

PREPARING NATIONAL CRANE AND WETLAND ACTION PLANS

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There are many advantages to preparing national action plans for cranes. National action plans can provide more detailed information on the status, threats to, and conservation needs of a nation's cranes and their wetland and grassland habitats. They allow this information to be conveyed to other parts of the country (where such information may be unavailable), as well as neighboring nations and the world at large. National action plans help to identify the gaps in our knowledge of cranes and their habitats. They provide researchers and conservationists (especially those working under isolated conditions) with direction by prioritizing research and conservation activities. These priorities also aid scientists, resource managers, agency officials, funding organizations, and political leaders in allocating available resources.

Most national action plans will contain the following elements.

INTRODUCTION

The action plan should begin with a brief discussion of the species of cranes present in the country and their importance. On the latter point, topics that might be covered include: cranes as symbols of a nation; cranes as part of a nation's natural and cultural heritage; cranes and ecotourism; cranes as objects of biological research; cranes as creatures of beauty; and cranes as indicators of ecosystem health. The introduction should lay out the need for, and rationale behind, a national-level plan. It is important that the crane conservation be discussed within the broader context of biodiversity conservation efforts within the country.

The introduction should also provide basic information on the nation's wetlands (and grasslands in countries where these habitats are important): the types present and their location. Wetlands, in this context, are defined broadly, and include areas of land that are permanently or periodically inundated: lake shores, ponds, swamps, marshes, bogs, riparian or lacustrine flood plains, pans and wadis, coastal salt marshes, mangrove swamps, and artificial impoundments. The key wetlands that cranes inhabit (and the periods when they are present) should be identified. The importance of wetlands should be discussed, including their value as a source of food, forage, and fiber; as a source of money through tourism; as a source of water for fish ponds and

other agricultural activities; as a means of controlling flooding and regulating other ecosystem functions; and as a natural water purification mechanism.

Finally, the introduction should include a discussion of the goals and organization of the action plan.

SPECIES ACCOUNTS

The plan should provide species accounts of the cranes (including subspecies) that occur within the country, with comments on range (including maps), historical and present status and distribution, population numbers and trends, habitat and ecology, and official conservation status (following the revised IUCN (1994) criteria).

CRITICAL WETLAND ACCOUNTS

The plan should describe critical wetlands: their location, extent, climate, topography, flora and fauna, hydrology, ecology, human impact and utilization, and conservation status. In those nations or regions where grassland ecosystems also provide important crane habitat, a critical account of grasslands should also be provided.

PRINCIPLE THREATS TO CRANES AND THEIR HABITATS

The plan should provide comments on the principal threats to cranes and their habitats. Possible threats include agricultural expansion, use of pesticides and fertilizers, overgrazing and degradation of wetlands, construction of dams, afforestation of grasslands, pollution, utility lines, hunting, live trapping for commercial trade and domestication, poisoning, and disturbance by people and warfare.

RECOMMENDED PROJECTS AT THE NATIONAL LEVEL

The plan should review current conservation measures and recommend projects at the national level. Focus areas may include censusing and monitoring, habitat protection and management, research (for example, on food habits, behavior, reproduction and field ecology, migration, and the effects of pesticides and poisons), captive propagation,

reintroduction, and education and training.

Where possible, the action plan should specify project timelines and estimated budgets as a prelude to preparing full project proposals.

RECOMMENDED PROJECTS AT THE REGIONAL LEVEL

The action plan should identify projects that need to be

pursued at the regional and continental scales. This section should specify the species and wetlands involved and the objectives, description, and justification. Focus areas may include: coordinated watershed planning; migration studies; international agreements; collaborative research projects; and international protected area networks.