
WATTLED CRANE 98 Fact Sheet (7/1/98)

Wattled Crane (*Bugeranus carunculatus* *Bugeranus carunculatus*)

Description: The wattled crane is the largest crane in Africa, standing nearly six feet tall. It derives its name from the two white-feathered wattles on either side of its lower bill. It is a striking bird with its long white neck and black underside with grey on its back, and wings. There is no difference in the appearance of males and females.

Range: Wattled cranes formerly ranged over the entire southern third of Africa, but are now limited to areas of Namibia, Zimbabwe, Zambia, Botswana, Republic of Congo (formerly Zaire), Angola, Malawi, Mozambique and South Africa. A small and separate population is also found in Ethiopia.

Habitat: Swamps, marshes and other wetlands make up the crane's habitat.

Diet: The wattled crane will dig for the tubers of sedges (grass-like marsh plants) and also feeds on seeds and grains as well as amphibians.

Social Organization: Wattled cranes live in pairs, though young and non-breeding birds live in small flocks. Nesting sites are very scarce, and as soon as one becomes available, birds from the flock will pair off and nest. They prefer nest sites that are dry but are surrounded by water for protection. A favorite site will be used year after year by the same pair. Like many cranes, they perform elaborate ceremonial dances during courtship. Wattled cranes lay one or two eggs but usually raise only one offspring, which remains with its parents for up to a year.

Conservation Status: Perhaps between 5,000-10,000 wattled cranes exist in the wild. It is listed as threatened in the South African Red Data Book, CITES Appendix II.

Threats to Survival: The draining of wetlands for agricultural use or the flooding of these areas for hydroelectric dams and reforestation are the main threats to wattled crane survival. Cranes are also frequently killed by high wire power lines. In the past, poaching of eggs and chicks contributed to the species decline. Wattled cranes have the lowest reproductive rate for any crane species, and often only successfully raise a chick every other year. Human disturbance at nest sites is also a factor for nest failure.

Zoo Programs -- SSP: Almost 200 wattled cranes are held in zoological facilities worldwide, and nearly 85 of these are managed under the SSP. Recent years have seen progressive increases in the number of hatchings and few cranes are taken from the wild. Wattled cranes are managed in a group with three other crane species -- the white-naped, hooded and red-crowned cranes.

Education: Education programs in southern Africa nations are underway to encourage farmers and ranchers to protect cranes nesting on their property. Few cranes nest within protected reserves; most are found on private property.

Conservation: Studies have been done on the effect of hydroelectric projects in the region, although this does not always prevent their construction. South Africa has begun to establish a captive breeding program, from second eggs from wild nests. They are also importing captive hatched birds from the U.S. and Europe. Plans are underway to transfer captive produced eggs (U.S.) to South Africa for hatching, with release as a potential development.

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