. The training

Handing over of the NATH certificates to the Kavango Bird Club by Hon. Governor John Thighuru of Kavango Region (*photos Wyvlife Nabaase*)

was completed at Popa Falls in November 2008, and financed by the GEF Small Grants Programme through the Namibia Crane Working Group (see newsletter no. 39).

It was a big ceremony where the Hon. Governor John Thighuru officiated, with all regional councillors present, and the head of line ministry and key stake-holders. Delegates from Windhoek, Namibia Nature Foundation, CPP unit programme coordinator, Namibia Development Trust and NNF- Katima were also present.

The Kavango Bird Club is doing well, and has be-come involved in bird guiding at Kaisosi River Lodge, and with office work on proposal writing. Allen Kafene and Marcelius Kudumo are always at the office thus to build up their capacity, and Liina Mumbala has been employed full time as NNF office administrator. Allen has completed Wilderness Safaris modules: Current Affairs, Geology and Wildlife Diseases, at tour guide entry level and intermediate level.

The Club is growing in size, and hopes to continue with another NATH guide training course next year, financed through the CPP programme. The members are promoting their guiding skills to tourists through the surrounding lodges.
Ed: Well done to the Kavango Bird Club!

NEWSFLASHES

Wattled Crane sightings

Neil Thomson & Gudrun Middendorff, email batqs@mweb.com.na & gudrunm@iway.na
We had a long weekend up on the Okavango River and saw the following Wattled Cranes:- On 28/08/09 – three birds flying over the reeds at Kwetche picnic site Mahango Game Reserve. On 29/08/09 two birds observed from Buffalo Core Area out on the flood plain. Observers' position 18° 12.228' S 21° 46.281' E. We estimated that the birds were least 300 m to the west of this position.

Linyandi & Lake Ngami full

Chris Brown, email cb@nnf.org.na
I was in Caprivi on 17/8/09 - the Linyandi is still very full. Also, I just spoke to Dave Ward freshly back from Botswana, who reports Lake Ngami overflowing its banks – almost flooding the tar road.

Ringed pelican at Schumann Dam

Neil Thomson
On 06/09/2009 Gudrun and I went ringing at Schumann Dam, Farm Frauenstein. On approaching the dam we saw a group of five pelicans loafing at the edge of the water. I would age them as two adults, two immatures/sub adults and one juvenile. They waddled into the water as we approached but we noticed that one of the sub adults had a large plastic ring on the right leg. The birds swam to the far side of the dam and then stood in the water so that we could not see the ring. Sometime later they took to the air and I was able to see the sun catching the metal ring on the left leg of the ringed bird as they circled overhead. A few hours later the young birds returned but of course landed again on the far side of the dam. We were able to see that the plastic ring was red and green but the birds were too far away to read the number. Plans to get closer in the vehicle to try to read the code on the ring were thwarted when the birds decided to go swimming. I assume that this must be one of the birds ringed as a chick at Hardap. Hardap is about 240 km from Schumann Dam.

Flamingos

Wilferd Versfeld
27/10/09: Can someone please let me know how many flamingos are at the coast? Last week on the Etosha Pan on the northern boundary, to the west of the Ekuma River, there were thousands of Greater Flamingos with young and sub adults (grey birds). Namutoni had received some rain so there were a few (100-200) birds at the causeway. Have any flamingos left the coast, as on 4-5/10/09 at Namutoni two small groups flew over during the night to the east.

The ICF Bugle

Betsy Didrickson, email betsy@savingcranes.org
The most recent issue of *The ICF Bugle* from the International Crane Foundation includes a feature on the new "Spirit of Africa" exhibit. All issues of *The ICF Bugle* are available on our website: http://www.savingcranes.org/theicfbugle.html