

Status of Wattled Cranes on the floodplains of north-east Namibia: results from an aerial survey during September 2007

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Areas surveyed

The Okavango River in Namibia, from the Angolan border just northwest of the bridge on the Trans-Caprivi highway south to the Botswana border; the entire length of the Kwando-Linyanti-Lake Liambezi-Chobe system, including the whole Mamili National Park; and the Zambezi River for its entire length on Namibia's border, including parts of the adjacent East Caprivi floodplains, were surveyed from the air in September 2007 (Figure 1). The same methods were used as for the Caprivi wetlands aerial survey in 2004 (Chase 2007, Stander 2004). Strip widths of 250 m on each side of the aircraft were counted, at an altitude of 90 m. The survey was flown by means of a total count with transects 500 m apart, providing a 100% sampling coverage. Detailed flight paths are shown in Figure 2. We report here on the number of Wattled Cranes observed, and compared this to the August 2004 survey (Brown *et al.* 2004).

Figure 1. Layout of five strata for the north-east aerial survey

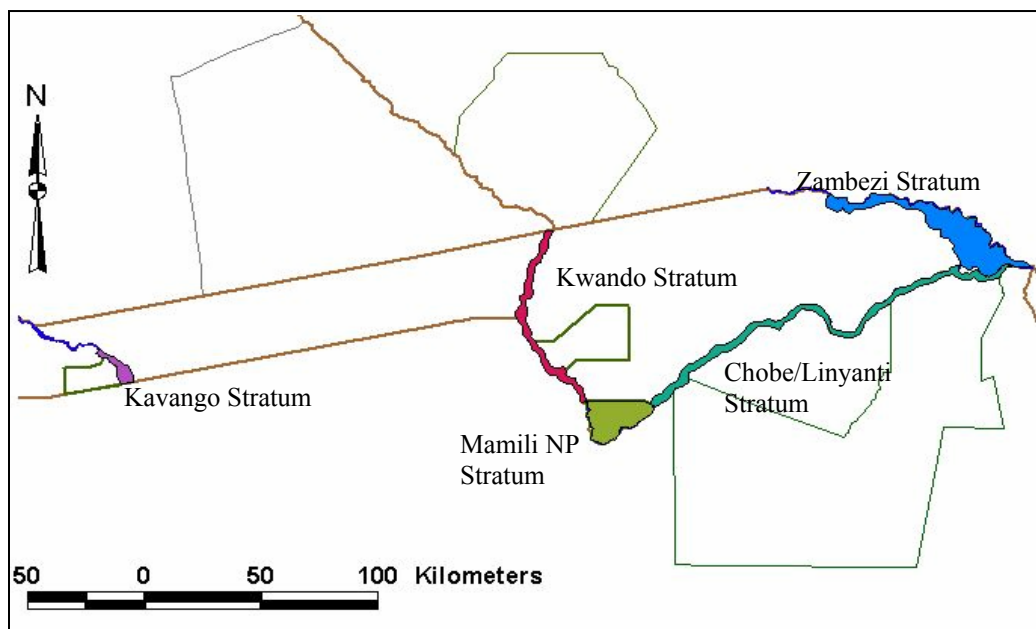
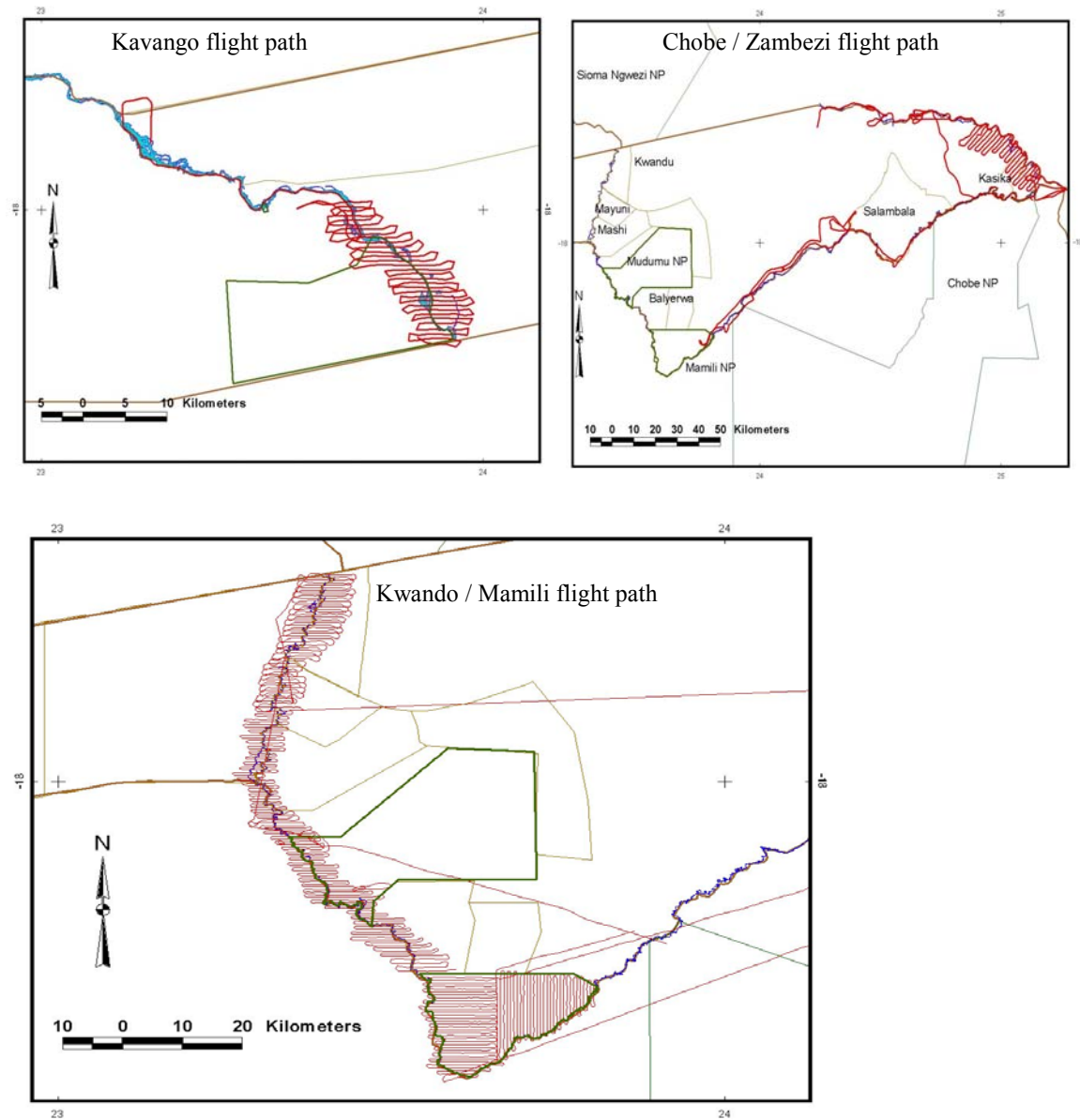


Figure 2. Recorded track log of flight paths during the survey



Results & Discussion

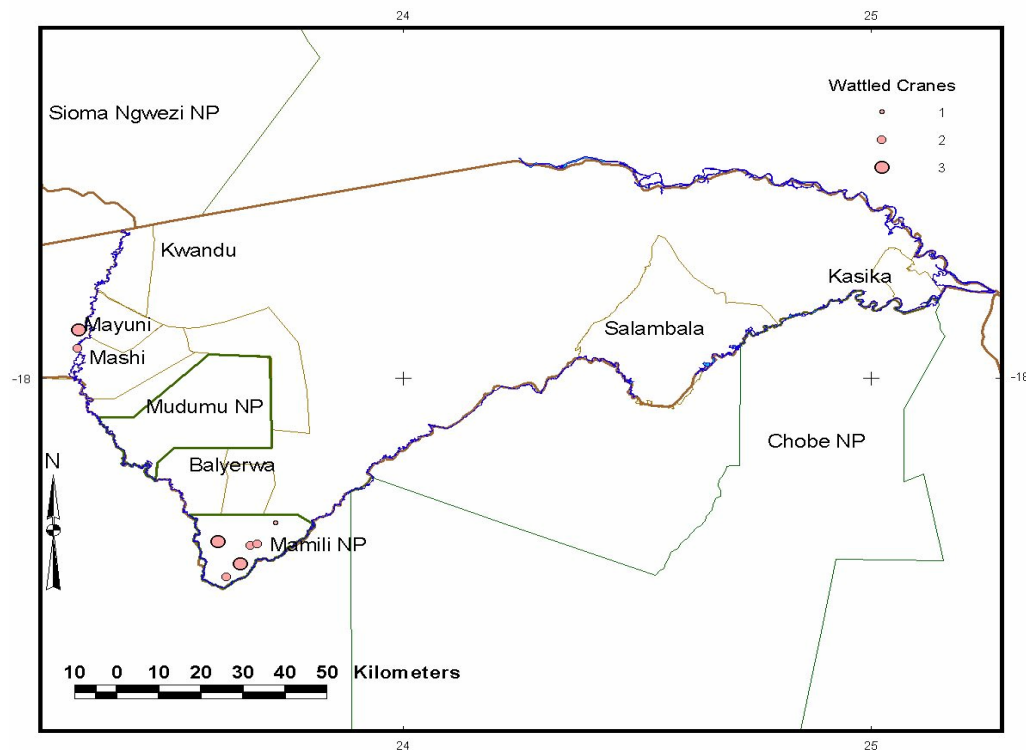
Eleven Wattled Cranes were recorded in the Mahango / Buffalo area on the lower Kavango floodplains. In 2004 four cranes were seen (Table 1).

Table 1. Numbers of Wattled Cranes counted in five strata on two aerial surveys (2004 and 2007) of the Caprivi river systems, Namibia.

Species	Survey Stratum and Species Counted										Total	
	Linyanti/Chobe		Kwando		Mamili NP		Zambezi		Kavango		2004	2007
Year	2004	2007	2004	2007	2004	2007	2004	2007	2004	2007		
Wattled Crane	8	0	0	5	8	13	0	0	4	11	20	29

Eighteen Wattled Cranes were recorded in the East Caprivi compared to 20 in 2004 (Figure 3). Most (13) were seen in the Mamili National Park (eight in 2004), and five on the western side of the Kwandu in the Bwabwata National Park. No cranes were seen on the Linyanti-Chobe east of Mamili (eight cranes seen in this stretch in 2004), and none on the Zambezi and eastern floodplains. In total, 29 Wattled Cranes were recorded in the north-eastern wetlands of Namibia in 2007 compared with 20 birds in 2004.

Figure 3. Distribution of Wattled Cranes during aerial survey of Caprivi River systems



Once again, this survey shows that there are no Wattled Cranes in large tracts of suitable habitat in conservancies and other communal areas. They are confined to the Mamili and Bwabwata National Parks. This coincides with the distribution patterns for other wetland species such as lechwe and reedbuck in this region. It is clear that there is still significant disturbance and persecution of wildlife in communal areas, including in conservancies, along the Kwandu system and presumably also along the Kavango and Zambezi systems. Wattled Cranes, lechwe and reedbuck are ideal indicator species to monitor levels of poaching and disturbance in these wetland systems.

Further work is needed within conservancies to achieve the management levels required to deliver conservation benefits for specialist wetlands species. This habitat and its associated species provide some of the main tourism attractions of the region, as well as important potential resources to conservancies. These components clearly need to receive more concerted focus and effective conservation action.

Acknowledgement

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References

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