

Endangered Wildlife Trust Update

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The South African Crane Working Group

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The South African Crane Working Group has made a breakthrough with their wattled crane release programme. With only 250 wattled crane left in the wild in South Africa the SA Crane Working Group has embarked on a captive breeding and supplementation programme. Captive breeding occurs in a number of facilities housing wattled crane. The birds are managed as one flock for maximum productivity. Chicks are reared for release using a method called isolation or costume rearing where people dress up in crane costumes and rear the chicks in as natural an environment as possible.



Hand rearing of wattled crane chicks.

These chicks learn to eat the correct foods, how to fly strongly and most importantly, because they are not exposed to people in a human form, they know that

are cranes and when sexually mature, will make the correct mate choice.

The SA Crane Working Group has been very successful when it comes to teaching these hand raised birds how and where to forage and roost and released birds have done well in this respect. What we can't teach them however is the movement patterns of wild birds and the traditional safe roosting and feeding areas. Birds released which do not join up with wild birds do not survive very long and move into regions where they are poisoned or killed through powerline collisions. Therefore this year the crane group decided to experiment with releasing a single bird to the wild flock in KwaZulu Natal.

Eight month old Musa was driven from Dullstroom to the Swartberg in KwaZulu Natal and acclimatized for one night in a holding pen. When the gates were opened she flew out and eagerly made for the flock. Sensibly she landed

nearby and approached very submissively with her neck low making chicks' noises. The reaction of the older birds was extraordinary. They ganged up and attacked her!!! She managed to dance away but got caught up in a fence. It looked for few moments that it was over for Musa. But she managed to roll through the fence and flew away none the worse for wear. Over the next few days the older birds continued to persecute Musa and she obviously chose not to spend too much time with them and refused to roost with the flock in the dam at night. This was very worrying as by roosting in a field she was very vulnerable to predation. Ann Burke, her now very worried surrogate mother, was concerned that Musa would never be accepted by the flock and with a heavy heart watched this chick hang around the fringes of the flock for 10 days. Then one morning when Ann arrived at the release site she saw Musa take off from the dam with the wild flock. Musa had at last joined up with the other birds and was roosting in safety!

Since then Musa has become more and more at ease with the flock birds. She is learning social graces and how to behave like a wild wattled crane. It is a tremendous achievement to have hand-raised a member of this critically endangered species and to see her flying free with a flock of wild birds.

Western Cape Support Group News Flash

A presentation by Owen Wittridge on the Cape Peninsula National Park will be given on Thursday 29 June at 18:00 for 18:30 start. Entrance fee will be free of charge and all are welcome. The venue is Lecture Theatre 2, John Day Zoology Building, University Road, Upper Campus, University of Cape Town. Please contact Liz Wilkie @ 082 924 4084 if you would like to attend.

Darting Safaris — MANAGEMENT THROUGH UTILISATION

Darting Safaris were created by the WBRC to satisfy a need where individual animals have to be immobilized for a management, conservation or research reason and where there are limited funds available for the procedure. Sport hunters and adventure lovers are prepared to pay for such procedures when given the opportunity to participate in the exercise. Additional income is also raised for game farms and reserves as the participating persons need to be accommodated and serviced for the duration of the operation.

Reasons for animal immobilization may include ear-notching and micro-chipping rhino as a management and anti-poaching measure, translocation of animals for breeding programmes, fitting radio-collars for determining home ranges, biological sample collection for genetic, disease and population biology studies etc.

Individual clients are given the opportunity to track, stalk and "bag" their prey with a dart gun. Groups of people may also attend such operations as part of team-building or training exercises and even family groups may participate in their own "safari". While under anaesthetic, the animal is carefully monitored by the attending wildlife veterinarian while the client gets his photograph taken with the animal. Trophy measurements are also taken and can be entered into the trophy record book.

Darting Safaris must be conducted by a team of professionals, to ensure



Wildlife Breeding Research Centre

that everything possible is done to safeguard the health and wellbeing of the animal, staff and participants. Radio-transmitter darts may be used to quickly locate a darted animal and in some cases it is strongly recommended that a helicopter be on stand-by to get staff to an immobilised animal without delay.

Contact Dr. Paul Bartels if you need any animals darted for a management, conservation or research reason or would like to participate in a darting safari. Tel: 082 990-3533 or e-mail: hunt@dartsafari.com



Eric Skmetta of New Orleans USA with his darted rhino "trophy".