



Protection of Species in South Africa Help for Blue Crane & Co

The Challenge Migratory birds use resources from different countries or continents and thus show that even areas that are far from each other are closely interconnected. Many migratory birds from North, Central, and South Europe winter in South Africa. But changes in the habitat together with more intensive agriculture have worsened the conditions in their wintering grounds. At the same time, a change in the use of nature endangers the survival of local wild animals like the blue crane, the grey crowned crane, or the wattled crane.

- In South Africa, farmers do not receive any subsidies and have to struggle to survive. Therefore, the pressure on nature is very high.
- The main dangers are intensive agriculture, landscape consumption, destruction of habitats, current lines and fences, and – partly illegal – animal trapping and trafficking.

The Project NatureLife-International together with Deutsche Lufthansa supports the South African Crane Working Group (SACWG), an initiative of the South African Endangered Wildlife Trust (EWT). Our aim is to register and monitor the breeding places of cranes and the development and realisation of protection measures together with local farmers. As many wattled cranes, blue cranes, and grey crowned crane live outside of national parks and other protected areas. There, almost no protection authorities exist at present. Considering furthermore the vast extend of agriculturally used land, it is necessary to collaborate closely with farmers in order to be able to realise such nature protection measures at all.

The collaboration with the South African Crane Working Group includes the following measures:

- Generation of information material for farmers and young people.
- Continuous monitoring of the crane population and identification of breeding places, which are often situated in the midst of grain fields.
- Protection through the establishment of buffer zones together with the local farmers.
- Protection of the last wetlands with reed areas that are used as breeding and foraging grounds.
- Conservation and reuse of grazings in the area around Dullstroom.

Encouraging Work Scientific studies help to choose appropriate protection measures which benefit not only endangered breeding birds in South Africa, but also many migratory birds from Europe. This is proven by the SACWG which examined the connections between extensive grazing management and species protection in the “Verlooren Valle Nature Reserve” (Boer for “lost valley”), which is part of the Ramsar Convention and is situated not far from Dullstroom in the north of Belfast.

The area covers 7,000 hectare of former farmland. In order to protect it, grazing animals were banned. But for instance the wattled crane population – which had already been very small before – shrank dramatically.

Nature protection studies about which habitats birds prefer reveal that birds are perfectly able to coexist with grazing animals and even benefit from them. Cows maintain open parts in the wetlands (which can then be used by the cranes as breeding and foraging grounds), rouse potential prey, and – according to the stocking – provide a close-to-nature vegetation management. Like this, grazing animals in various ways fulfil tasks which had formerly been carried out by local wild animals, e.g. zebra or buffalo.



The South African Crane Working Group together with the responsible persons of the nature reserve is developing concepts for grazing management adapted to the needs of cranes.

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