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### MARCH 2012 CRANE CENSUS

Our annual wet-season combined aerial/ground crane census at Etosha National Park and northwards took place from 17-24/3/12. This survey is part of a biannual series started in 2006. The census yielded a total count of only 18 adults and 2 chicks (all within the Park) - a further decrease in adult numbers for the wet season from 32 in April 2010 and 24 in April 2011. However, this figure is not regarded as the maximum count for 2012 ...

The rains were again excellent this year and there was a considerable amount of water in the Pan, especially the eastern parts, while Lake Oponono was still flooded.

Our aerial survey area started at Namutoni and Andoni, then ran westwards across the Oshigambo River to the Ekuma River where we turned northwards and criss-crossed the Lake Oponono area. From here we turned south into the Park again and westwards to Ozonjuitji m'Bari, then back eastwards via Okaukuejo. As with previous surveys in March/April, we found a smallish flock of non-breeding Blue Cranes at Fischer's Pan, in this case only seven birds. Three Crowned Cranes (18° 15'S 15° 45'E) and two Wattled Cranes (18° 15'S 15° 45'E) were recorded in the Lake Oponono area, but no Blue Cranes were seen outside the Park.

The ground count yielded eleven adults (five pairs) and two chicks (Salvadora plains and Namutoni causeway), bringing the total to 18 adults and two chicks. Two more chicks observed previously (Halali seep and Namutoni causeway) do not appear to have survived. Although this count is disappointing, we still need to wait for the dry season when more of the cranes appear to return to the Park, to obtain a final count for 2012.

*The Namibia Crane Action Plan is supported by Namibia Nature Foundation  
This newsletter is kindly funded by Mathias Stein & Barbara Hudoc, and the  
Hessische Gesellschaft für Ornithologie und Naturschutz (HGON)*

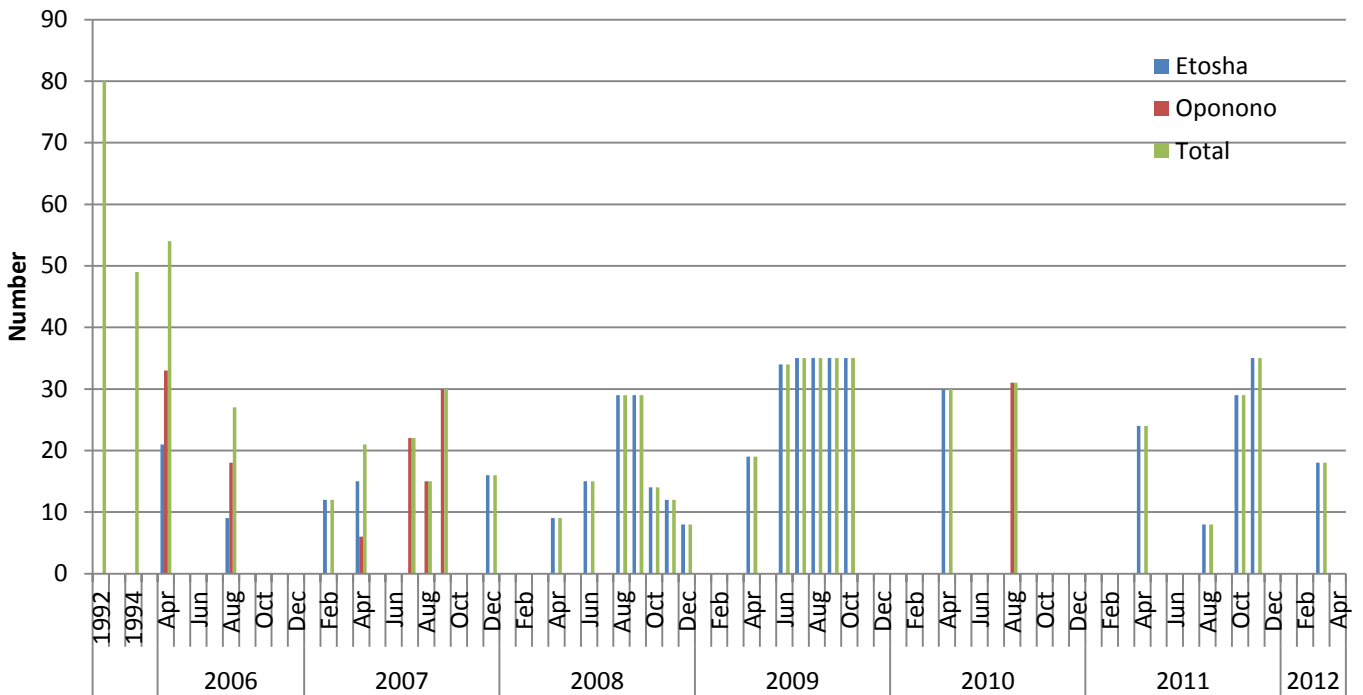
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Top: The March 2012 team: (L to R, back) Wilferd Versfeld, Mike Scott, Ann Scott, pilot Nad Brain, Seth Guim, Hanjo Böhme and (front) Sageus Garieseb; inset: Holger Kolberg (automatic photo Nad Brain)

Centre and bottom: This year's two surviving chicks were produced one at Salvadora (centre) and one on an island at Fischer's Pan/ Namutoni Causeway (bottom) (photos Ann Scott)

## Counts of Blue Crane adults/subadults at Etosha and Lake Oponono, 1992 - 2012



### A new look at Blue Crane numbers

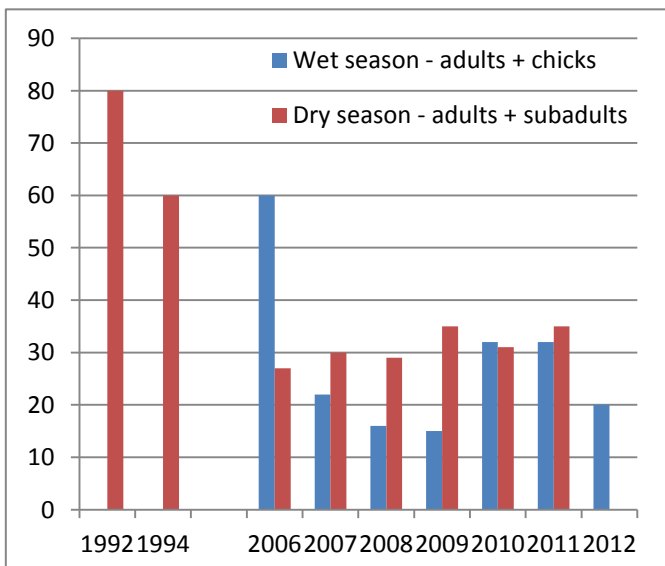
According to the figure above, which shows individual counts of Blue Cranes at Etosha and Lake Oponono from 1992-2012, it is clear that their numbers in Namibia have declined.

We have estimated a survival rate of 40-60% for chicks to fledging, whereafter their chances of survival are assumed to be higher.

But even if all the chicks were to survive and we included their numbers with adults during the wet season (see figure below), the dry-season counts (that include adults + subadults) are still higher indicating that not all birds are present/counted during the wet

season, only the breeding birds within the Park plus a small non-breeding group. Although we check over the Lake Oponono area during the wet-season aerial surveys, cranes were not observed there from September 2007 to August 2010 (see above figure). The question remains: where are the remaining cranes during the wet season? Except for 2007, very good rain seasons have been experienced from 2006 to 2012, resulting in flooding in the Pan and areas to the north. These conditions may also create new areas for the cranes to move to, that are not suitable under drier conditions – and so the cranes still return to the Park during the dry months.

Are the cranes picking up problems in areas outside the Park? According to a survey done by our Polytechnic student Teofelus Ntinda during the second half of 2011, there are indications that cranes are indeed being hunted, both for food and for muthi purposes (see pp 5-6 for a summary of the findings from Teo's study, "Investigation into the decline of the only breeding Blue Crane population in Namibia, assess human impacts and to improve local awareness"). The MET is investigating this critically urgent situation, which requires increased conservation awareness activities in the areas concerned and, if necessary, appropriate law enforcement action.



Total wet- and dry-season counts of Blue Cranes for Etosha and Lake Oponono, 1992-2012.

**Ringed birds & telemetry**

Once more our intrepid ringing team excelled itself, capturing and ringing the two surviving chicks. This brings the total number of chicks ringed to 24 to date:

- NAO – Salvadora plains (20/3/12)
- NAR – Namutoni causeway/Fischer's Pan (20/3/12)

Of the five pairs observed, at least the following birds were ringed:

- NHH (5 years old) & another ringed bird – at Sueda
- NBZ (4 years old) at Namutoni causeway – produced two chicks of which one survived (compared to none in 2011); also see report and photographs by Pär Söderquist on p10-11.

The remains of NAE, an adult in moult fitted with a radio transmitter (151.330) at Halali seepage on on 6/4/11, were found near Salvadora on 20/3/12, with the radio still transmitting.

The satellite transmitter (no. GC008) fitted to a large, just-fledging juvenile (NAG) east of Salvadora on 7/4/11 transmitted until 2/5/11, after which unfortunately no further signals were received. The fate of the bird is not known, as the transmitter has not been recovered.



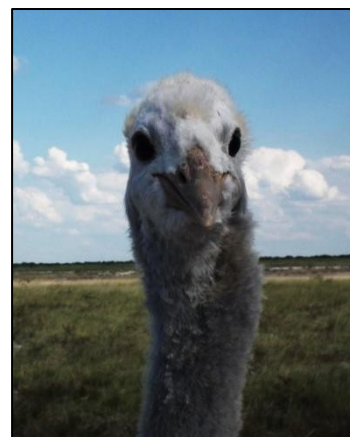
Above: One of a pair of ringed birds at Sueda, NHH – five years old, but no chicks were recorded this year.



Above: Part of our intrepid ringing team, weighing the chick at Salvadora plains.  
Below: The team with the chick at Namutoni Causeway.



Above: Wilferd Versveld picks up a signal from the radio transmitter of NAE near Salvadora ...  
Below: ... but these sad remains are all that is found of the bird (photos Ann Scott)



### What next?

After much discussion, we have now identified four major actions as imperative in order to ensure the survival of the remaining Blue Cranes in Namibia:

- To continue with our efforts to fit one or more Blue Cranes with satellite telemetry to determine which areas they visit outside the Park, as a means to identifying possible threats in these areas;
- To monitor numbers during both the wet season and the dry season (when the cranes are more concentrated around water points), to obtain a more accurate total population estimate;
- To follow up on the reports of hunting of Blue Cranes in areas outside the Park, with appropriate law enforcement where necessary; and
- To increase awareness and educational activities to address the illegal hunting of cranes and other birds outside the Park.

### Acknowledgements

A big thank you to MET, especially Wilferd Versfeld and Holger Kolberg for their ongoing enthusiasm and assistance with organising the logistics for this fieldwork, including the fueling of the aircraft; and to Seth Guim and Sageus Garieseb for their willing assistance in the field, especially with the capture of the crane chicks. We also wish to thank the Wilderness Wildlife Trust, Ramsar Small Grants Fund and Mathias Stein & Barbara Hudoc for co-funding the census; Paul van Schalkwyk for making an aircraft available; Nad Brain for the safe and dedicated flying and delicious campfire dinners; Hanjo Böhme for his encouragement and support; and John Mendelsohn for his ongoing assistance with the satellite tracking data. A special thank you, and well-deserved congratulations, to Polytechnic student Teofelus Ntinda and NEWS-Namibia for gathering further information and promoting awareness about crane conservation (see below).

Photographs on left, top to bottom: Large expanses of water in the eastern parts of the Pan (1) and at Lake Oponono (2); The cranes appear to favour Fischer's Pan under these conditions, when the rain creates varied wetland habitats (3); the group of seven non-breeding birds was found far into the wetland habitats on Fischer's Pan (4), once again demonstrating the necessity for combining the ground count with an aerial survey for the census (*photos Ann Scott*)

## FUNDING UPDATE

### Generous donations from our supporters in Germany

The Namibia Blue Crane Project has been very fortunate to receive a generous donation of N\$5000 (EUR 500) from **Mathias Stein and his wife Barbara Hudec**, both from Germany. This gesture stems from Mathias's participation in the April 2011 crane count, on invitation of Hanjo Böhme. Mathias thereafter facilitated a matching donation (amounting to N\$5035) from the **Hessische Gesellschaft für Ornithologie und Naturschutz e.V.** (HGON; [www.hgon.de](http://www.hgon.de)), through Dieter Kositschik. HGON is a charitable organisation in Germany that supports protection and research work on birds.

Our sincere thanks for this generous support for our crane work! We hope to use these finds for much-needed crane awareness work.

### Flight Paths for Wetland Flagships: a two-year grant from the Environmental Investment Fund of Namibia

The Namibia Crane and Wetlands Working Group (in collaboration with the NamPower/NNF Strategic Partnership) is proud to report that its application to the Environmental Investment Fund (EIF) of Namibia for a project entitled "Flight Paths for Wetland Flagships", has recently been approved. The EIF has granted an amount of N\$311 080 over two years, with match funding for a total of N\$254 500 mainly from the NamPower/NNF Strategic Partnership ([www.nnf.org.na/nampowerproject.htm](http://www.nnf.org.na/nampowerproject.htm)) and the Nedbank Go Green Fund (see our previous issue, No. 48 May 2011, p10 for further details) and supported by the Ministry of Environment and Tourism.

The overall goal of the project is to track the flight paths of flagship wetland bird species in order to address major conservation issues outside protected areas.

The objectives are to:

1. Track the flight paths of flagship wetland bird species, namely Blue Cranes and Lesser and Greater Flamingo.
2. Continue to monitor numbers and breeding success of Blue Cranes, and investigate the seasonal and local abundance of flamingos.
3. Investigate the mitigation of power lines on identified flamingo flight paths.
4. Publicise the results to promote awareness of the plight of these flagship wetland bird species.

#### Project rationale:

Large birds such as cranes and flamingos are universally regarded as flagships for wetland conservation.

Unfortunately these species are not confined to protected areas. Nomadic migratory species may encounter threats in unprotected areas, including snaring/hunting and collisions with power lines. As an aid to mitigating these problems, there is a need to determine the flight paths of flagship wetland bird species more precisely so that problem areas can be identified and targeted for further action.

It is imperative to establish conclusively exactly how many Blue Cranes remain in Namibia; and which areas they move to when they leave Etosha, so that awareness efforts to address threats can be focussed amongst the local communities involved. Because of the expense of applying mitigation measures for both old and new power lines, it is also necessary to establish flamingo flight paths in order to investigate specific sites/routes for mortalities; to confirm whether there is a problem or not and, if so, of the scope of the impacts; and to feed the information to power line planners and EIA practitioners in terms of planning for new power lines. With the mining expansion on the coast and the associated increase in the need for power, this aspect is particularly pertinent, in order to promote sustainable development.

The increasing public interest in these flagship species is also having a ripple effect on environmental conservation in broader terms, to the benefit of these communities in terms of the long term sustainability of the habitats they live in and are dependent upon for survival.

The EIF grant is in the process of being handed over, and we look forward to bringing you further news of this exciting ground-breaking initiative in our next issue.

**Our sincere thanks to all our donors and supporters for their invaluable financial and other contributions to our projects!**



**NamPower/NNF Strategic Partnership**



## **POLYTECHNIC STUDENT PROJECT: Investigation into the decline of the only breeding Blue Crane population in Namibia, to assess human impacts and to improve local awareness**



Third-year Polytechnic student Teofelus Vulika Ntinda.

In the previous issue of this newsletter (No. 48, May 2011, p8) we mentioned that a project was being initiated by third-year Polytechnic student Teofelus Vulika Ntinda, under the tutorship of Shirley Bethune and mentored by Wilferd Versfeld of the MET Etosha Ecological Institute (EEI). This project was kindly sponsored by NEWS-Namibia ([www.NEWS-Namibia.org](http://www.NEWS-Namibia.org)), facilitated by Peter Cunningham, and took place from July to October 2011. We would like to congratulate Teo and his team on a job well done!

### **Project objectives**

The main objectives of the study were to investigate possible human impacts on Blue Cranes in their habitats outside the ENP and to improve awareness about the importance, vulnerability and conservation of Blue Cranes within their feeding range.

To achieve this, the specific objectives were:

1. To conduct surveys to determine human activities likely to impact on Blue Cranes or their habitat within the Omadhiya Lake System area to the North of the ENP.
2. To investigate the attitudes of people towards Blue Cranes and the possible use of Blue Cranes either as food or for medicine.

3. To improve environmental education and awareness about the importance, vulnerability and conservation of Blue Cranes in the area.
4. To develop practical recommendations to the Ministry of Environment and Tourism (MET) the Crane Working Group, the Namibian Environmental and Wildlife Society (NEWS) and the Wetland Working Group of Namibia for future conservation of Blue Cranes in Namibia.

### **The conclusions of this study are summarised below**

The main objectives of this study were met: The objective of investigating possible human impacts on Blue Cranes in their habitats outside ENP was met by, firstly getting a better understanding (through the interviews) of human activities likely to impact on Blue Cranes or their habitat in their feeding area (North of ENP) and, secondly by a better knowledge about which people are living in the area, either permanently or temporarily for example those who were settling in the area for fishing.

The objective of improving awareness about the birds was achieved both as a result of the field-work and due to directly speaking to people living in the area about Blue Cranes, their importance, vulnerability and the need to conserve this species. This can be further improved by ongoing future awareness campaigns.

Specifically it was found that:

- ✚ Human activities are likely to impact on Blue Cranes and their habitat within the Omadhiya Lake System area to the north of the ENP. There is an increase in human population (more permanent structures e.g. building) over the last 8 years and this has increased human activities (farming, burning, fencing, hunting, snaring and fishing) that could be destroying the Blue Cranes habitat and so contributing to driving them away.
- ✚ The good rainfall over the past 5 years, this has stimulated a good grass growth, increasing the fuel load biomass, which could easily catch fire and spread quickly. This has resulted in both food and habitat loss for Blue Crane.



Environmental education (Blue Cranes discussion) in progress  
(photo E. Johannes)

- ✚ Most of the community members interviewed couldn't recognise the Blue Cranes but their attitude and interest was good. Some people know the information and had a background of what we were talking about but were not prepared to let us know about the traditional uses. Most, 77% refused totally to give us any information.
- ✚ The communities have much respect for the traditional healers, hence, they would not direct us to the traditional healers houses, even though they were very likely in the area. This could be because of fear or respecting their cultural beliefs (you don't just give directions to important people).
- ✚ Only 1/5 of the people approached to be interviewed were happy about the investigation, they took part and co-operated well during the survey period. Yet many more showed keen interest at the Ongwediva Trade Fair. Environmental education and awareness about the importance, vulnerability and conservation of Blue Cranes among communities was achieved, through one on one interviews, meetings held with groups of 30-80 people (community mobilizing), pamphlets and radio talks.
- ✚ At the three public meetings, people showed interest and asked questions. Interestingly, they wanted to know why they had not been informed over the past years to assist were they could. During the Ongwediva annual trade fair people showed keen interest and willingness to help. This is encouraging that everyone is concerned and willing to offer his/her contribution to assist in the future.
- ✚ Blue Cranes play a role traditionally as they are used as food, medicine and to predict a good harvest. The feathers are used for arrows and as decoration. Even though they use a quite painful method to catch them it's known to be quite successful.
- ✚ Based on both the scientific data on the Blue Crane and communities views and suggestions, as a result of meetings and time we spent together a list practical recommendations could be drawn up for the Ministry of Environment and Tourism (MET), the Namibia Crane Working Group, the Namibian Environmental and Wildlife Society (NEWS), The Wetland Working Group of Namibia and all communities' members for future conservation of the Blue Cranes in Namibia. It is hoped that the study will continue and some of these recommendations implemented in the near future.

### Acknowledgements

My genuine thanks go to Mr Wilferd Versfeld, my mentor, for his enthusiasm, commitment, project

editing, and for his time, Thanks very much to Mr Leonard Hango for allowing me to conduct my field activities with Ilishana sub-basin Management Committee (IBMC), I acknowledge the active sponsorship support from Namibian Environmental and Wildlife Society. Thank you to Dr Ann Scott, Mike Scott, Ms Shirley Bethune, my Tutor, and Mr Willem Adank for their dedication and joint effort to make this project a reality. Thank you also to the Ministry of Environment and Tourism, Directorate of Scientific Services for allowing me to be based at Okaukuejo. Thank you to Mr Elia Johannes, Mr Johannes Nekomba, Mr Ferish Ferish for helping me out with the data collection and Mr Tony Heald for the picture and finally to Mr Johannes Kapner for his support. May God bless you all.



Top: Cattle herders encountered during the survey  
(photo E. Johannes)

Centre: Raising awareness at Okalunga kaDaniel  
(photo T.V. Ntinda)

Bottom: A fisherman (61 years old) busy organising his net while the interview is in progress (photo E. Johannes)

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## BLUE CRANE SIGHTINGS AND BUILD-UP TO THE SUMMER 2011-2012 BREEDING SEASON

For record purposes we include full details of all reports received – and thank our contributors!

### *A record from the previous breeding season ...*

**Shirley & Jenni Bethune** (bethune@iway.na)

**16/1/11:** We saw the nesting cranes at Salvadora (14:45) and at wetland (gravel pit/causeway with water) near Batia (13.00) on 16/1/11, females sitting (on eggs/nesting?) and males foraging.

**Wilferd Versfeld** (wversfeld@met.na)

**17/5/11:** Seems some cranes are on the walkabout, I checked the whole detour along the pan edge etc. and did telemetry all the way but could not pick up NHM and NAG. They started moving last year this time. Checked the area of last PTT point also. NAE is still at Halali Seepage, did not see them due to grass but were south of the road and then later on edge of pan. Springbokfontein saw the two adults but no chick. Doring Draai has seven birds. Groups of 5 + 2 but no rings, could be the Chudop pair as one is smaller. The group of five is very skittish as when you stop to look they fly off. Found the causeway pair at the west end of the runway. Did not find the Aroe group. A ranger reported one crane at Pan Point waterhole last Thursday 12/5/11.

**Polimo** (on Flickr, contributed by Teuns & Ina Jansson, email teunsjansson@yahoo.com)

**21/5/11**



**Peter Cunningham** (pckkwrc@yahoo.co.uk)

**24/5/11:** I flew over the western Etosha and Owambo-land (NW of park) area some time ago for a job I was doing and wonder if the pans there - i.e. Amarica, etc. area would not be worthwhile including in future surveys!?

**Wilferd Versfeld**

**27/5/11:** NHM has gone walkabout, have not been able to pick up signal. Halali Seepage (NAE) is all there, still south of road, all four and not very scared.

**Wilferd Versfeld**

**9/6/11:** Went looking for them cranes yesterday. The Salvadora group is on a walkabout, could not pick up a signal yesterday. Ortwin flew up to Namutoni over the weekend and did not pick up signal, so maybe they have gone to Oponono already but we can't get there as the place is still flooded.

The Halali seepage group (NAE) is still there, very happy and calm, could get close to them unlike the Salvadora group. They feed in the tall grass south of the road close to the shrubs, would that be for escape? Only found the Springbokfontein pair with no chicks and no other cranes, and went as far as Andoni and Twee Palms.

The pan is still getting floodwater as at Namutoni causeway the water is flowing east into Fischer's Pan and the road at Pan Edge and Doring Draai is under water. Lots of flamingo at Halali side also.

I checked the areas of the last positions of the PTT but that is out on the pan edge so could not see anything.

**22/8/11:** Found no cranes at Oponono and only 17 at Andoni, but then the WPS reported some at the Oshigambo river but could not give a number.

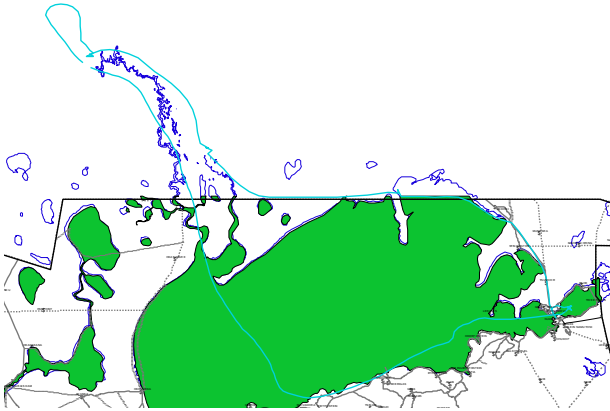
**Wilferd Versfeld**

**6/10/11:** There are 11 cranes on Andoni, **NO** radio collars or signals in area. James, the first satellite-tagged crane is in the group again. There were three chicks and eight adults, two chicks are the Charitsaub pair, rings NAI and NAJ with another one not ringed. Other ringed adults are NHH and NHF. They were tame as I could approach fairly close to them at the Andoni gravel pit, over midday when they were cooling down in the water.

**27/10/11:** There are now 29 cranes at Andoni on the plains and at the inside gravel pit which still has water. These include the ringed birds, NHD (2006) parent of NAC, NAD (2011), who bred at Halali seepage. The other parent with radio is missing, no sign and no signal at Andoni. Also there were NHF (2006), NHH (2007), NBN & NBW (2008), NAI & NAJ (2011) ringed at Charitsaub. There are four juvenile birds not ringed, which could be from west of Aroe and two more from wherever. James, the first satellite-tagged bird I saw there on 4/10/11 is not there, and the four Salvadora birds are not there and the other radio bird is not there, so if we add these on we are back at the 35 of last year.



## Wilferd Versfeld



**7/11/11:** I was able to do the radio tracking for the Blue Cranes last Thursday (3/11/11) with Mark Jago (see map above). Sad to say we could not locate any signals of the three collared cranes. Mark is also an experienced radio tracker and pilot so we tried all the tricks in the book, went up to Oponono, the grass plains etc.

I also went to Andoni and found 35 cranes, but no radio collars and no James (first satellite collar). During the week two cranes were seen at Namutoni, but were not seen on Thursday so it appears that they are moving around again.

To summarise the radio-tagged birds: Salvadora (Polly 1) NHM, was ringed and collared in 2009, it returned each year and last year bred and reared two chicks, of which we could only catch one and put on the PTT (NAG) which has not been seen since they left Salvadora in mid-April. Halali Seepage bird, NHD (2006) lost the chick last year, this year reared two chicks NAC, NAD and the mate (the flightless adult) got a radio collar. They left Seepage on about beginning of July. Now NHD and chicks NAC, NAD are at Andoni, so this looks too much of a coincidence that two radio collars have not turned up. NBZ which reared two chicks west of Aroe is at Andoni with two chicks which are unringed.

**Immanuel Kapofi** (kimmanuel@yahoo.com)

**16/11/11:** Good news to our birds in Etosha at this stage: I have counted 30 Blue Cranes near Andoni water hole, just next to the the road. I was so happy by seeing the bunch of them near and among springbok group. On 28/11/11 I have sighted a single Blue Crane outside of the Park near King Nehale gate. This bird was feeding alone with no domestic animals present about four kilometers from the main gate. Rains are promising well in this region. So far: in October 2011 we have received 10.2mm while in November 2011 we have received 53.2mm. Grass is too long on the plain where Blue Cranes are residing. Thus, it is very difficult to spot out chicks if there are some if you see them far away.

We had huge fire on the other side of the road but did not reach where cranes used to congregate. I believe that huge fires pose an impact on Blue Crane population too. Thus, possible those cranes that used to be sighted near Salvadora have moved to Namutoni/unburned open area. With the little rain we have received, most game was observed drinking from the surface in Etosha Pan.

**Neil Thomson** (batqs@mweb.com.na)

**2/1/12:** Herewith our Blue crane sightings in Etosha on 29/12/2011.

One bird on south side of Fischer's Pan. Observers' position 18°48.049'S 16°55.214'E Bird about 300 - 400 m east of this position. Too far away to see if ringed.

Two birds on north side of Fischer's Pan. Observers' position 18°45.192'S 16°56.899'E Birds about 150 m south of this position. Could not determine if either was ringed.

Two birds at Twee Palms Waterhole. Observers' position 18°45.883'S 17°01.779'E. One bird sitting – incubating? Standing bird not ringed.

Two birds next Namutoni/Halali main road on Chudop plains. Observers' position 18°50.168'S 16°54.687'E. Birds about 15 m south of road. No rings seen.

One bird next to Namutoni/Halali main road on Chudop plains. Observers' position 18°49.819'S 16°55.169'E. Bird about 15 m south of road. No rings seen.

**Lisa Berl** (info@compass-marketing-namibia.com)

**2/1/12:** We saw this pair of Blue Cranes at Etosha's Springbokfontein – and as you can hopefully make out in the pic, there seems to be either a nest in the rocks or they are just resting there.

*Ed: This pair was on a nest but no chicks were recorded.*



**Wilferd Versfeld**

**19/1/12:** Was at Halali and picked up the signal of the Seepage bird (large flightless bird, radio frequency 151.331 last year) at Salvadora last week at the water with another on nest. Did not have telescope to read ring. Nothing at Seepage.

Today went again and saw bird and read colour ring NHM, which is the Salvadora bird Polly 1 (151.191), with signal of 151.331, used both telemetry sets. Very confusing I have never heard that collars can change a frequency that much,

more often one up or down but not that much. What is more interesting is where have they been as I tried and flew looking for them but could not hear them. There was one bird with colour ring at Seepage but was too far to read. And the good news is that Salvadora has one very small chick, probably a day or so old.

**Wilferd Versfeld**

**27/1/12:** Completed the wetland count yesterday and have some good news and bad news. The bad news is that it appears Springbokfontein should be re-named "Bad Luck Fontein" as the two cranes were not on the nest island yesterday and were feeding in the water and resting on a sand bar during the midday sun, when they should be shading the eggs or chicks. They had no chicks with them.

The good news is that Seepage has one chick only, so far?, and NHD has teamed up with another partner, also ringed but not sure if it was NBN as it was a bit far in the wet area. Salvadora has one chick only and I could not read the ring to make sure it was NHM as it was a bit far. Still picking up the radio signal of the flightless adult from Seepage (151.331) at Salvadora. The Chudop pair are still walking about and at Namutoni causeway to the east on an island there is another pair breeding. At least this year they chose an island.

**Pete Hancock** (birdlifemaun@gmail.com)

BirdLife Botswana, www.birdlifebotswana.org.bw

**8/2/12:** I met Kenneth /Uiseb from MET here in Maun yesterday, and had an interesting chat with him. It reminded me that I had not responded to you regarding the possible Blue Cranes seen on Chief's Island recently. To cut a long story short, I looked into the matter quite thoroughly and regrettably there were no Blue Cranes there. Not sure how the confusion arose, but I am convinced that none of your birds are ending up here – there are no Blue Cranes left in Botswana.

Your birds could be going to South Africa, where they would not be noticed, but I suspect that they are dying of old age - they are long-lived birds and the Etosha population is probably just being maintained by longevity. I think this is what happened here in Botswana – we had sightings of the same birds in the past, until one-by-one they died of old age and the population simply faded away.

**Wilferd Versfeld**

**12/3/12:** Rainfall for 2011 was good as there was over 100 mm of rain for 4 months, January to April; the total for the season was 704 mm.

There is one chick at Namutoni causeway, Halali Seepage I cannot find and Salvadora still has one chick, Springbokfontein no chick.



**Pär Söderquist** (par.soderquist@hkr.se)

**13/3/12:** My girlfriend and I just got back from a trip in Namibia. When we were in Etosha we saw a couple of Blue Cranes with a chick (see above) that got attacked **PTO**



by two black-backed jackals. Luckily the cranes got away.  
One of the adults was also banded (NBZ; see left). The observation occurred on 26/2/12 at 17h30.  
Location: on the east side of the road west of Fischer's Pan, just north of Namutoni.

Two jackals approached the family, one of them tried to attack but the banded crane ran towards it flapping its wings and the jackal retreated. After that the crane family and the jackals went in different directions.  
Ed: The ringing of this chick is also mentioned on p3.

**Hanjo Böhme** (email [gmbhanjo@iway.na](mailto:gmbhanjo@iway.na)) and Ann & Mike Scott  
Pair of Blue Cranes at Fischer's Pan: north-east on 20/3/12; no chicks were recorded.



**Nacho Aransay** ([nachoaransay@hotmail.com](mailto:nachoaransay@hotmail.com))  
**21/4/12:** Back from Etosha, I only saw two couples of cranes, one in northern Fischer's Pan and one at Salvadora, but no chicks at all. None of the four (adult) birds was ringed.

## WATTLED CRANE AND CROWNED CRANE NEWS

**Kerryn Morrison** ([kerrynm@ewt.org.za](mailto:kerrynm@ewt.org.za))  
**8/2/12:** Grey Crowned Cranes have been preliminarily accepted for uplisting from Vulnerable to Endangered globally (IUCN Red List; this list has been posted up on the GTB Forum at <http://www.birdlife.org/globally-threatened-bird-forums/2012/02/preliminary-decisions-for-2012-red-list/>).

**Holger Kolberg** ([holgerk@mweb.com.na](mailto:holgerk@mweb.com.na))  
Trends in numbers of Wattled Cranes – and Great and Lesser Flamingos – in Namibia, 1997-2008 are reported in *Lanioturdus* 45 (1) February 2012 (Trends in Namibian Waterbird Populations 6: Spoonbill, Hamerkop, Flamingos and Cranes).

## Sightings

Three Crowned Cranes (18 15S 15 45E) and two Wattled Cranes (18 15S 15 45E) were recorded in the Lake Oponono area during the annual wet-season crane survey (see above).

**John Mendelsohn** ([john@raison.com](mailto:john@raison.com))

**21/3/12:** Wattled Crane sighting at Lake Oponono (18.291S 15.897E).



**Sonja Krueger** ([skruger@kznwildlife.com](mailto:skruger@kznwildlife.com)) via Kerryn Morrison

17/7/11: Please find the coords of a sighting of a pair of nesting Wattled Crane in the Caprivi in case it is of interest to you: 18 degrees 11.408 S 21 degrees 46.105 E. They were quite far away so the photo is not great.



## NEWS FLASHES

### New bird newsletter for Namibia

Holger Kolberg (namibbirdnews@gmail.com)

A new bird newsletter for Namibia is available! It can be downloaded for free from this link:

<http://www.namibiabirdclub.org/newsletter.html>

Congratulations to the Namibia Bird Club on its 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary this month!



### Ramsar: World Wetlands Day 2012



Sandra Hails (hails@ramsar.org;

[www.ramsar.org/CEPA-Programme](http://www.ramsar.org/CEPA-Programme))

Our World Wetlands Day theme for 2012 was on **Wetlands and Tourism**. This theme is linked to the theme for the next meeting of the Conference of the Parties ("Wetlands, Tourism and Recreation"), COP11, which will take place in June

2012, hosted by Romania.

Sustainable tourism both in and around wetlands can bring many benefits to countries from national to local community level but, as we know, unsustainable tourism practices can also have negative impacts on wetlands and the people they support. And of course there are positives and negatives from the point of view of wildlife too! To date the Ramsar Convention has not had any specific focus on wetlands and tourism and, with the upcoming WWD and COP11, the time is right to turn our attention to this important issue.

### More on cranes and uintjies (Cyperaceae)

Marina Beal Nama Karoo Foundation

([info@namakaroo.org](mailto:info@namakaroo.org))

**May 2011:** My favourite item in your last newsletter was the part about the uintjies/wildebeest/crane connection (see previous issue, May 2011). Here in the Karoo (South Africa) the area was commented on by Burchell for its fields of uintjies. The veld here has now entered its almost fourth year of rest so we shall see if that has an impact on the uintjies and cranes...

We have abundant uintjies...but never thought that resting veld could have a negative impact so will watch out for it. I always thought the rotavator effect of the crane action helps the bulbs keep multiplying like one does with irises ...

**27/6/11:** Here is something interesting ... in SA we had the highest Blue Crane counts last year (2010). This year, we are only at about 600. Flippy Loch is east of Graaff-Reinet and he said he thinks the uintjies had a bad season with all the rain but the "bloutulp" thrived near him (poisonous to livestock they say, but good for cranes to eat). So (with few years observation into it) we think there may be a reason why Flippy's area and our area seem to alternate between having the big crane bounty each year. Clearly those little bulbs have a role to play everywhere!

### Who's looking at our website?

[www.nnf.org.na/CRANES.htm](http://www.nnf.org.na/CRANES.htm)

Alice Jarvis, our webmaster, informs us that in March 2012 our website received 51 visits from 21 countries/territories:

123 Pageviews

2.41 Pages/Visit

56.86% Bounce Rate

00:01:08 Avg. Time on Site

90.20% % New Visits

### No. of country/territory visits:

Indonesia 14

Namibia 6

United States 5

Sweden 5

South Africa 3

United Kingdom 2

Saint Vincent and the Grenadines 2

Australia 1

Syria 1

Belgium 1

A special thank you to Alice for keeping our website up to date – please visit it if you have not yet done so!



Large flocks of flamingos were observed on Etosha Pan during the March 2012 survey, but no nests were recorded

(photo Ann Scott)