
Red-Crowned Crane Fact Sheet (5/1/94)

Red-Crowned Crane (*Grus japonensis*)

Description: Also called the Japanese crane or the Manchurian crane, the red-crowned crane is a tall white bird with a black neck, black patches on its wings and red on top of its head. It stands almost five feet tall and has long legs and a long beak.

Range: Red-crowned cranes are found year-round on the Japanese island of Hokaido. Another population of cranes breeds in the Soviet Union and Manchuria and winters in coastal China and the Korean peninsula.

Habitat: Marshes and wetlands are needed for red-crowned crane nesting areas in summer, but in winter the cranes migrate to farmlands, coastal marshes and feeding stations.

Diet: It feeds mostly on wetland plants during the fall, winter and early spring; however, during the breeding season it feeds mostly on insects and other invertebrates.

Social Organization: Red-crowned cranes form lifelong breeding pairs and return to the same nest site year after year. They are well known for their courtship dances.

Conservation Status: There are about 1,500 red-crowned cranes left in the wild. They are listed as a vulnerable species by the IUCN Red Data Book, as endangered under Mace/Lando criteria, an endangered species by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and as an Appendix I species under CITES.

Threats to Survival: Although the population has stabilized somewhat as hunting of the birds for food in China has declined, new development projects in wetlands in Japan, China and the Soviet Union threaten to destroy their breeding areas. Their winter grounds in coastal China are threatened by a proposed dam on the Yangtze River. Along with habitat destruction, development also creates more electric power lines, which kill unknown numbers of birds each year. Despite protective laws, poaching continues to remain a problem. The concentration of cranes at winter feeding stations puts them at risk for the spread of disease.

Zoo Programs - SSP: There are currently about 700 red-crowned cranes in zoological facilities worldwide -- a third of all red-crowned cranes alive

today. Red-crowned cranes in North America are managed as a group with three other endangered crane species -- the wattled, white-naped and hooded cranes. Of the four crane species in the SSP program, the red-crowned crane is the most highly endangered. Regional I management programs exist in North America, Europe, China and Japan. The AZA crane SSP/TAG co-hosted a Global Animal Survival Plan for the red-crowned crane in China in 1993. This was the first attempt at a global captive management program for a bird species. The population is large enough to support regional programs with periodic exchange of birds.

Conservation: Feeding stations have been created in the crane's winter grounds in South Korea and Japan. This crane has been designated a National Monument in Japan and South Korea and is protected by law in North Korea and the Soviet Union, as well. Sanctuaries have been created in its winter feeding grounds as well. In Japan, fatal collisions with power lines have been reduced by half through the use of conspicuous markers on the lines.

Education: The red-crowned crane has been revered for centuries in Japan but it is only recently that more active conservation measures have been adopted to ensure its safety. It has evolved into a symbol for conservation throughout its range. Throughout the world the decline of cranes represents the entire disappearing wetlands ecosystem.

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