

The Somerset Crane Chronicle

The newsletter of the Great Crane Project

Issue 4
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Welcome

Welcome to the fourth newsletter of the Great Crane Project - the project that aims to re-establish a population of these magnificent birds in the Levels and Moors and enrich the Somerset landscape in an inspirational way.

The big move

On two consecutive days, early in August, and very early in the morning the project team gathered up at Slimbridge to begin the loading of the birds for transport to Somerset. The birds were checked over, weighed and measured for the last time and popped standing, into five foot high crates.

They were then driven down the M5 and across country to a release enclosure at a secret site in Somerset.



Unloading the cranes © GCP

Unloading the birds into the enclosure went very smoothly and we were simply amazed at how coolly the young birds reacted to their new environment.

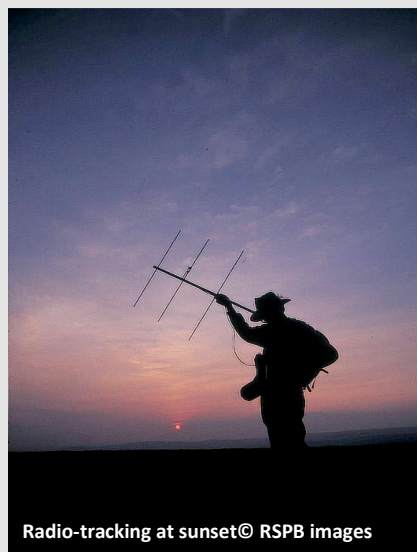
Anchoring

The cranes were left within netted aviaries inside the release enclosure for nearly three weeks. This period of time "anchored" the birds ie ensured that they built an attachment with their new environment, and accepted it as home. The move also marked a sudden change from the ultra-clean conditions at crane school to a wild environment full of bugs and we could keep a close eye on the birds' health.



Monitoring and training

The cranes were all marked prior to the big move with a mixture of coloured leg rings, satellite and radio tags and GPS data loggers. This monitoring kit is a vital part of the release project and will ensure that the birds can be located each day and checked over the coming months. Nearly thirty local volunteers have been trained to carry out the monitoring work and their help will be really critical in the next stages of the project.



Crane Championing

A programme of work with school children will see more than fifteen project volunteers going into local schools to lead a conservation and arts based 'crane championing scheme'. A session discovering cranes and wetlands will be followed by creative activities and local school children will be able to name some of the cranes yet to have developed nicknames. The project has been developed in combination with Somerset Art Works.

The release....

On a blustery day in late August, the gates of the aviaries were opened for the first time and the birds began to tentatively make their way out.

We had little idea what to expect as the birds made their way out. All could fly by now - would they fly - and if so would they fly away - or fly back?



The first bird took to the air - and an incredibly heart-stopping moment followed as it flew higher and higher, up, over and behind a line of trees. I looked around and noticed that all the other cranes were watching it too, along with crane mum Amy and dad Roland. After a few very long seconds it re-appeared and dropped in to land rather inelegantly in a field beside the pen. A few minutes later more birds took to the air with other birds following us out of the pen on foot.

....and forty-five days on.

The cranes have spent the last month and a half travelling increasingly further out from the pen during the day to forage in the meadows and rough grassland. They have been feeding on craneflies, grassmoths and orb spiders, rush seeds and plant roots as well as using some of the supplementary feed that we have been providing to help in the anchoring process. They have also started using arable stubbles too which may become an important source of food during the winter months.

You can now meet the cranes and follow the progress of the project at:

www.thegreatcraneproject.org.uk

Or contact Damon Bridge

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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 population of common cranes in Somerset and help the restoration of cranes to suitable habitats throughout the UK.