
Records

First record of the Wattled Crane *Grus carunculatus* in Uganda

On the afternoon of Saturday 2 May 2009, SNK had accompanied students to Kibimba rice scheme, eastern Uganda, for fieldwork when she observed one individual Wattled Crane *Grus carunculatus* among 30 individual Grey Crowned Cranes *Balearica regulorum*. Kibimba rice scheme located in Bugiri District is one of the commercial rice-growing areas in Uganda. These birds were recorded in one of the paddocks that had been freshly harvested, a habitat most preferred by cranes in rice fields (Nachuha 2006). On sighting the bird, contact was quickly made with AB (Executive Director of NatureUganda, the BirdLife partner in Uganda) to crosscheck the sighting.

On Sunday 3 May 2009 both authors travelled back to Kibimba and confirmed this record. During the second visit, the bird was still feeding among a group of 60 Grey Crowned Cranes. It was occasionally aggressive, probably indicating that it was a new arrival to the area. When we approached it would fly together with other cranes over short distances.

The Wattled Crane is easily distinguishable from the other cranes due to its large size and height. It has a clear white neck, with yellowish-orange eye, long tail feathers and grey cap with a distinct red facial patch, which extends along the front of two large wattles covered in white feathers (Urban *et al.* 1986). Photographs for this observation were taken and can be accessed on NatureUganda website: www.natureuganda.org

Some information and facts about the Wattled Crane

Family/subfamily: Gruidae

Author: Gmelin, 1789

Synonyms: *Begeranus carunculatus* Collar and Andrew (1988)

Status: The 2009 IUCN Red List category as evaluated by BirdLife International classifies this bird as *Vulnerable* because it has a small population which appears to have undergone a rapid decline and faces continued threats (BirdLife International 2009).

Range and population: *Grus carunculatus* is found in Ethiopia, and central and southern Africa. However, this record now adds Uganda as part of the known range of this species. In Ethiopia, usually only 1-3 individuals are seen together, though they do flock occasionally. In central and southern Africa, they are reported as locally abundant to rare, but are thought to be declining and perhaps endangered or recently extinct in some areas (BirdLife International 2009).

Ecology: This species is generally not migratory but those that inhabit wetlands are irregularly nomadic in response to water availability. It nests in shallow sedge-dominated wetlands often above 2000 m altitude and it continues to rely on wetland habitat during the non-breeding season. It is monogamous with each pair defending a territory. Since this species is not known to migrate between populations in Africa, we cannot speculate on the origin of this single bird which was probably a vagrant.

Threats: The biggest threat to the survival of the Wattled Crane is loss and degradation of wetlands as a result of intensified agriculture, draining for rice cultivation and flooding by dam construction (BirdLife International 2009). Other threats include collision with power lines, persecution, traditional medicine, and illegal removal of eggs and chicks.

Conservation measures: Both in-situ and ex-situ methods are being employed to conserve this species (BirdLife International 2009). Ramsar sites and other protected areas have been established in several key wetland areas with local human communities sensitised about the importance of this species. There are captive breeding efforts mainly in southern Africa, which are not very successful due to poor fertility in captivity (BirdLife International 2009).

References

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