

STATUS AND DISTRIBUTION OF CRANES IN IRAN AND SOME OBSERVATIONS IN IRAQ

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Very little detailed information about Iranian wetlands existed at the beginning of this century and that available was unfortunately rather vague. The recent literature about birds in Iran largely follows Zarudny (1911) and other workers who collected in Iran in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. These early workers seldom listed any quantitative data concerning the abundance of species; consequently, it is now virtually impossible to come up with any firm conclusions about population trends during the present century. The following notes are based almost entirely on wetland surveys and waterfowl studies conducted by the Ornithology Unit, Iran Department of Parks and Wildlife, throughout Iran from 1966 to 1975, and in Iraq from 10 January to 3 February 1979. In the latter trip I was accompanied by E. Carp and I wish to acknowledge his assistance.

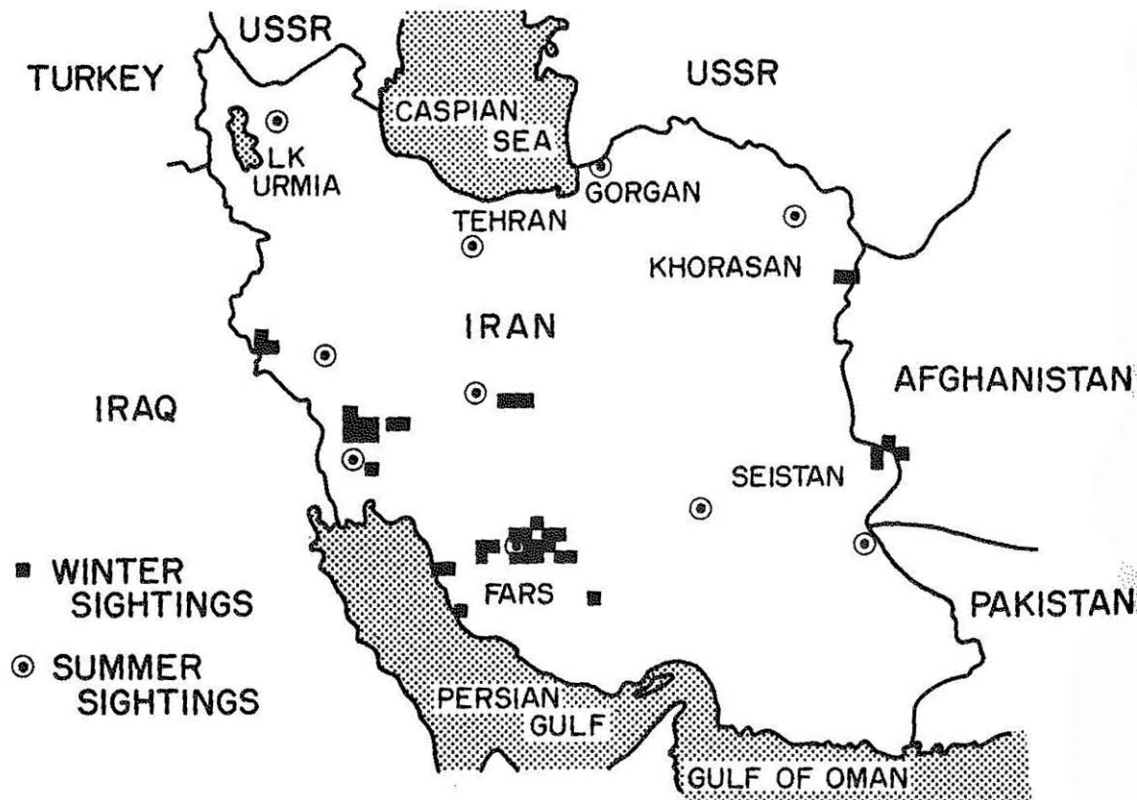
The work of the Ornithology Unit included winter, spring, autumn, and breeding season surveys at all major wetlands. Special attention was given to the midwinter (January) waterfowl counts and in the winters 1971-1972 to 1974-1975 all wetlands of any significance for wintering waterfowl were censused. Aerial censuses were conducted at the large wetlands of Khuzestan, Fars, and Seistan. Three species of cranes were recorded: the common (*Grus grus*), Siberian white (*G. leucogeranus*), and demoiselle (*Anthropoides virgo*).

COMMON CRANE

The common crane is a common winter visitor to arable land and wetlands in the south (Fig. 1) along the Karkheh, Dez, and Karun Rivers in Khuzestan, in central Fars, and in Seistan. Smaller wintering flocks were also reported from Ilam area, Izeh Lakes in Khuzestan, Halileh Rud Marshes near Bushire, delta of Monde River (Gulf Coast), along the Zaindeh Rud near Isfahan, and near Tayebad in northeast Khorasan (only in mild winters). This crane arrives in late September and early October and departs in March and early April. It is a regular migrant in spring and autumn in the southeast Caspian region (particularly the Gorgan Bay area), and in the valley of Jowin Rud near Sabzevar, Khorasan. The common crane is occasionally seen in small numbers during migration on areas of arable land or at small wetlands in the west-central plateau (e.g., Tehran area, Esfahan area).

Three recent records of summering nonbreeders are seen Pol-e Dokhtar Marsh, Luristan, 3rd week of May 1972; 1 seen at a small lake on Turkoman Steppes, Gorgan, 2nd week of July 1972; and 1 seen at Akh Gol Lake, northwest of Azarbaijan, 2nd week of July 1974. There are no recent records of nesting in Iran.

Midwinter counts of common cranes in Iran are listed in Table 1. Allowing for incomplete coverage



total estimates for the wintering population of these cranes are as follows: 1971-72, 2,500-3,000; 1972-73, 2,000-2,500; 1973-74, 2,000-2,400; and 1974-75, 2,500-3,000.

Common cranes observed during our brief visit to Iraq are listed in Table 2. According to local farmers and shepherds, large numbers of common cranes occur on the plains around Haur Ash-Shuwa'ija, near Kut (32°42'N, 46°00'E), on the Attariya plains east of Baghdad, and on the plains east and northeast of Baghdad toward the Iranian border. Obviously, during the present survey we observed only a tiny fraction of the common cranes wintering in Iraq.

SIBERIAN WHITE CRANE

The Siberian white crane formerly occurred in winter in the South Caspian region, Turkoman Steppes, and, according to Zarudny (1911), in Seistan. Caspian records are summarized by Schuz (1959). The last record in the south Caspian region was at Lenkoran, USSR, in 1925. In February 1978 a flock of about 11 Siberian cranes was discovered wintering near the town of Feredunkenar on the east Caspian lowlands of north-east Iran. The cranes wintered in the midst of a duck trapping complex and had gone unnoticed by ornithologists because of the improbability of finding them wintering in such proximity to man, and because of the waterfowl harvesters' reluctance to allow anyone but themselves to approach the trapping area in fear of frightening the ducks away from the traps. The cranes

have wintered in the locale for as long as the local people could remember. Birds seen in migration at the Astrahan Nature Reserve in the delta of the Volga River in the Soviet sector of the Caspian Sea may be the only group still wintering in Iran.

DEMOISELLE CRANE

The demoiselle crane is a migrant in the south Caspian region and a winter visitor in Seistan, along the Gulf Coast, and in southern Persian Baluchistan (Zarudny 1911). It is a winter visitor to southwest Iran (Hue and Etchecopar 1970). However, there are very few reliable records and the only recent records are 1 seen at Lake Maharlu, Fars, 1965-1966 (L. Cornwallis, pers. comm.); 1 seen 17 August 1972 at Lake Kobi, Azarbaijan; 2 collected November 1972 near Chalus, Mazandaran; and 2 seen 15 September 1973 at Miankaleh Peininsula, Mazandaran. Obviously the species is now only a very uncommon migrant through Iran.

LITERATURE CITED

- HUE, F., AND R. D. ETCHECOPAR. 1970. Les oiseaux de proche et du moyen Orient. Boubée.
- SCHUZ, E. 1959. Die vogelwelt des sudkaspischen tieflandes. Stuttgart.
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Table 1. Midwinter censuses of common cranes in Iran, January 1972-1975.

Province	Locality	Winter			
		1971-72	1972-73	1973-74	1974-75
Khorasan	Tayebad area	22	46	-- ^a	274
Isfahan	Zaindeh Rud	--	30	13	51
Ilam	Ilam area	206	250	--	--
Khuzestan	Karun, Dez, and Karkheh	1,315	387	711	299
	Plains south of Ahwaz	0	0	0	4
	Izeh Lakes	--	--	--	400
Gulf Coast	Halileh Rud delta	--	--	120	69
	Monde River delta	--	--	--	27
Fars	Dasht-e Arjan ^b	32	19	75	2
	Lake Parishan ^b	3	182	275	275
	Lake Maharlu	0	0	7	0
	Dasht-e Baiza	0	0	14	7
	Kur Valley	0	5	0	61
	Bakhtegan and Tashk ^b	9	548	375	541
Seistan	Darab/Lar	500	0	--	0
	Hamoun-i Puzak South	15	145	8	450
	Hamoun-i Sabari ^b	0	17	6	0

^aNo census taken wherever -- is present.

^bLocalities within the Department of the Environment's reserves.

Table 2. Observations of common cranes 10 January to 3 February 1979 survey in Iraq.

Date	Locality and coordinates	Cranes	Crane activity
14 Jan	15-ha steppe pond and cultivated plains 17 km W Qalat Salih, 31°30'N, 47°14'E	12	In flight
18 Jan	Center of Haur As Sa'adiyah from E shore 32°09'N, 46°38'E	62	Roosting
19 Jan	10-ha steppe pond and cultivated plains 43 km N Amara, 32°06'N, 46°50'E	32	In flight
26 Jan	Steppe plains near marshes 12 km NE Fuhud, NW Haur Al Hammar, 31°01'N, 46°43'E	4	Family feeding (2 ad, 2 juv)
29 Jan	15-ha desert pond 30 km SE of Nasiriya, 30°52'N, 46°22'E	6	Feeding
1 Feb	Lake Razazah, seen from W shore 5 km S of N end, 32°59'N, 43°33'E	5	In flight
2 Feb	Desert plains, arable land, and small marshes at Attariya, 45 km E of Baghdad, 33°15'N, 44°55'E	5	Feeding