



THE ENDANGERED WILDLIFE TRUST'S RESPONSE TO ALLEGATIONS OF MASS POISONING OF BLUE CRANES IN THE NORTHERN CAPE

20th February 2015

Start

The Endangered Wildlife Trust (EWT) was first made aware of the allegations that between 200 and 1000 Blue Cranes had been poisoned by a farmer in the Northern Cape since 2012, on Friday 13 February 2015. We immediately made contact with the Northern Cape's Department of Environment and Nature Conservation who is conducting an official investigation into these allegations.

At this time, we cannot confirm or deny these allegations and are awaiting the conclusion of the investigation and the provision of supporting evidence. The EWT is assisting with, and supporting this investigation wherever possible. We also very strongly encourage any individual with information to work together with the Department in this investigation.

The EWT strongly opposes the illegal or irresponsible use of poisons and has spent more than 30 years working with landowners, farmers, farmworkers and chemical companies to reduce, and where possible eradicate the use of poisons in the environment. We fully support the prosecution of any perpetrators of irresponsible, unethical and illegal use of poisons, using the National Environment Management Act, relevant Provincial Ordinances and the Fertilizers, Farm Feeds, Agricultural Remedies and Stock Remedies Act as tools to achieve such justice.

We need to strongly emphasise that prosecution is however, only successful where investigations are carried out by authorities who are supported by the correct information and valid evidence required for a successful conviction. Tampering with evidence or withholding information can unfortunately result in wildlife crime cases being dismissed in court, or not resulting in convictions that match the crime committed.

The EWT is assisting wherever possible in the investigation. The EWT, in partnership with the International Crane Foundation, is also developing several methods of reducing the conflict between cranes and farmers that may arise due to real or perceived crop damage and encourages all those with information relevant to this case to report it to Leon Muller, Compliance and Enforcement Officer at the Northern Cape Department of Environment and Nature Conservation on 082 330 5280.

End.

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The Endangered Wildlife Trust is a non-profit, public benefit organisation dedicated to conserving species and ecosystems in southern Africa to the benefit of all people.

NPO Number: 015-502, **PBO number:** 930 001 777, **Member of IUCN** - The International Union for Conservation of Nature
The Endangered Wildlife Trust is US 501(c)(3) compliant under **US IRS Registration number:** EMP98-0586801.



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Background information

The Blue Crane (*Anthropoidesparadiseus*) is South Africa's National bird. It has the most restricted range of any of the world's 15 crane species, and is a Southern African endemic, with more than 99% of the world's Blue Cranes found in South Africa. They are currently classified as Near Threatened on the Red Data List for Birds. The population in 2005 was estimated to be at least 25,000; indications are that there are far more now due to the good increases we have seen in some parts of the country and the stability they have reached in others.

The largest population of Blue Cranes can be found in the wheat/pasture mosaic of the agricultural landscape of the Western Cape. The Karoo region of the Northern and Eastern Cape though is home to the world's largest population of Blue Cranes in natural habitat. Blue Cranes are also found, albeit in smaller numbers, in the eastern grasslands of the Eastern Cape, KwaZulu-Natal, Free State and Mpumalanga. South Africa's Blue Crane population suffered a drastic decline of up to 80% in some parts of the country in the 1970's and 1980's largely to poisoning and habitat loss. The current threats to the species include significantly, overhead power line collisions and habitat loss, but also the illegal trade in wild caught chicks and poisoning.

Fortunately for the Blue Crane and South Africa's other crane species, the Grey Crowned and Wattled Crane, there are countless farmers that take their role as 'Custodians' of our country's biodiversity very seriously. Farmers and conservationists, like the EWT, have worked together for more than 25 years to halt and reverse the declines of all three of South Africa's crane species. And we applaud the many farmers who have been and are willing to find workable and legal solutions to minimise conflict with wildlife and who implement farming practices that benefit cranes, and more broadly, conservation and biodiversity.

The EWT's current efforts for Blue Cranes include:

- securing and sustainably managing key grassland areas in collaboration with farmers and the relevant conservation authority;
- a project to better understand the movement patterns of Blue Cranes in the Western Cape to provide a baseline for objective input into both power line and wind farm developments, and to provide a basis for understanding the potential impacts of changes in the agricultural landscape due to either climatic or socio-economic factors;
- a National Crane Count will be held in 2016 to obtain an improved understanding of the status of the species in the country;

The EWT works in partnership with the International Crane Foundation on all crane related projects in sub-Saharan Africa.

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