



## First quarter 2020 Newsletter

Dear members and supporters.

Much has changed for the KZN Crane Foundation over the last few months and particularly since lockdown has started. This newsletter will take you through various developments and will focus on some of the most important.



*Above - A view over the KZN CF headquarters and the Bill Barnes Conservancy. On clear days the Drakensberg in the background is crystal clear. With binoculars one can see waterfalls. There is a serenity and quietness over the reserve and surrounds. Our wildlife, including the resident Wattled Crane pair, is without doubt enjoying the isolation.*

## **An update of your Foundation over the last 6 months**

A whole lot has happened since the last newsletter and a summary of what has occurred recently needs to be recorded and disseminated to the members.

1. AGM 30/08/2019. There was a need to find some new members to join the committee as several committee members were not standing for re-election. We would like to thank Dr Sandy Stewart and her committee for the huge contribution they made during their term(s) in office.
2. Dr Sandy Stewart, Gavin Stewart, Charles McGillivray, Simon Dunning, Tanya Smith and Drummond Densham retired from the committee at the AGM. There were no nominations to chair the committee. Daniel Dolpire, Jon Bates and Brent Coverdale made themselves available for re-election.
3. During the meeting it was proposed that EWT (Endangered Wildlife Trust) be approached in regards to the possibility of a merger with the KZN CF and the running of the BBCONR. This proposal was accepted. The committee members who had tendered their resignations agreed to stay in office until agreement or non-agreement took place.
4. On 28/02/2020 a Special General Meeting was held at which the EWT merger was discussed and a committee was elected together with the relevant office bearers. Jon Bates presented a report on the EWT merger. A decision was made to withdraw the offer to EWT. A new committee was elected, consisting of Daniel Dolpire , Jon Bates , Brent Coverdale , Antonia Mkhabela , Janet Snow , Natasha Strong , Rebecca Wakeford , Rusty Barnes , James Berning , Chris Brown , Craig Elstob , and John Pitout .
5. A committee meeting was held on 03/03/2020 to plan the way forward.
6. During the course of the last year the funding to the KZNCF had been reduced considerably and with R 115 817.18 in our bank account some serious decisions had to be made to reduce costs across the board .Every line on the bank statement was inspected to see if savings could be done and several contracts have been cancelled and others reduced .
7. One major expense was the “Cranes in the Classroom” Education programme. A subcommittee was set up and a meeting held on 10/03/2020 . They advised that under the circumstances serious changes had to be made.
8. The two educators Lindelani Mafu and Nduduzo Khoza were retrenched and it was recommended that the education model would be reviewed to find a more cost effective way of achieving the same environmental education of rural black (and white) scholars.



**Above.** We bid farewell to our previous Chairperson Sandy Stewart and also to Treasurer Gavin Stewart. Since 2017 both served the KZN Crane Foundation with distinction and - might we add - bravery. Through difficult times and personal challenges, they held the ship together. Thank you, Sandy and Gavin. You remain as members and we are so grateful that we can call on you for your always sage and balanced advice and guidance.



**Left.** Lindlelane Mafu and Ndu Khoza our two Educators are no longer with the KZN Crane Foundation. They leave us due to the realities of financial constraints. Both can be proud of being dedicated and proficient Environmental Educators.

We wish them well for their future careers after lockdown.



**Above.** *A triumph. Successfully released into the wild in the Autumn of 2019, Isabelo was photographed in April 2020 in the Karkloof. This remarkable bird had been in East Griqualand with floater flocks of Wattled Cranes for the entire Summer of 2019/2020. Proof that captive reared birds can successfully integrate with wild birds in wild society.*

**Read survey on Wattled Crane population and released birds at end of newsletter.**

**A Transformation at the Usher Centre.**



The KZN Crane Foundation – Usher Centre - is now a 'Factory'.

Because the KZN CF Education programme has been suspended, we now have the space and security systems to perform storage, packing and distributing to needy communities in the area.

Nsele Security is on site 24-7 and the alarm system has been upgraded.

**Pic Left:** the main hall loaded for packing of Food Relief boxes.



**Pictured above; On left** is Nkhosi Mahlaba (driver) and Eduhelper- Philile Zuma from the Michaelhouse Community Partnership Trust. Nkhosi and the Ford Ranger have been seconded to us for the lockdown duration. **On right** is the KZN Crane Foundation Ranger with logos of some donors displayed.

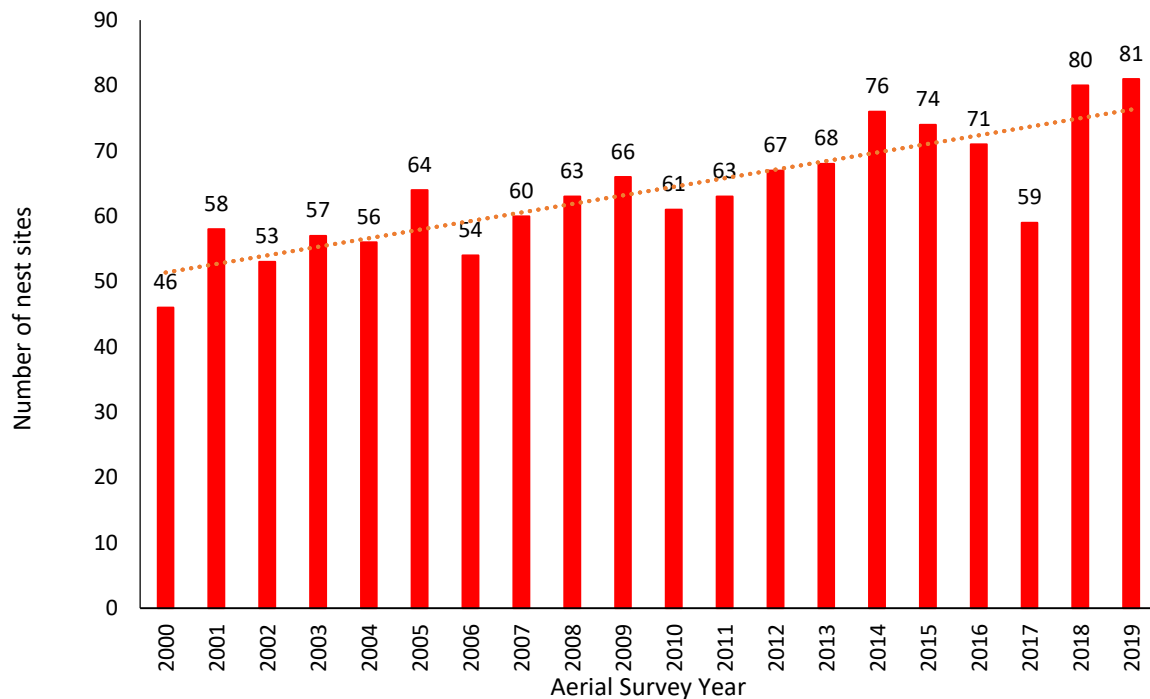
## **Crane populations in KZN.**

### **2019 Aerial Survey results**

The annual crane aerial survey in KwaZulu-Natal has been performed over the past 27 years and provides a robust assessment as to the health of the three species within the province. Unfortunately, the 2019 census was plagued by some challenges, mechanical issues on the plane, and inclement weather conditions which resulted in a less than ideal survey. Thus, not being able to survey over five consecutive days, probably resulted in an under estimate of Wattled Cranes and an over estimate of Grey Crowned Cranes. Nevertheless, a total of 1,428 Blue Cranes, 3,859 Grey Crowned Cranes and 249 Wattled Cranes were counted. The results of the survey continue to demonstrate positive trends for all three species in the province. Wattled Crane breeding sites had the highest count of any year with 81 nest sites active or with birds present, which is nearing closer to the provincial target of 100 active breeding pairs for the species within KwaZulu-Natal. These positive trends indicate the success of the conservation interventions and activities that have been conducted by the various stakeholders over the last three decades.

The following diagram highlights the increase in the number of Wattled Crane breeding pairs in KwaZulu-Natal over the last 19 years.

### The number of wattled crane active nests shows a positive trend



### Captive reared released Wattled Cranes

Mfula and Isabelo were released into the wild, after having been costume reared from second eggs, in the winter of 2018. The paths of these two birds were divergent at best. Isabelo, took to the wild like a duck to water and has integrated successfully into the wild population. Currently, Isabelo is in the Karkloof, after having spent a considerable portion of the summer months in Cederville area. Mfula on the other hand, has not. Although to the casual observer Mfula is a Wattled Crane, the behaviour paints a completely different picture. Spending a lot of time alone on a farm outside of Mooi River, feeding at the local vulture restaurant, and at times trying to soar with Cape Vultures, Mfula cannot be considered a rearing success. Unfortunately, Mfula has not been sighted since late February, a picture from a camera trap at the said vulture restaurant, and the tracking device has not provided any data since early March. Concerted efforts to locate Mfula have proven futile and so either the tracking device has failed, Mfula is currently in an area with no GSM reception or at worst Mfula has died. This is a most unfortunate end to this story, but one from which a lot of insight can be gained to guide future captive breeding programmes and release protocols. Ezemvelo KwaZulu-Natal

Wildlife is in the process of analysing the captive data to potentially determine, why two birds, raised under the same regime, took completely trajectories once released.

### **Overall Crane numbers 2019.**

Wattles 380 (July 2018) vs 249 (July 2019) = Negative 131 (-35 %)

Blues 1295 (July 2018) vs 1428 (July 2019) = Positive 133 (+ 10%)

Crowned 3132 (July 2018) vs 3859 (July 2019) = Positive 727 (+23%)

Due to a weather disrupted 2019 aerial survey, including a flying day missed altogether, scientists may have under counted wattles and over counted others. It's difficult to know, but hopefully 2020 or 2021 surveys will be easier for accuracy.

### **Marketing - The Sentinels theme carries on.**



Even after the completion of The Sentinels book project, Daniel Dolpire still takes every opportunity to capture stunning visuals of cranes. This one was taken from his garden at BoschHoek.

The Sentinels continues to be an iconic marketing tool for Cranes and the environment.

In February Daniel did the 'Sentinels journey' presentation to Sitheka Country Estate community members. Generously hosted by Glyn and Michelle Bodley, with a delicious dinner, the event raised close on R1,000.

**Serenity.**



Epsom dam, on the road to the Usher Centre seems not to notice the frenetic activity taking place. Hopefully we will see a return to 'normal' before too long.

Stay safe and thanks for all your support.

***James Berning and the KZN Crane Foundation Committee.***

