

Crane Research Around the World:

**Proceedings of the International Crane
Symposium at Sapporo, Japan in 1980
and Papers from the World Working
Group on Cranes, International Council
for Bird Preservation**

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STATUS OF THE BLUE CRANE IN SOUTH AND SOUTHWEST AFRICA¹

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To obtain as much information as possible, a questionnaire was sent to the Department of Nature Conservation in each province and to other interested people. From the answers received and from personal field observations the following report has been compiled.

CAPE PROVINCE

Blue or Stanley cranes (*Anthropoides paradisea*) were present throughout the province, with a special concentration in the Eastern Cape. Flocks containing as many as 200 birds have been reported during the prebreeding season. Nesting occurred between October and January and young birds of different ages were present until May. Depredations on germinating maize occurred during October and November and maize cobs were damaged during March-May. Specific damage was reported from the Districts of Lady Grey and Cathcart. In the District of Cathcart birds were killed by poisoned seed. Shooting was also resorted to, sometimes to kill the birds, but mostly to chase them away.

NATAL

The cranes were found virtually throughout Natal province, except for the coastal districts. Sometimes flocks of up to 100 birds were seen in the prebreeding season. They nested widely in the Magisterial divisions of Underberg, Polela, Mpendhle, Lions River, Mooi River, Umvoti, Escourt, Weenen, Bergville, and Klip River. There were also breeding records in other divisions down to Hlabisa. Some damage was done to newly planted maize, but only during a short period by prenesting flocks. Cranes were occasionally killed by farmers, but this was believed to be of no consequence to the total population.

TRANSVAAL

The Department of Nature Conservation could not submit any information; consequently, the author relied on personal records and those of interested people. There was a fair distribution of cranes throughout the western parts of the province. Flocks of as many as 50 birds were seen in the prebreeding season. Nesting birds were reported during November to January, and young were reported as late as April.

No records of damage to crops were available, and there were no reports of killing these cranes.

ORANGE FREESTATE

Blue cranes occurred practically throughout the province. Flocks of 10 to 300 birds were observed, especially during the prebreeding season. Cranes nested from October to February. Damage to maize, wheat, and lucerne was reported. Gulleets of birds shot by farmers contained up to 250 g of germinating maize or ripe wheat. Flocks apparently damaged germinating maize only during October and damaged wheat just before harvesting. Crane gulleets also contained various insects, and possibly the damage done to farmers' lands was outweighed by the benefit derived from the cranes' feeding on insects harmful to crops. Cranes have been killed with poisoned seed, and more than 200 birds were killed in 1 incident.

SOUTHWEST AFRICA

The cranes were found north of south latitude 20° in Southwest Africa. Concentration of flocks differed from year to year. Nesting adults and young were seen during the summer months in the Districts of Ovambo and Ethosha. Crop depredations by cranes were not reported, and the killing of these cranes either by shooting or poisoning was not reported.

CONCLUSIONS

From the questionnaire responses I conclude that the blue crane population is healthy throughout South and Southwest Africa and is nowhere endangered. In only a few instances was it known that farmers killed birds, either by poisoned seed or shooting, but up to now these losses have posed no threat to the species.

Crop damage is caused by flocks gathering before or after the nesting period. There is, however, a trend developing whereby people keep these birds as pets in their gardens. Consequently, young African natives are encouraged to catch birds of all sizes. The number of cranes accidentally killed during capture or that died due to improper feeding is unknown. It seems, however, that the Department of Nature Conservation personnel are aware of the problem and are not issuing permits to rear cranes captured in this manner.

¹Article written in 1974.