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WILDLIFE TRUST**
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Grey Crowned Cranes, Wetlands, and Communities:

THE PROGRAM FOR EAST AFRICA

One of Africa's most beloved birds is in serious trouble. The Grey Crowned Crane—once common across the wetlands and grasslands of East Africa—has declined by more than 80% over the last 25 years, and is now Endangered. The loss and degradation of wetland breeding grounds, driven by rapid human population growth, grinding poverty, and the expansion of subsistence agriculture, are largely to blame. Most Grey Crowned Cranes occur on private farmlands. As the cranes are pushed into smaller and more marginal wetland habitat to care for their eggs and young, they are increasingly disturbed by people, dogs, and livestock. Eggs are eaten. Chicks are easily captured for domestication within Africa, or for export to distant countries.

But there is hope for these beautiful birds. Important strongholds still remain for the species in East Africa—especially in Uganda, Kenya, and Rwanda. And there is enormous potential in these countries to raise awareness and take action for these beleaguered birds. The Grey Crowned Crane is the national bird of Uganda, appearing prominently in the center of the Ugandan flag and National Coat of Arms. With their golden crowns and stunning colors, Grey Crowned Cranes adorn currency, stamps, soccer jerseys, travel brochures, and other publicly visible canvases throughout the region. Concern is growing about the decline of these majestic birds among varied groups of people, from government agencies to community leaders to school children, and the time to act is now.

If we can develop innovative, alternative incomes for the impoverished communities that depend for their livelihoods on the wetlands that they share with cranes, everyone wins.



Photo by Shawn Oleser

How Cranes Got their Golden Crowns

A great king was stranded on the vast plains on a very hot day. He entreated various birds and animals for help during his wanderings, but none would help him. He was becoming weak and very angry, until he met a flock of cranes. The king asked the cranes for help and they gladly shaded the old king with their beautiful wings and helped him to find shelter amid some trees.

In thanks, he placed his hand on their heads and there appeared small golden crowns. The cranes thanked him for this generous gift and then flew off. Several months later, a crane appeared on the king's doorstep in a bedraggled state. He told the king the cranes were now hunted day and night for their golden crowns.

The king, realizing his foolishness and the greed and jealousy of others, transformed the gold crowns into a halo of golden feathers, which the cranes still have today.

OUR IMPACT

The International Crane Foundation/Endangered Wildlife Trust Program for East Africa focuses on the iconic Grey Crowned Cranes, the wetlands they depend on, and the communities who share these lands across East Africa. We monitor the status, distribution, and threats to Grey Crowned Cranes across all of the range countries, but focus in-depth on conservation and livelihood solutions in three countries that are critical to the survival of this species: Uganda, Kenya, and Rwanda. We evaluate our impact on crane population trends and breeding productivity, on the health of the wetlands the cranes depend on, and on the socio-economic advancement of local communities who commit to crane and wetland conservation. We use the *Open Standards for the Practice of Conservation* for the planning, implementation, and adaptive management of all our field projects.

Safeguarding the National Bird of Uganda

Uganda is home to the largest population of Grey Crowned Cranes in Africa, with strongholds in the southwest and southcentral parts of the country. Rapid human population growth places immense pressure on these productive wetlands. The numbers of Grey Crowned Cranes and many other species are falling rapidly as the quality and extent of wetland habitat declines. For nearly 20 years, our local community leader and conservation biologist Jimmy Muheebwe has worked tirelessly to reverse this decline. He studies the root causes of threats to these



cranes, and engages community groups to improve their livelihoods while protecting cranes and their habitats. He has formed dozens of school wildlife clubs to raise awareness about cranes and biodiversity through drama, dance, and song. He explains the rich array of ecosystem services provided by healthy wetlands, and how these services benefit local communities in diverse ways. Going forward, we will expand on this legacy in Uganda by:

- Empowering community-based **Crane Custodians** to safeguard cranes at Kaku Kiyanja, Nyamuriro, Kiruruma, Mugandu, and other key sites in southwestern and southcentral Uganda by reducing nest and chick disturbances and preventing the removal of eggs and chicks for the illegal bird trade.
- Negotiating voluntary Conservation Agreements with local communities that provide benefits to the community in return for conservation actions that reduce threats to cranes and their habitats.
- Providing training and mentorship to community leaders and residents for sustainable livelihood practices that incorporate climate-smart, biodiversity-friendly agriculture (promoting crops better suited to the area, incorporating no-till farming, adopting methods to improve soil fertility and reduce erosion, and reducing the need for agrochemicals), and that promote the green economy, sustainable market chains, and alternatives to environmentally damaging practices.
- Incorporating family planning, empowerment and education of girls and women, and human health in the community projects we develop, through strategic partnerships that advance Population-Health-Environment (PHE) programs.

- Encouraging community members to create buffer zones between their crops and wetlands and engaging them in replanting large expanses of papyrus in wetlands that have been degraded and converted.
- Facilitating the development of Community-Based Wetland Management Plans involving local communities and authorities, providing the legal framework for communities to sustainably use and manage important wetlands.

In Uganda, we achieve our impact in close partnership with Nature Uganda, the Ministry of Water and Environment, the Ministry of Tourism, Wildlife and Antiquities, Uganda Wildlife Authority, and Uganda Wildlife Education Centre.

- Developing a nationwide campaign for all Ugandans to take pride in and responsibility for the future of Grey Crowned Cranes, describing concrete actions they can take to protect cranes and wetlands.



Photo by Jim Harris

Community Action for Grey Crowned Cranes in Kenya

The wetlands of Western Kenya are another major stronghold for Grey Crowned Cranes. Since 1993, we have supported the Kipsaina Crane and Wetland Conservation Group, a registered Community-Based Organization in Kenya under the leadership of local leader and crane enthusiast Maurice Wanjala. In and around Saiwa Swamp National Park, an important breeding area for Grey Crowned Cranes, we developed a model demonstration area for conservation-friendly livelihood projects that reduce the human pressure on wetlands and their watersheds. These projects involve native tree nurseries, livestock fodder, fish ponds, dairy goats, and bee-keeping. Maurice engages primary and secondary schools, church congregations, and women’s groups in cultural activities that promote land stewardship and crane conservation. We are now expanding these efforts into other important sites for Grey Crowned Cranes in western Kenya,

such as the Sio-Siteko Wetland and surrounding Busia Grasslands (a designated *Key Biodiversity Area*), and the Kingwal Swamp and surrounding watershed. Our actions include:

- Empowering community-based **Crane Custodians** to safeguard cranes in western Kenya, especially by reducing nest and chick disturbances and preventing the removal of eggs and chicks for the illegal bird trade.
- Negotiating voluntary Conservation Agreements with local communities that provide benefits to the community in return for conservation actions that reduce threats to cranes and their habitats.
- Celebrating cranes, wetlands, and wildlife through our annual Cracide Day and Crane Festival, which is supported by local government, private stakeholders, and local communities.
- Providing spring source protection outside of wetlands, ensuring clean and reliable sources of drinking water for communities and livestock.
- Managing a large nursery to provide indigenous tree seedlings and fruit trees for community-based restoration of riparian zones near streams and wetlands.

- Developing a new Community Conservancy or protected area for Kingwal Swamp, under a formal agreement under Kenyan Law that promotes community land management for wildlife conservation and compatible land uses that improve livelihoods.
- Providing training and mentorship to community leaders and residents for sustainable livelihood practices that incorporate climate-smart, biodiversity-friendly agriculture (promoting crops better suited to the area, incorporating no-till farming, adopting methods to improve soil fertility and reduce erosion, and reducing the need for agrochemicals), and that promote the green economy, sustainable market chains, and alternatives to environmentally damaging practices.
- Incorporating family planning, empowerment and education of girls and women, and human health in the community projects we develop, through strategic partnerships that advance Population-Health-Environment (PHE) programs.

In Kenya we work in partnership with the local organization Community Action for Nature Conservation (CANCO) and the Kipsaina Crane and Wetland Conservation Group. We also collaborate with the Kenya Wildlife Service, the National Museums of Kenya, Conservation International, Wetlands International, and others.



Photo by Erica Cochrane

A New Dawn for Rwanda's Cranes and Wetlands

Rwanda's population of Grey Crowned Cranes is smaller than that of the neighboring strongholds of Uganda and Kenya, but the country serves as a model for developing regional crane and wetland conservation strategies. Since 2011, we have piloted approaches in Rwanda that we use in our priority projects across the region, including Conservation Agreements linked to important livelihood options. At Rugezi Marsh in northern Rwanda, we introduced modern bee-keeping methods and cooperatives that have reduced the frequency of damaging fires associated with traditional bee-keeping—a key threat to the marsh and its inhabitants.

We facilitated the development of fodder production cooperatives to reduce overharvest of plants from Rugezi Marsh for cattle feed. We established micro-enterprises to support the tourism industry. From the capital Kigali to Akagera National Park in eastern Rwanda, we support efforts to reintroduce Grey Crowned Cranes that have been confiscated from captivity back to the wild. Going forward, we are:

- Ensuring the long-term sustainability of our Conservation Agreements for bee-keeping, fodder production, and micro-tourism enterprises.



Photo by Jim Harris

- Advancing new livelihood options that further reduce threats to Rugezi Marsh and contribute to a greener local economy.
- Facilitating the declaration of Rugezi Marsh as a National Park under the Rwanda Development Board to ensure provide legal protection, management, and law enforcement.
- Initiating ecotourism for cranes and wetlands by building the first eco-lodge at the Rugezi Marsh, contributing to national policies on tourism, and providing a platform for further development by other key tourism stakeholders.
- Building on our educational outreach and Crane Custodian successes in Uganda and Kenya to encourage stewardship of breeding cranes and reduce threats to Rugezi Marsh.
- Providing expertise in veterinary science and wildlife monitoring to support the reintroduction of confiscated Grey Crowned Cranes to the wild at Akagera National Park, and applying the lessons from this successful approach to comparable programs in neighboring countries.

Key partners in Rwanda include the Integrated Polytechnic Regional College at Kitabi, the Rwandan Environment Management Authority, the Rwanda Development Board, and the Rwanda Wildlife Conservation Association.

WE NEED YOUR SUPPORT

The International Crane Foundation/Endangered Wildlife Trust Program for East Africa leads innovative programs and projects to safeguard Endangered Grey Crowned Cranes and the diverse and productive wetlands that sustain cranes, wildlife, and communities across East Africa.

We are the partner of choice for governments, private businesses, academic institutions, and other non-profit organizations seeking new ways to secure wetlands and biodiversity in the densely settled agricultural landscapes of East Africa. The iconic Grey Crowned Cranes, cherished by the peoples and nations of East Africa, are vital indicators of ecological health, flagships for wetland conservation, and transboundary ambassadors for the rich diversity of life and local communities that depend on wetlands.



Photo by Sundhir Herle

Please join us in safeguarding heathy cranes, wetlands, and communities in East Africa.

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