

Crane Safari FAQs

BOOKING ESSENTIAL

What does a Crane Safari include?

- The safari starts at 10.00 from a location near Curry Rivel – to be disclosed on booking.
- Join members of the Great Crane Project monitoring team in the project vehicle as they go in search of the cranes, on and off road, using radio tracking equipment.
- Find the cranes in locations not normally accessible to the general public.
- Accompany the monitors on foot to get closer to the cranes.
- Learn how to identify individual birds by their coloured leg rings.
- Enjoy amazing views of the cranes while the monitors record information about their behaviour.
- After the monitoring is complete (up to two hours), enjoy a complimentary lunch in the Lemon Tree cafe at the Willows and Wetlands Centre.
- Watch the film 'Return of the Cranes' about the Great Crane Project.
- The Crane Safari ends here, but the Willows and Wetlands Centre has a museum, shop and wetland walks, and your Crane Safari pack includes vouchers for free tours of the basket works.

What does it cost?

The price is £15 per person. This covers booking and administration by the Willows and Wetlands Centre and lunch at their Lemon Tree cafe plus the viewing of a short film. The RSPB does not make a charge for the Safaris.

What dates are available?

The Crane Safaris will run on Mondays to Saturdays from mid November 2014 to mid March 2014. Bookings must be made by midday on the Friday of the week before the date required.

How do I book?

Bookings are taken through the Willows & Wetlands Centre, phone 07434 363 427, office open Mon – Sat 9.30-5.00. You will need to pay the full price (£15 per person) over the phone by debit or credit card (or by card or cash at WWC). You will also need to give your mobile phone number (this is essential so that we can contact you if problems arise on the day), and your email address so that you can receive important further information. (If you do not have an email address, please give your postal address so that information can be posted to you.)

How many people can go?

Crane Safari trips are limited to a maximum of two guests, either two people who booked together, or two individuals who have booked separately. If you book as an individual you may be sharing with another guest, depending on bookings.

Can children come too?

The minimum age is fourteen but all under 18s must be accompanied by an adult, who must book at the same time. Please ensure that young people are aware that the safari involves a lot of standing still, and being quiet, for long periods...and it can be windy and cold!

Is there much walking involved?

There will be some walking between the vehicle and the best vantage points for observing the cranes. As we cannot predict the whereabouts of the cranes, it not possible to say how much walking there will be, but even short distances may be over rough, uneven, muddy, wet or slippery ground so appropriate footwear is essential (see 'what do we need to bring'). Crane safaris are not suitable for those with limited mobility. If you need specific advice on this please phone 01458 252805

What do we need to bring?

Good quality binoculars or a telescope will ensure you get the best views. The project's telescopes will be available, but please be aware that these will also need to be used by the monitors for their work. Binoculars will be available to borrow if you don't have your own. Since cranes prefer open landscapes, you are likely to be standing still for some time in unsheltered locations to observe them, so it is advisable to wear plenty of warm layers and bring a warm hat, gloves and waterproofs. Some walking will be involved over ground which may be rough, uneven, muddy, wet or slippery, so please wear suitable footwear such as walking boots or wellingtons with non-slip soles. You may like to bring a flask of hot tea/coffee for consumption during the safari, but lunch will be provided at the Willows and Wetland Centre after the trip.

What about the weather?

The crane monitors go out in all weathers, so it is very unlikely that a trip will be cancelled for reasons of weather, unless there are extreme conditions such as floods, snow or ice which make roads impassable or unsafe. It is therefore essential that you are prepared for cold, windy and/or wet weather, especially as the crane viewing will be in open flat areas with no shelter (see 'what do we need to bring').

What if we have to cancel?

In the unlikely event that the Great Crane Project has to cancel the trip, you will be offered a full refund, which will be made through the Willows and Wetlands Centre who took the payment.

If you have to cancel your trip, please inform us as soon as possible. More than a week before the trip, please contact the Willows and Wetland Centre, but if you have to cancel a week or less before the trip please phone 01458 252805. If you inform us of your cancellation before the trip, you will receive a refund minus an administration charge of £5.

How many cranes are there?

As of 20th October 2014, there are a total of 79 cranes in and around the Somerset Levels and Moors. However, some birds do travel to other places at times, so the number of birds in the area can vary.

Where are the cranes?

Currently most of the cranes have been spending much of their time in and around the southern part of the Levels and Moors, south of the Polden Hills. They move around within that area according to the availability of the best feeding sites (such as recently harvested stubble or fields rich in invertebrates or seasonally available wild seeds and roots). They may also explore beyond this area, particularly on clear still days. More information on recent sightings is available at www.thegreatcraneproject.org.uk/seeing-cranes/sightings-map. However, cranes can be very difficult to see within the landscape, especially to the untrained eye, which is why joining a Crane Safari offers by far the best chance of seeing them!

What do crane monitors do?

The Great Crane Project's team of monitors regularly go out to find the cranes and record valuable information about their location, behaviour (especially what they are eating) and welfare. Radio tracking equipment helps them to locate many of the cranes, although the small transmitters worn by the cranes do stop working after about two years. However, the monitors' in-depth knowledge of the birds means they know of many locations where the cranes are likely to be found. Telescopes are used to identify the birds by their coloured leg rings, so information can be gathered about individual birds, which is particularly useful for monitoring welfare, pairing and breeding. Monitoring is carried out through the winter months, when food and welfare may be a particular concern, but is less frequent during the summer when the cranes tend to split up into smaller groups and long vegetation makes leg rings harder to see.

Can we help during a crane safari?

A Crane Safari is an exciting opportunity to see the cranes and learn about the work of the project. Monitoring the cranes is skilled work requiring training and experience, so it is not really possible for guests to contribute. However, it will certainly help if guests follow the advice of the monitors, avoid sudden movements or loud conversation which could disturb the birds, and avoid distracting the monitors while they are actually recording their observations.

Are we guaranteed to see cranes?

Joining a Crane Safari with the project's monitors certainly gives you the best possible chance of seeing cranes. Not only are the monitors very experienced in finding the cranes, they can also take you to locations not normally accessible to the public, can help you get closer to the birds without disturbing them, and have good quality telescopes for viewing them. However the cranes are completely wild and free so, although you will have an excellent chance of finding at least some of them, we cannot completely guarantee that you will see cranes.

Can we use our own vehicle?

The Crane Safari can only take place using the Great Crane Project's vehicle, or another RSPB vehicle. Guests may not use, or follow in, their own vehicle.

Can we bring our dog?

There are strictly no dogs allowed on the crane safaris.

Further details about your Crane Safari

On the Friday before your trip you will be sent information by email, which will provide full details about your Crane Safari, including full directions to the start point. More details about the project, the cranes and crane monitoring will also be included, which will help you understand the cranes and the monitoring work and increase your enjoyment of the day.