



Western Cape Crane Conservation Project - Nandi Thobela, Field Officer

The Western Cape Crane Conservation Project is not a new initiative; however, I am new to it. Six months into the project, I have experienced a lot and I am proud to report that I have seen a considerable number of Blue Cranes. I have recorded at least 468 adult birds and 23 juvenile birds from ad hoc sightings alone, and conducted the fixed route census with Kevin Shaw on three occasions. These routes are adopted from the Coordinated Avifaunal Road counts (CAR) and are monitored bi-monthly. In the meantime we have had to abandon a particular route for safety reasons, but have selected an alternative route within the area.

I have recorded three power line collisions at the same place on two different occasions. All three birds were adults. The carcasses are currently being held in a freezing facility in Potberg for research purposes. I have responded to one poisoning incident in the Herbertsdale region of Mossel Bay district which was brought to our attention by a member of the public – this particular event resulted in the death of at least nine Blue Cranes. Cape Nature continued the investigation and courtesy of EWT-WCMP (Wildlife Conflict Mitigation Programme) toxicological analyses were performed; and the birds tested positive for Diazinon organophosphate “dazzle” poisoning. There has been a recent poisoning event in the Heidelberg area which was reported by the land owner. This led to the death of two Blue Cranes. Cape Nature responded to this incident and reported that the birds tested positive for Diazinon poisoning. It seems as if Blue Cranes are being accidentally poisoned by the farm labourers who are actually targeting other avian food sources such as guinea fowl and geese. This has raised serious concerns, and mitigation efforts are in progress. Crop damage caused by Blue Cranes has also surfaced; however, thus far, there is only one incident on record this year.

I have been making reasonable progress with awareness and education. I have been involved with the SANParks Kids in Parks programme, Department of Agriculture’s Junior LandCare camps, the Agri Mega expo and the environmental awareness programme organised by Cape Agulhas Municipality for school pupils. I have also visited seven schools in the area, as far as Muizenberg, and from pre-primary to high schools, with the aim of creating awareness on the Blue Crane. (On website)

In summary, I can conclude that the current problematic issues facing cranes in this area are poisoning and power line collisions. These issues are going to be monitored very closely with the

intention of reducing the threat they pose to the Blue Crane population. With the start of the breeding season in the Overberg, Blue Crane pairs are prolific and I have already seen a nest. The recording and monitoring of these nests and pairs will invariably lead to more farmer interaction. There has been an approval of a wind farm in the Caledon area, whilst there are ongoing EIAs for other proposed wind farms.

