

KZN Crane Foundation

2020 and beyond.

Narrative on activities and progress.

At the end of the year 2019 there was a possibility that the KZN Crane Foundation (KZN CF) could merge with the Endangered Wildlife Trust (EWT). In February 2020 at a Special General Meeting the KZN CF resolved to remain independent and manage its own affairs.

This summary covers 2019 activities and gives a broader perspective to the KZN CF and its activities up to date.



Education

The KZN CF made a decision in February to change its Cranes in the Classroom education model to one which is less costly, sustainable and up scalable. Instead of the KZN CF employing Educators who travel to each school, our model will be to train and mentor DOE employed Environmental Educators in the schools. Our

programme is to be called Development and Management of a **Professional Learning Community** (PLC) for Teaching about Cranes, water and habitats and related ESD learning.

80 learners from each school will visit the KZN CFs Bill Barnes Reserve each year to do an environmental trail walk. Something we learnt from a speaker at the Wild Shots 2018 seminar stimulated this educational programme change – “one cannot expect people to understand conservation and the protection of wildlife and the environment if they have not experienced it themselves”.



Zolani Ntombela – Chairman of S O C Students E Club. Antonia Makhabela – Deputy Principal and Environmental leader.

The trail over the reserve and its wetlands is to be opened for use after completion and also when lockdown restrictions end.

The Cranes.

Renewed relationship with Johannesburg Zoo.

For a few years the collaborative relationship with Johannesburg Parks and Grounds and the Wattled Crane Recovery Programme had not been maintained. Late last year the Jhb Zoo and the KZN CF began discussions and these resulted in renewed intent for future cooperation in the research and rearing of Wattled Cranes.

It was of great interest that we learnt that the Jhb Zoo's 'farm' at the Vaal River had successfully managed the mating, hatching and rearing of Wattled Crane chicks from three captive pairs. Bishop Ngobeli had and is receiving guidance and support from the White Oak Conservation Foundation (Florida USA). This organization has had notable success in captive breeding by Wattles and other Crane species.

The encouraging outcome at Jhb Zoo is that there are now 4 fledged Wattled Cranes which, if habituated to wetland roosting conditions, are possible release prospects into wild flocks.



Above. On left is Jhb Zoo (Vaal) pic of a pair with chick. On right is pair and chick at White Oak, USA.

Jhb Zoo, the KZN Crane Foundation and Ezemvelo KZN Wildlife are due to meet in November to discuss habituation and releases in 2021.

Research – captive birds.

We have continued to develop protocols based on the 6 Wattled Cranes which have been reared at the KZN Crane Foundation.

The first three cranes were captive reared as if for wild release but due to permit were then habituated to humans and were sent to Zaagkuilsdrift where they still live in good health under captive conditions. From the batch of three 2019 birds reared in captivity, one died from an injury sustained by flying into netting. The other two were released into the wild. Of these, one bird did not integrate into the wild Wattled Crane Floater flocks (we consider that the reason is understood and future protocols will have learnt from this). The 3rd bird, Isabello, was successfully released and integrated into the wild flocks.

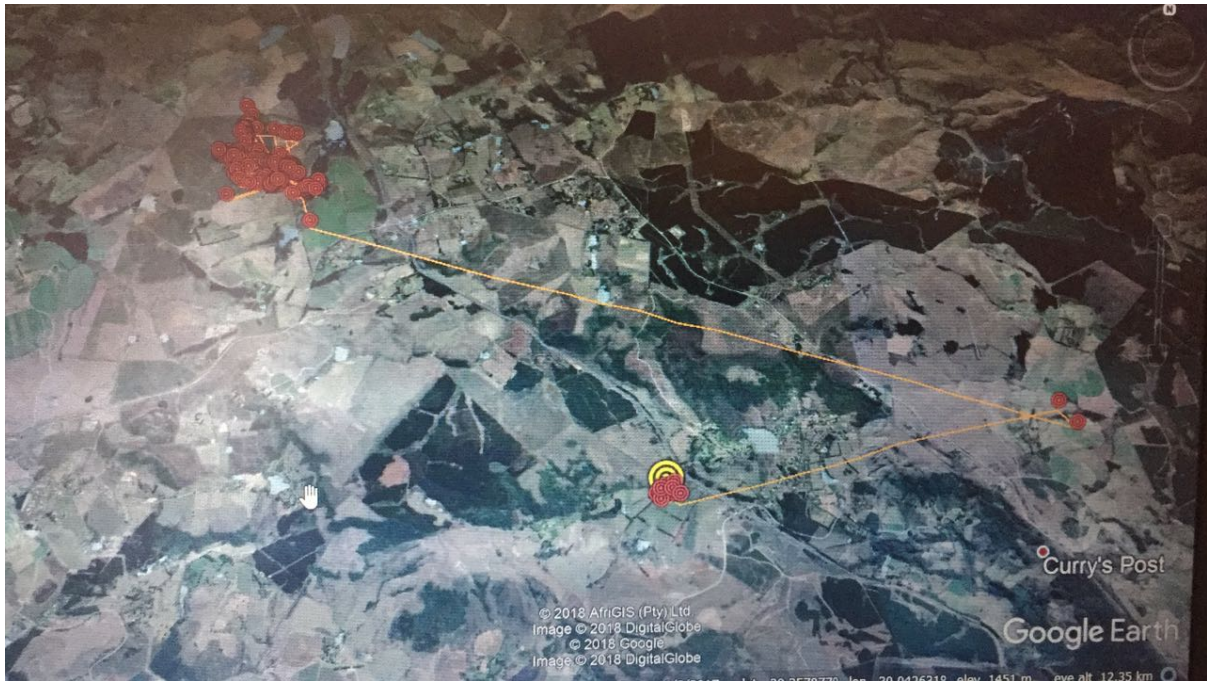


Isabello - upper right. Hatched from a rescued egg. Captive reared. Integrated into the wild flock.



Further success. Isabello in 2020 has paired with a wild reared bird, has mated, nested and produced fertile eggs.

The analysis of the crane rearing data has commenced. Although still in its infancy, due to the considerable data that was captured during the rearing process conducted over a combined three years, some key areas have been analysed to date: weight gain, which can be viewed as a proxy for food intake and appropriate growth and daily exercise. The assessment of the movement of wild birds is complete and will be presented at The Conservation Symposium in November. In total the data of seven Wattled Crane chicks (5 wild chicks and the 2 captive reared birds) and one adult Wattled Crane was analysed. This analysis has highlighted the importance of protecting roost sites for the non-breeding flock and the daily exercise of captive reared birds.



Tracking of both captive reared birds and wild, tracker fitted, birds show specific range movements. The above image is an early download of Isabelo's movements.

Wattled Cranes recovery in general.

It is most gratifying that Wattled Cranes in the wild continue to increase. The recent aerial survey counted over 390 of the birds. In the year 2000 the count was just on 200.

The Sentinels book which was published in 2018 has been used as a marketing aid when presented to farmers. It's a very powerful tool for which we thank you for your support.



The resident Wattled Crane pair at the Bill Barnes Conservancy produce a chick every year. Their annual success rate to fledging has been over 60% over the last 15 years. This year's chick was ringed in August.

KZN Crane Foundation in lockdown.

Lockdown for the period from March to current has meant that the KZN Crane Foundation was restricted in carrying out most functions.

As reported, the Education programme was suspended and the permanently employed educators (who also were responsible for field tracking and released bird observation) were retrenched.

The KZN Crane Foundation resolved to continue activities by providing a venue and volunteers for humanitarian relief for the poor and desperate in our local area Nottingham Road, Balgowan and Rosetta. We thus became the driving force behind NR Relief and have fed thousands of meals, peaking at 4,500 individuals at one time, there has been an easing off, and we are now feeding under 1,000.

This effort has been enthusiastically supported by all of the KZN Crane Foundation donors and has also resulted in a significant increase of membership and local support. With our reach into very poor and desperate communities we have carried a message of a conservation organisation that cares about them. The vehicle donated by HHCT has been used for Relief logistics.



The KZN CF bakkie adorned with donors' logos. More on the rear and bonnet.



With the Bill Barnes Conservancy in the background are a group of volunteers from one of our poorest communities. They are now waste entrepreneurs. The green T shirts, on the back, carry the slogan 'HLONIPHA' which means Respect. Respect for yourself, for others and the environment.