

FACTSHEET – Wattled Crane

In Botswana, the Wattled Crane is found throughout the Okavango Delta, and also in the Linyanti Swamps - the Okavango actually supports the largest single population of this species remaining. Aerial surveys conducted by BirdLife Botswana in 2001, 2002 and 2003, in conjunction with the Department of Wildlife and the South African Crane Working Group, showed that there are 1,400 Wattled Cranes in the Delta, and that they breed during the winter months when floodwaters are receding.



Photo: J Macdonald



Photo: M Muller

During the summer months, flocks of up to 100 cranes may be seen in the Makgadikgadi Pans, and if rains have been good, they may also be found in other outlying pans such as Tale and Kukale, along the Boteti River and at Lake Ngami. These flocks are mainly comprised of 'floaters', young unpaired birds that disperse from the Delta after summer rains. Wattled Cranes are highly mobile, and a 400 kilometre flight from the Okavango to Ntwetwe Pan is easily managed, even by the recently fledged chicks. It is speculated that these young birds move between the major wetland systems of south-central Africa, eventually forming pair bonds when they mature at seven years of age, and then settling down to breed on permanent territories maintained by the pair until one or both partners eventually die (at about 50 years of age).

Although the Okavango population of Wattled Cranes appears to be stable, this is dependent on the natural flooding regime of the Okavango system; any adverse hydrological changes will impact directly on the birds. Thus it may be said that the Wattled Crane is our best indicator of the health of the Delta.