



Welcome

Welcome to the very first newsletter of the Great Crane Project - the project that aims to get crane footprints back in the mud of the Levels and Moors and enrich the Somerset landscape in an inspiring and indelible way.

This regular newsletter will keep you updated on the project's progress as it unfolds over the coming years as well as providing what we hope will be insightful snippets into crane behaviour and science, history, mythology, literature and art.

Somerset's birds – your birds!

The crane family are one of the longest surviving of all bird species having been on the planet for over 40 million years. They also once freely roamed this part of the world, and were very much on the menu of the Iron Age wetland communities living in the Glastonbury and Meare Lake villages. Crane footprints are also preserved in the mud of the Severn Estuary, and their name lives on...with 'cran' the prefix to many an old haunt of the crane. Cranmore near Shepton Mallet is one such place.

They were hunted to extinction over 400 years ago - the blink of an eye in terms of the species - and now they are coming back! It is the project's aim that the reintroduction of this wonderful, iconic bird to the Levels and Moors will kick-start a wider appreciation of the wetland habitats that are so vital for the birds survival.

This will also protect and enhance the habitats that already support an incredibly wide range of bird, animal and plant species.

Recent news

- The project has just hosted a delegation of crane experts from Germany. They were impressed with the Levels and Moors and are happy that cranes will thrive here.
- A safe two-hectare enclosure to temporarily hold young birds prior to release into the Levels and Moors is near completion.
- A public awareness raising programme has begun in Somerset to prepare for the arrival of the birds
- Building work has started on a rearing and hatching facility at the WWT Slimbridge Wetland Centre.



Crane feet

The three toes of the crane's foot closely resemble an arrow symbol used in ancestry to represent family groupings. The French name for the symbol is *pied-de-grue* (cranes' foot) and this is the origin of the word *pedigree*.

Crane relations

Although they look a similar shape to herons and storks, they are not in the same family and are much more closely related to birds like moorhens, coots and water rails. This family of birds also includes the great bustard – a bird that has similarly been reintroduced to the West Country.



Why Somerset?

The Somerset Levels and Moors were chosen from a shortlist of four other sites in the UK for the reintroduction. They are extensive and relatively unpopulated and they have a fantastic mix of pasture, hay meadow, swamp, reedbed and arable land. There is also a good deal of land under conservation management with suitable water levels during the breeding season. Cranes need wetlands to nest in, but outside of the breeding season they could turn up anywhere where there is suitable food, and they are not fussy eaters... insects, bugs, plant roots, seeds and grains are all on the crane's diet.



Can't wait till next year...?

The birds won't be here until autumn 2010 but you can see cranes now at WWT centres at Slimbridge, Martin Mere, London and Washington and at Pensthorpe in Norfolk.

I want to know more!

For more background to the project you can contact the project manager, Damon Bridge on 01458 254414 to have a chat, request a leaflet, or arrange a group presentation.

Alternatively, go to any of the websites below and follow the links:

wwt.org.uk
rspb.org.uk

pensthorpetrust.org.uk
viridor-credits.co.uk

A brighter future for Somerset's wetlands

The Great Crane Project (GCP) is a partnership between the Wildfowl & Wetlands Trust (WWT), the RSPB, Pensthorpe Conservation Trust and Viridor Credits Environmental Company. The project aims to re-establish a sustainable population of common cranes in Britain, securing its future as a breeding species.