



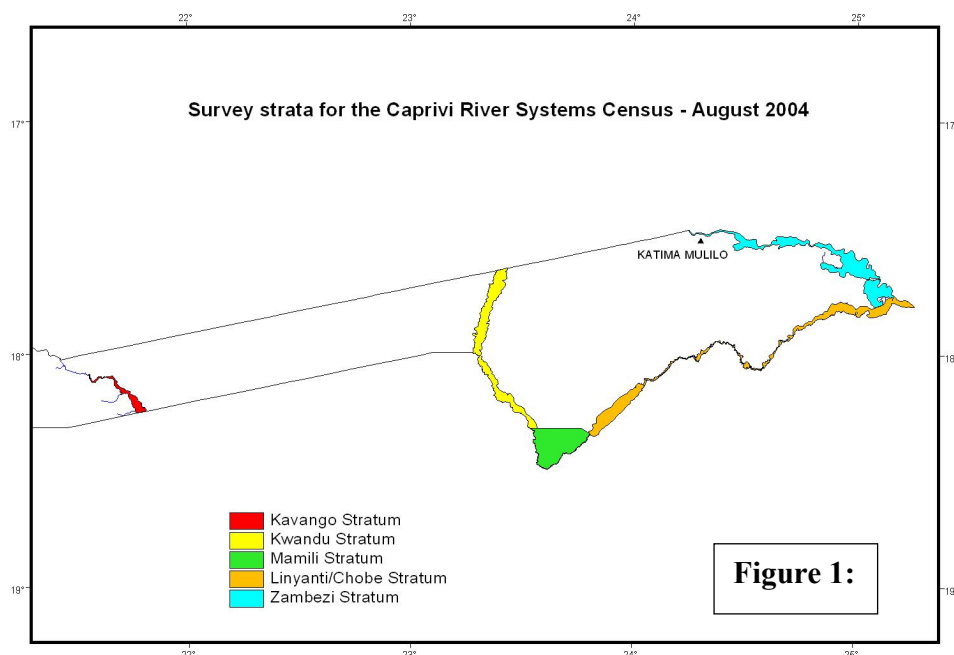
Status of Wattled Cranes on the floodplains of north-east Namibia: results from an aerial survey during August 2004

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Areas surveyed

The Okavango River in Namibia, from just northwest the bridge on the Trans-Caprivi highway south to the Botswana border; the entire length of the Kwandu-Linyanti-Lake Liambezi-Chobe system, including the Mamili National Park; and the Zambezi river for its entire length on Namibia's border, including parts of the adjacent East Caprivi floodplains (Figure 1).



Methods

An aerial census was conducted of the above systems, between 11 and 20 August 2004, using a Maule four-seater high wing aircraft. The census team consisted of a pilot, a recorder and two observers. A total count of water bodies and floodplains was carried out. The edges of the floodplains were demarcated using aerial photographs and satellite images, and the survey areas were then divided into 15 km² blocks. GPS and mobile GIS technology was used to cover each block intensively (Figures 2 & 3) and to plot each observation. The mean survey height above ground was between 255 and 304 ft, flying time amounted to a total of 36.5 hours (including ferry time) and the search rate ranged between 0.9 and 2.3 km²/min.

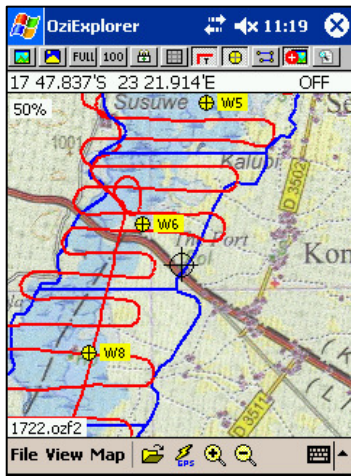


Figure 2: A handheld computer with digital mapping software, linked to a Bluetooth GPS, was used to navigate accurately within counting blocks. The live-capture image (left) depicts a 1:250 000 scanned topographic map as the background, with the counting block boundaries (blue lines), and the exact flight path of the aircraft (red lines). This high quality and accurate moving-map image, visible to both the pilot and the survey crew during flight, enabled good coverage of the survey blocks.

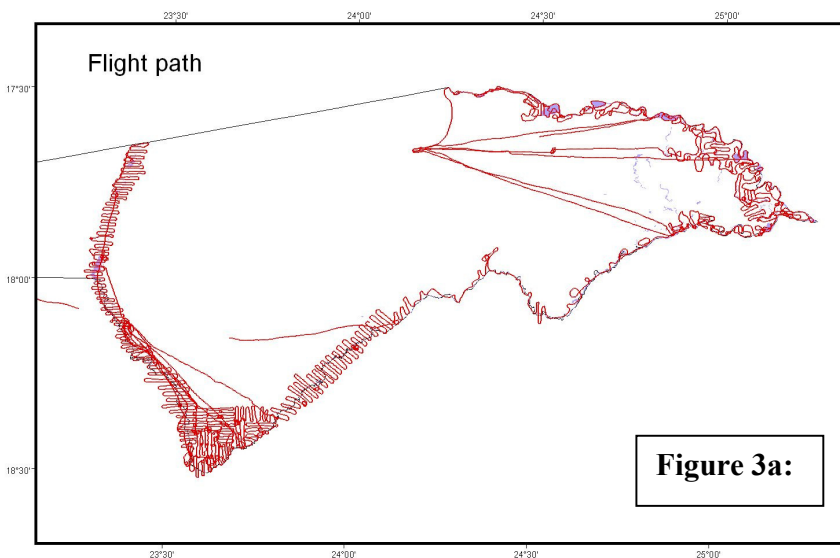


Figure 3a:

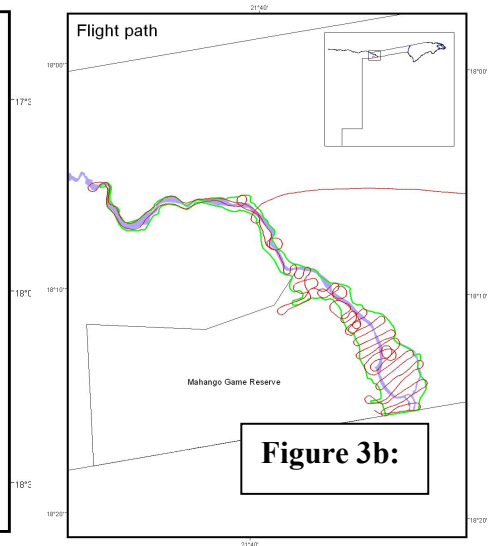


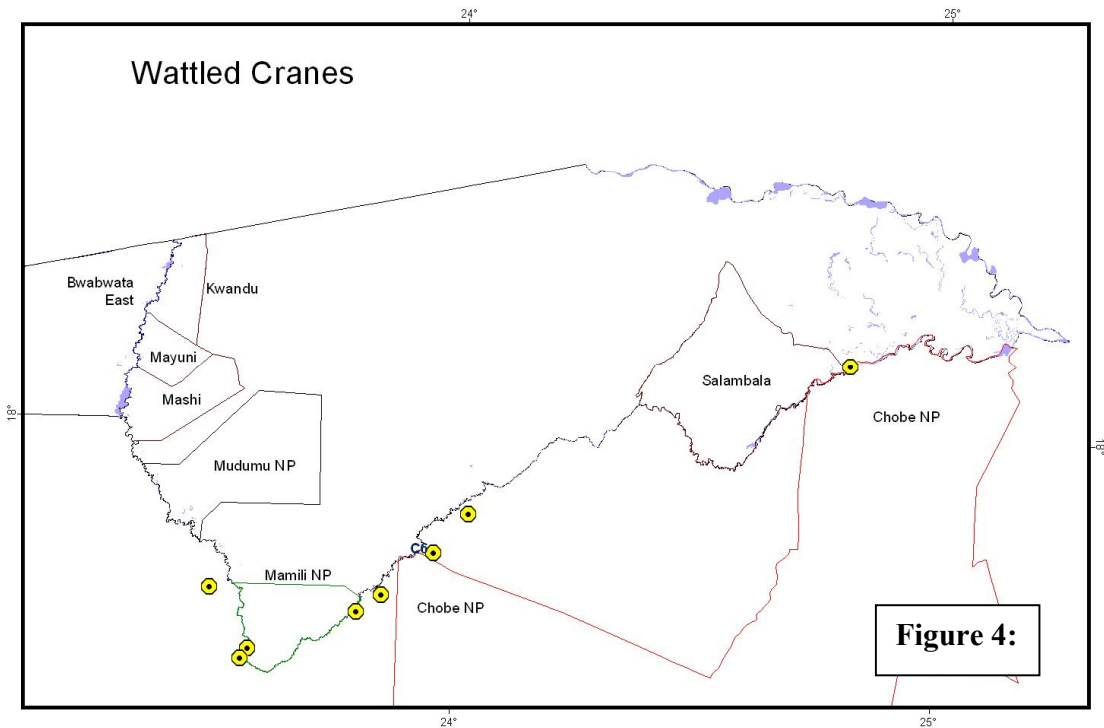
Figure 3b:

Results & Discussion

Two pairs of Wattled Cranes were recorded in the Mahango Game Park on the floodplains of the Okavango system and eight pairs in the East Caprivi. Four pairs were in the Mamili section (three pairs on the Kwandu floodplains and one on the Linyanti), three pairs on the Linyanti north-east of Mamili, and one on the Chobe system (Figure 4). In total, just 10 pairs of Wattled Cranes were recorded on the floodplains of north-east Namibia.

There is a clear concentration of Wattled Cranes near the southern ends of the Kwandu-Linyanti system, where the birds were mainly on the Botswana side of the floodplains. There were no Wattled Cranes in very suitable habitat from the Angola border to the Mamili National Park. This coincides with distribution patterns for other species of wildlife. It is clear that there is significant disturbance and persecution of wildlife on the Namibia side of the border, and Wattled Crane distributions further reflects this unhappy

situation. The conservancy programme and the work of the Ministry of Environment and Tourism are not delivering satisfactory results when it comes to floodplain species. The floodplain habitat and its fauna, which constitute some of the main attractions of the region, as well as an important production system and resource in that part of Namibia, clearly need to receive more concerted focus and effective conservation action.



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