



Factfile:

Winchi

The Majestic Crane

West African Crowned Crane
B. p. pavorina

East African Crowned Crane
B. p. ceciliae



Content:

INTRODUCTION.....	3
KEY POINTS.....	4
SUMMARY REVIEW	5
AFRICAN CROWNED CRANES.....	6
SUBSPECIES/POPULATIONS	7
POPULATION NUMBERS AND TRENDS.....	7
CONSERVATION STATUS.....	7
HISTORIC AND PRESENT DISTRIBUTION	8
HABITAT AND ECOLOGY.....	9
REFERENCE SOURCES.....	9

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INTRODUCTION

Today there are fifteen species of Winchi. This Factfile focuses on the two *African Crowned Cranes*, which are believed to have the closest connection to the great ancestors of all cranes. Once regarded as messengers from heaven, signalling longevity and good fortune, Winchi appears in the ancient myth and legend of many cultures.

Winchi Dankira or Ngoma (dance) originated in Africa (known as Cush or Nubia in antiquity). It was then taken to Tibet and then over to China. In the east monks developed their own Winchi styles through nature's own inspiration, these became companions of other hand to hand combat arts and animal expressions.

In the African world the development of Winchi Dankira came about from the observation and study of the *Black Crowned, Wattled, Gray Crowned* and *Blue Cranes*, all of which stress a lot on balance and flexibility. Winchi Dankira uses the beak technique to peck as a form of attack and the flapping wings for balance and defence. Winchi also employs high front and sidekicks. The one legged stance is classic, but is only one of the many stances utilised by Winchi.

Powerful Winchi Dankira styles were developed by the Aborigines (Africans) in Australia where we find the *Australian Sarus* and the *Brolga* species of crane. The Kalahari peoples in Southern Africa expand on this type of Winchi expression by using low and long stances, sweeps and utilising the wings to make expressive attacking and defending movements.

The strength of Winchi comes from circular movements and long arm techniques. In the practice of Kazimba Ngoma (an artform utilised in **SOUL's Dankira Tehwagi**), Winchi always opens the Ngoma and thus sets the pace and energy of the Ngoma. In its dance Winchi must be able to rise up and fly. Turning kicks pivoting on its toes, whirling (rotating) dances, hand giving gestures and prayer like expressions all form part of the majestic array of Winchi expressions.

The breathing is mainly through the nostrils, while the air is dispersed throughout the body.

KEY POINTS

- Winchi stands up to 3 feet high and are approximately 38 inches in length.
- The crane is noted for its balance, gracefulness and agility.
- It represents longevity and teaches us concentration and patience.
- They range over West & East Africa, Ethiopia, Sudan, Congo, Uganda, Kenya and Central Tanzania. Cranes enjoy open country. They are omnivore, eating plants, worms, snails, insects, frogs, lizards, mice & young birds.
- Cranes are typically social and gregarious, except during breeding season, when they are shy and wary.
- The courtship display consists of each bird circling around each other with wings half spread. Often leaping high in the air and also bowing low to each other. Cranes display in this manner throughout the year.
- Parents construct large nest of grasses and other vegetation. The nest is built on the ground and 2-3 eggs are laid.
- Both parents incubate the eggs for 30 days.
- Both parents feed young in the beginning and in about 10 weeks, the young can fly.
- Its movements are generally soft, relaxed and circular. However they can also be explosive and can be used in close or at a distance.
- Practising crane movements helps develop strength in the arms, fingers and wrists as well as overall leg conditioning and ankle strength.

SUMMARY REVIEW

As mentioned above the Crowned Cranes most closely resemble the ancestors of the crane family. One characteristic that attests to their ancient heritage is that only Black and Grey Crowned Cranes can roost in trees. Unlike other cranes, Crowned Cranes have long hind toes (called the "hallux") positioned low on the foot, which allows them to grasp branches.

While both species of Crowned Cranes nest in wetlands, they spend much of the year in dry grasslands feeding on seeds and insects. To find insects, the Crowned Cranes walk through the grass, startling insects into hopping or flying and giving away their location.

Black Crowned Cranes are non-migratory, nesting in small, temporary wetlands during the rainy season and gathering in large, permanent wetlands during the dry season.

Both species of Crowned Cranes begin their dance by bobbing their heads, then bowing and leaping together. Cranes dance with each other to strengthen pair bonds and in response to stress.

Status:

There are two subspecies of Crowned Cranes that live in the African Sahel, the transition between the Sahara Desert to the north and the moister areas to the south. In Sudan and Ethiopia, the Gray Crowned population is stable and relatively abundant with a population estimated at 55,000 to 60,000 birds. The Black Crowned cranes are less common and are actually declining rapidly in West Africa, where only 11,000 to 17,000 live.

Degradation of habitat continues to be the principal threat to these birds. The number of Black Crowned Cranes has declined with the persistent drought that has affected the Sahel since 1973. As the drought and resulting desertification continues, more and more people flee to the moist areas used by the cranes.

Wetlands are often drained and further degraded by cattle grazing. Dams, built to provide irrigation water to combat the drought, change the flow of water throughout the region leaving some wetlands drowned and others dry. In addition, civil wars within the Black Crowned's province have hindered assistance and left some reserves unprotected. Despite the distinction of being Nigeria's national bird, Black Crowned Cranes are often hunted and sold to wild animal dealers and fewer than 100 birds still survive in this country.

The IUCN has categorised Black Crowned Cranes as Vulnerable (proposed) while CITES has classified this species as Appendix II.

AFRICAN CROWNED CRANES

The African Crowned Crane (aka Black/West African and Gray/East African/Sudan Crowned Crane) are found in the Sahel and Sudan Savanna regions of Africa from the Atlantic coast to the upper Nile River basin. Two subspecies are recognised. *B. p. pavonina* (the West African Crowned Crane), with an estimated population of 11,500-17,500, occupies the western part of this range and is divided into eight or more distinct populations. *B. p. ceciliae* (the East African Crowned Crane), with an estimated population of 55,000-60,000, occurs in eastern Africa, with the largest concentrations in southern Sudan. Historically, the species was more numerous and more evenly distributed than at present. In the eastern part of its range, its population is stable and relatively abundant. In the western portions of the range, however, its numbers have declined and its range has been reduced dramatically over the last two decades. The species is classified as Vulnerable under the revised IUCN Red List Categories. *B. p. pavonina* is classified Endangered, and *B. p. ceciliae* Vulnerable.

Crowned Cranes use both wet and dry open habitats, but prefer a mixture of shallow wetlands and grasslands (especially flooded lowlands in the sub-Saharan savannahs). They can be considered both year-round residents and local migrants, flocking together during the dry (non-breeding) season and moving from large permanent wetlands to smaller temporary wetlands formed during the rainy season. Although they are non-migratory, daily and seasonal movements may in some areas range up to several dozen kilometres.

The principal threat facing the Crowned Crane (as with most cranes) is the loss, transformation, and degradation of its habitat. Behind this threat lies a combination of causal factors: extended drought in the Sahel and sub-Saharan savannahs, high human population pressures, intensive agricultural development and expansion, and extensive changes in hydrological systems as a result of dams, drainage, and irrigation projects. These factors are most pressing in West Africa, but also affect the species in the east. In some areas, these cranes are hunted for meat or captured and sold for trade. Ineffective enforcement of laws and the shortage of scientific research may also be considered long-term threats to the survival of the species.

The decline of the Black Crowned Crane in West Africa has begun to stimulate conservation efforts on behalf of the species. It is legally protected in most countries where it occurs, and many protected areas established in these countries harbour cranes. Several local surveys have recently been undertaken. In 1992, Nigeria hosted an International Conference on the Black Crowned Crane and its Wetlands Habitat in West and Central Africa, and a Black Crowned Crane Co-ordinating Centre was established. No reintroduction program has been undertaken for the Black Crowned Crane, but the potential for reintroduction of the West African subspecies has been under discussion, and an experimental release has taken place in Nigeria.

Priority conservation needs for the species include: transfer of the species to CITES Appendix I; ratification of the Ramsar Convention by range countries and adoption of stronger national wetland protection policies and legislation; requirements for environmental impact assessments of large-scale development schemes affecting Black Crowned Crane habitat; increased support for existing protected areas and designation of new areas used by cranes; ecological research on wetlands and crane habitat requirements; a co-ordinated surveying and monitoring program for the species; collaborative projects involving local communities in the conservation and sustainable use of wetlands; establishment of a West African Crane Recovery Team; development of educational programs involving Black Crowned Cranes and wetlands; and expanded training opportunities for crane and wetland conservation specialists.

SUBSPECIES/POPULATIONS

West African Crowned Crane

B. p. pavonina

East African (aka Gray or Sudan) Crowned Crane

B. p. ceciliae

The East and West African Crowned Cranes were combined within a single superspecies in the past, but are now considered separate species with two subspecies each. The two subspecies of the African Crowned Crane are most easily distinguished by differences in the coloration of their cheek patches. In *B. p. pavonina*, the lower half of the cheek patch is red; in *B. p. ceciliae*, the red extends into the upper half of the cheek patch (Johnsgard 1983, S. Haeffner pers. comm.).

POPULATION NUMBERS AND TRENDS

Subspecies	Number	Trend	Source
<i>B. p. pavonina</i>	11,500-17,500	Declining. Extirpated (or nearly extirpated) in some nations.	Urban in press
<i>B. p. ceciliae</i>	55,000-60,000	Uncertain. Generally stable, but possibly declining locally. Still abundant, perhaps expanding in Sudan.	Urban in press
Total	66,500-77,500	Declining	

CONSERVATION STATUS

IUCN Category

Vulnerable, under criteria
A1c,d A2c,d

CITES

Appendix II

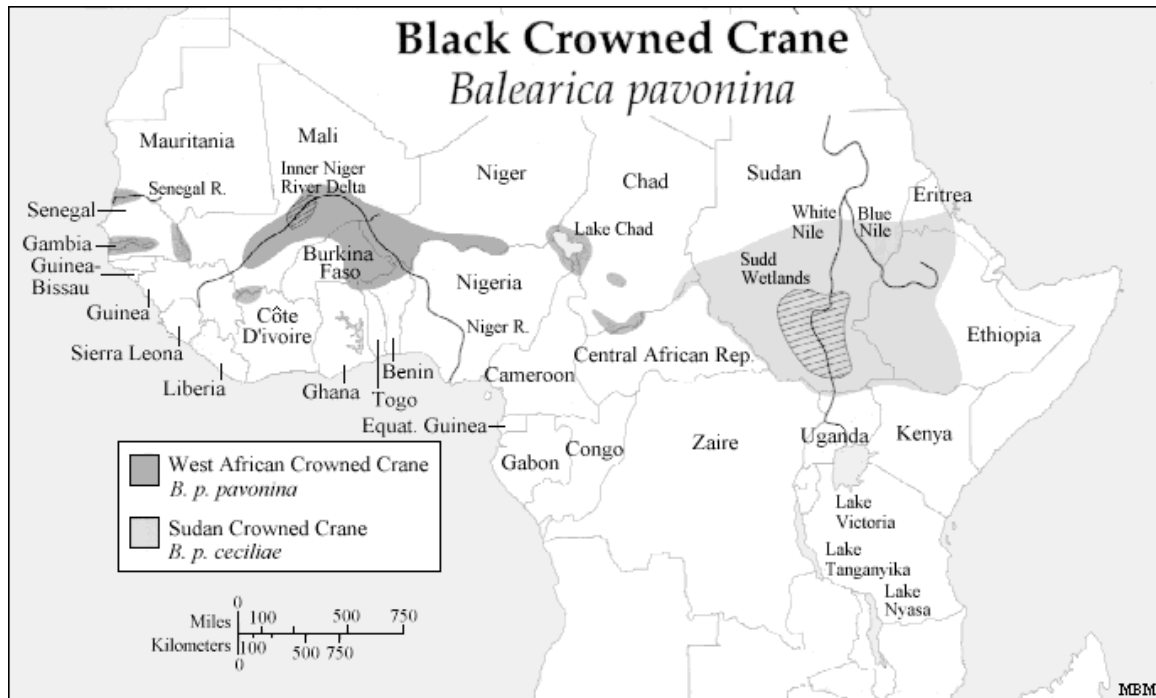
West African (*B. p. pavonina*)

Endangered, under criteria
A1c,d

East African/Sudan (*B. p. ceciliae*)

Vulnerable, under criteria
A1c,d A2c,d

HISTORIC AND PRESENT DISTRIBUTION



The Black [African] Crowned Crane is found in the Sahel and Sudan Savanna region of Africa from Senegal and Gambia on the Atlantic coast east to the upper Nile River basin in Sudan and Ethiopia (Walkinshaw 1964). Major wetlands—including the delta of the Senegal River, the inland delta of the Niger River in Mali, the delta of the Wazi River at Lake Chad in Cameroon, and the extensive Sudd wetlands in southern Sudan—are strongholds for the species (Eljack in press). *B. p. pavonina* occurs in the western part of this range, from Chad to Senegal, and is now thought to be divided into eight or more distinct populations. *B. p. ceciliae* is found in eastern Africa, with the largest concentrations (an estimated 50,000 birds) in southern Sudan (Urban in press).

Historically, the Crowned Crane was more numerous than at present, and distributed more widely and evenly in the Sahel and sub-Saharan savannahs. The eastern portion of the population remains relatively abundant, although the population may be declining in eastern Sudan (Eljack in press). In western Africa, both the numbers and range of the West African Crowned Crane have declined dramatically since the onset of persistent drought in 1973 (Mustafa and Durbunde 1992). The drying up of wetlands, combined with increasing human population pressures, loss of habitat, and other threats, has fragmented the range of the subspecies and brought it to the verge of extinction in several countries. The population in Nigeria (where it was once abundant and is still the national bird) has been reduced to no more than 50-100 individuals (Urban in press, P. Hall pers. comm.).

HABITAT AND ECOLOGY



Black Crowned Cranes one week old.

Crowned Cranes use both wet and dry open habitats, but prefer freshwater marshes, wetter grasslands, and the edges of water bodies. The West African subspecies prefers a mixture of shallow wetlands and grasslands, especially flooded lowlands in the sub-Saharan savannahs during the rainy season (generally June-September). They also forage and nest along river banks, in rice and wet crop fields, and even in abandoned fields and other dry lands, although always close to wetlands. In the eastern portion of its range, the Crowned Crane typically inhabits larger freshwater marshes, wet meadows and fields, and open areas of emergent vegetation along the margins of ponds, lakes, and rivers. These landscapes often include acacias and other trees, in which the cranes will roost.

Black Crowned Cranes can be considered both year-round residents and local migrants, flocking—often in large numbers—during the dry (non-breeding) season and moving from large permanent wetlands to smaller temporary wetlands during the rainy season. Their circular platform nests are built of grasses and sedges within or along the edges of densely vegetated wetlands. The average clutch size is about 2.5 eggs/nest. The incubation period is 28-31 days. The fledging period is 60-100 days (Walkinshaw 1973, Johnsgard 1983).

Soon after the chicks hatch, the cranes move into nearby open upland/grassland areas where they forage on insects and the fresh tips of plants. During the dry season, they forage in upland areas, frequently near herds of domestic livestock where invertebrates occur in greater abundance. If the rains fail, or if nesting habitat is deleteriously affected by drainage or overgrazing, crane pairs will remain in flocks throughout the year. Daily and seasonal movements between feeding and roosting areas are thought to be extensive (perhaps up to several dozen kilometres), but there has been little research on this aspect of their life history (Urban 1981).

REFERENCE SOURCES

- *Kazimba Ngoma Academy*
- *International Crane Foundation*
- *The Birds of Heaven* (book by Peter Matthiessen)
- *Schools Of Unified Learning (SOUL)*