



The Crane Call

Summer 2016



Established in 1989 to conserve our Cranes and their Habitat.

In this issue:

- **The Chairman's Report**
- **Infrastructure upgrades at the UCC**
- **Wetland extension at the BBCNR**
- **Our New Website**
- **The Wattled Crane Conservation Research Programme**
- **Community Engagement**
- **Progress with The Sentinels**

Chairman's Report

At the time of the Autumn Newsletter I reported on the dire position of the dam levels in the midlands and at the AGM I informed members that as a result of the risk of not having sufficient water to habituate the chicks to standing in water and foraging in the wetland, it had been decided not to resume the Wattled Crane chick rearing project this year. This was a great disappointment, however it has not held us back and we have used the time and cost savings this afforded us to good effect. We have in fact had a very busy year developing the long term facilities at the Usher Conservation Centre and progressing our Wattled Crane Conservation Research Programme.



© Daniel Dolpire

One of Daniel Dolpire's wonderful crane studies

Chairman's Report (Continued)

During the year, Wilma Martindale, was unfortunately forced, by the increased workload at her accounting practice in Nottingham Road and domestic pressures, to resign as our Treasurer, which was a huge blow to the Committee, as Wilma has done an outstanding job in that role and will be sorely missed. I would like to take this opportunity on behalf of the Committee and indeed the membership of the KZNCF to thank Wilma for her invaluable contribution to the foundation.

I am pleased to report, however, that we have been very fortunate in being able to persuade Carlos Pereira to take over from Wilma and ensure the smooth running of our finances.

I hope the summary of our activities which follows will give you an insight into some of the things that we've been doing for the good of cranes and I'd like to take this opportunity to thank you for your continued support and wish you and your families a peaceful Christmas and the best of health and good fortune for 2017.

Sej Dunning

New Infrastructure

In the Autumn Newsletter, we reported on the development of the new road to the UCC, that project is now complete, as is the erection of a screen fence between the UCC and the isolation rearing facility thanks to a very generous donation by **CHEP SA (PTY) Ltd.** (see photo) We have also completed the building of the new accommodation for interns involved in our research programmes, this project and the road were sponsored by **N3TC.**



The new screen fence donated by CHEP

A New Wetland extension to the BBCONR.

Immediately prior to his untimely passing, Andrew Ferendinos had been working with The Fortress Group on an environmental off-set project which would allow for the expansion of the Bill Barnes Crane and Oribi Nature Reserve. This was to involve the purchase the wetland to the north east of the UCC from Fordoun, for inclusion in the reserve. The off-set was a part of the condition of the sale and redevelopment of the Clairwood Racecourse, in that part of the racecourse land had been a Grey Crowned Crane nesting site. The scheme involved The Fortress Group purchasing the wetland from Fordoun and donating it to the BBCONR. That project has now come to fruition and transfer of the wetland from Fordoun is imminent, and thanks to the great generosity of Jon Bates much of the proceeds of the sale of the land has been donated to the KZNCF. The new wetland is to be named the Andrew Ferendinos Memorial Wetland in honour of Andrew's sterling contribution to our cause.

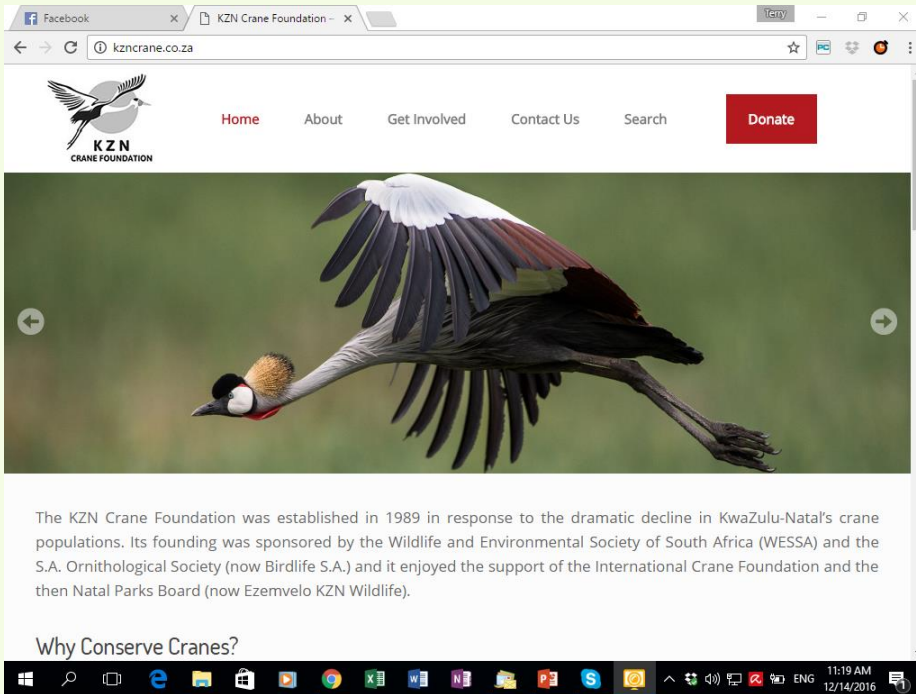


The new Andrew Ferendinos wetland extension to the BBCONR



Our Website and Communications.

During the course of the year, our website was hacked and the home page tampered with. Whilst this was annoying and meant that we did not have a proper web presence for a time, it was not a totally negative experience. In that we had been aware of the need to modernise and refresh the site and this cyber-attack gave us the impetus to do so. Please visit our new site, at www.kznocrane.co.za (or click on the image below).



The Home Page of our new Website
(to get there, just click on the image)

The new site not only looks more modern, with some spectacular examples of Daniel Dolpire's photographic studies, but it gives a much broader perspective on topics such as our history, programmes, and donors. The site provides significantly more information on cranes, both our three local species and an insight into the cranes of the world. There are links to our brochure, the KZN Annual Crane Survey and our newsletter as well as the gateway to becoming more involved in the conservation of cranes. The site is well worth a visit why not try it.

Since last Christmas, we have also published our high quality 'Coffee Table' brochure, improved our cyber-presence through our much more active Facebook page (<https://www.facebook.com/kznocrane/>) To get a copy of our brochure, please select 'Contact us' on our website and we will send you one, or simply go to 'About the KZN Crane Foundation' on the website, scroll down to the bottom of the page and click on 'Our Brochure')

The Wattled Crane Conservation Research Programme (WCCRP).

The successful 2014 Wattled Crane rearing project taught us a good deal about hand rearing crane chicks, but it taught us nothing about reintegrating hand reared chicks into the wild flock in such a way that they are able to pair bond, mate and successfully raise chicks of their own. The first step towards learning about this, is to get a better understanding of the behaviour of sub-adult Wattled Cranes in the wild as they make the transition from being under the care of their parents to becoming members of the floater flock.

Lara Jordan has elected to focus on this transitional phase in the life cycle of Wattled Cranes in her progress towards a PhD at The University of KZN. The study entails fitting tracking devices to the legs of wild crane chicks before they are fully fledged and following their movements during the transition period.

The research fits in very well with our long term research objectives, we therefore fully support Lara in this endeavour. The technology required and the data collection system are very costly and we together with EWT and the University have undertaken to contribute towards the funding of the research. To this end we successfully applied to the Hans Hoheisen Charitable Trust for funding and they have agreed to support the project over a three year cycle. To date, we have received the tracking devices and Lara will shortly be working with EWT to fit the trackers to selected crane chicks.

Apart from the trackers, the project requires researchers to drive out to locations where the tracking devices have detected the cranes and physically report on the condition and circumstances of the birds. This is by its nature a testing task and demands access to a robust and reliable motor vehicle. Unfortunately our existing Bakkie is, like most members of the Committee, well past retirement age. We have therefore had to purchase a newer vehicle and we've been able to do this thanks to generous donations from the **Ken Collins Charity Trust, The Fortress group and Jon Bates** (the Wet land off set), as well as **The Mortimer Motor and Fed Auto Groups**.



Community Engagement

The education team has made good progress this year in achieving the three main goals set for the education programme in 2016.

The first goal was to raise awareness, amongst rural school children, of the plight of South Africa's cranes and the need to protect and preserve the habitats essential for their survival. Cranes are used as a tool to teach Grade 1 to 6 children values and attitudes such as caring and loyalty and to expose them to the creative arts. The "Cranes in the Classroom" lessons in the schools and the two holiday programmes (Beautiful Nature Club and Bruntville Nature Club) provide the platform for these activities. The holiday programmes take place at the Usher Conservation Centre and the Bruntville Community Centre.



In this way, over 2000 children have participated in the programmes this year, an increase of 50% since last year.



Our Educational Program (continued).

This year the following schools have participated in the programme:

Bruntville Primary School	Crystal Springs Primary School
Curry's Post Primary School	Esiphethwini (Hlanganani) Primary School
Isibonokuhle Primary School	Isilindele Primary School
Shea O'Connor Primary School	Asithuhthuke Primary School

Our second goal, was to widen the outreach of the programme and include schools that have not been part of the programme up to now. The following schools will be part of the programme going forward;- Dabulamanzi Combined School, Nottingham Road, Nogqaza and Njoloba Primary Schools. In total we are now working with 12 local and conservancy schools. This has been made possible by the kind donation of a motorbike and protective clothing by **Northstar Asst Management** and payment for motorbike lessons and licence tests by **Rosetta Nottingham Road Conservancy (RNR)** and continued funding by **N3TC**.



Nkanyiso and Ryan, at our award winning stand at the Royal Show

Our Third goal was to strengthen our relationship with conservancy and environmental NGO partners in the area, including the Lion's Bush, Curry's Post, Balgowan and Karkloof conservancies, MMAEP's (Bugs), Endangered Wildlife Trust and Birdlife KZN Midlands. We are very appreciative of the invaluable encouragement and support they continue to provide to our education programme at schools in their areas. It is hoped that water workshops will also be run with the two nature clubs (on the reserve and in learners' local area) in connection with the Adopt-A-Stream project. Roselands Environmental Centre in Richmond is also making use of our educational officer Nkanyiso Ndlela's expertise to provide environmental lessons on the cranes and wetlands.

The Sentinels

December 2018 progress on the project

The task of compiling the necessary photographic material for the completion of The Sentinels has progressed exceptionally well this year, particularly in respect of Blue Cranes. Until this year, I had almost completed work on Wattled Cranes and made good progress with Grey Crowned Cranes, but had only achieved about 20% of what I needed on Blue Cranes. This year has changed all that and I now have over 90% of the material I need on Blue Cranes, with some very rewarding work having been completed in the Western Cape.

Henry Davies gave me a contact in Colesberg, Penny Southey, owner of Kuilfontein Stable Cottages. In August I set off and found exactly what was needed to kick off the trip! The accommodation borders a dam where Blue Cranes come in to roost! All through the night we heard the rolling calls of Blue Cranes chattering amongst themselves – it gave me goose bumps, it was as if the cranes were talking to me!



For the first part of the trip we were based in Greyton, where Tanya Smith had given me plenty of contacts, I also had great support through social networks in the Cape. We covered a vast area of the Overberg from Caledon to Heidelberg, from Witsand to Malgas, as well as the De Hoop Nature Reserve, Bredasdorp, Napier (which I'm assured may be pronounced 2 ways!)

As an aside, between Bredasdorp and Struisbaai lies Soetendalsvlei, the largest natural fresh-water lake in South Africa, which was once, I was informed, a home to Wattled Cranes.



The Sentinels



© Daniel_Dolpire

A great venue to see Blue Cranes is Gabrielskloof wine estate, off the N2 near Botriver, where we had a cup of coffee with Wicus Leeuwner (The Crane Man) who shared his contacts along the Riviersonderend river. All the farmers I met were very supportive of the cranes and my efforts, gates were opened and we watched sheep, cattle and ostriches feed alongside the cranes! What an experience!

From the Overberg we moved to Riebeek Kasteel in the Swartland, where once again, support from the town's people and farmers was amazing. What a hidden gem in our special country! Here in a field of lupins, in the mist,



whilst struggling to get my lens to focus, I managed to get some amazing pictures of a flock of Blue Cranes. William Walker who processes much of my work, compared the watercolour-like effects of these photos to scenes out of "Mother Goose".

The Sentinels (continued)

The spectacular colours of spring in the Cape made the experience of being there unforgettable. The canola fields were at their best and the beauty of wild flowers along the west coast was almost surreal! All in all a very successful trip! Thank you to all for your support!

Soon after getting home, one of my local farmer contacts reported that a pair of Blue Cranes were nesting on one of his dams. I spent 3 weeks, in the early mornings and evenings, observing the nest, waiting for the eggs to hatch and got some of my best shots of Blue Crane behaviour! Of equal interest was the behaviour of other birds, in proximity to the nest. A pair of Blacksmith Lapwings had a nest near-by with a brood of 4 chicks, which resulted in the protective parents continuously dive-bombing the cranes. Some of the other species I noticed were a nesting pair of Little Grebes, Yellow-billed Ducks, Southern Pochards, Sacred Ibises, Egyptian Geese, Pied Kingfishers, Great Egret, White Faced Whistling Ducks and Jackal Buzzards. For good measure I also came across Oribi and Southern Reedbuck.

I am currently working on farm near Nottingham Road, where another pair of Blue Cranes have decided to nest on an island in a dam, I am hoping to see chicks in the next couple of days! This nest is only about 500 meters from the N3 with heavy traffic thundering by constantly.

All in all a very good year with the cranes! We hope to finish off the photography during 2017 and go to publishing in 2018. Work still needs to be done on Grey Crowned Cranes on the nest so I would appreciate any feedback on potential sightings and nests over the coming months.

Thank you all for your wonderful support on the project.



© Daniel_Dolpire

An amazing experience, all three of our crane species roosting together.