
WHITE-NAPED CRANE 98 Fact Sheet (8/1/98)

White-Naped Crane (*Grus vipior*)

Description: The male and female white-naped crane, also called the white-necked crane, are almost identical in appearance. The face and forehead are bare, the facial skin is dark red. The rest of the head is white, extending to the throat in the front and to the base of the neck in the back. The gray color of its body runs along the sides of its neck in points. Its wings are black, white and gray while its long beak is greenish-yellow, and its legs and toes are pink.

Range: White-naped cranes are migratory birds that breed in Manchuria, Mongolia, and the Amur River basin of eastern Russia and winter along the Demilitarized Zone in South Korea, Poyang Lake in China and Kyushu, Japan.

Habitat: In the breeding areas, white-naped cranes inhabit marshes, wetlands and flooded meadows. In the winter they live in rice paddies, mudflats and brackish marshes.

Diet: White-naped cranes are primarily vegetarians which dig for sedge tubers, and also eat grass seeds, rice and wheat. They also eat some insects, worms, grubs and small aquatic animals.

Social Organization: These cranes are territorial and live in pairs during the summer breeding season. In winter the cranes feed and roost in small groups. Like many other cranes, white-naped cranes display elaborate courtship rituals, with distinct calls, jumping and wing-flapping. The birds' nest is usually on a small rise surrounded by water for protection from predators. Both the male and female take turns incubating the two eggs that are normally laid.

Conservation Status: The white-naped crane is the fourth rarest crane in the world and its population is estimated to range from 4900 to 5300 birds. During winter census, 2,000 birds have been counted in Japan, 200 in the Korean peninsula, and approximately 3,000 birds near Poyang Lake in China. The white-naped crane is listed as an Appendix I species by CITES and a vulnerable species by the IUCN Red Data Book. The birds are present in China year round; in Korea (north and south) during migration and winter; winter in Japan; and occur in Mongolia and Russia during the breeding season only.

Threats to Survival: Human persecution and habitat destruction are probably the main causes for its sinking numbers. The loss of wetland habitat in the breeding ranges due to agriculture expansion is a significant threat to the cranes. Often the habitat is being destroyed by grass fires, which causes nest and egg destruction. Other problems facing the breeding habitat is a series of dams being proposed, particularly in the Amur River basin. If built these dams will have a negative impact on the breeding grounds through flooding and increased agricultural development of the area. On their wintering grounds in Japan, the cranes face dangers from concentrated areas of cranes, which would increase the risk of a disease outbreak. Drainage for agriculture and development also threatens the wetlands that make up its winter grounds. Expansion and development along the Korean DMZ will negatively impact the wintering cranes and their critical wetland habitat.

Zoo Programs - SSP: There are currently 36 institutions participating in the SSP and are managing 90 birds in the North American region. The population is stable and is at its target population of 90 birds.

Growth is slow and only the most valuable genetic pairs have been recommended to breed. There are currently 29 founders and work continues to breed an unrepresented male founder in the population.

Conservation: The white-naped crane has been designated a national monument in both Korea and Japan, where sanctuaries have been created and supplemental feeding programs started. Although many cranes were killed during the Korean War, it now benefits from the shelter provided by the 39 km wide Demilitarized Zone.

Education: It is hoped that public education programs will encourage further crane conservation. We can reach zoo visitors through programs at the zoo and publicize our conservation efforts through the media to both a local and national audience.

Reintroduction: Since 1994, AZA institutions have been sending surplus white-naped crane eggs to Russia to be reared and released to the wild. The wild cranes in the Russian Far East are reluctant to use habitat near civilization. The biologists at Khinganski Nature Reserve hand rear the chicks and release them to the wild in their 2nd year. These tame or semi-wild cranes will pair up with the wild cranes and reclaim some of the habitat near human activity. Since this project started, semi-wild cranes have paired, migrated, and returned to Khinganski to rear young. The release protocol is being adjusted to decrease imprinting and socialization of the chicks on people.

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