

The Sentinels

Cranes of South Africa

Daniel Dolpire (photography)
David Allen (text)

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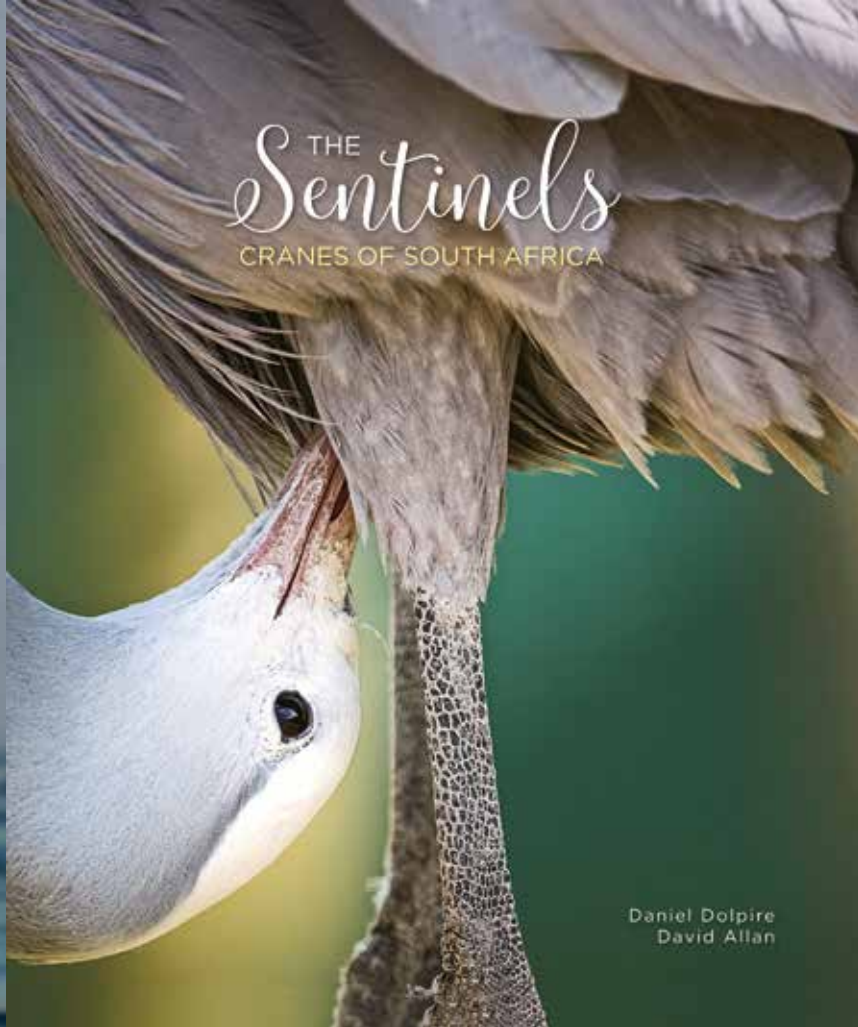
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305 x 260 mm; 176 pages; all colour.

164 colour photographs

5 maps



A stunningly illustrated
account of the 3 species
of Southern African crane:

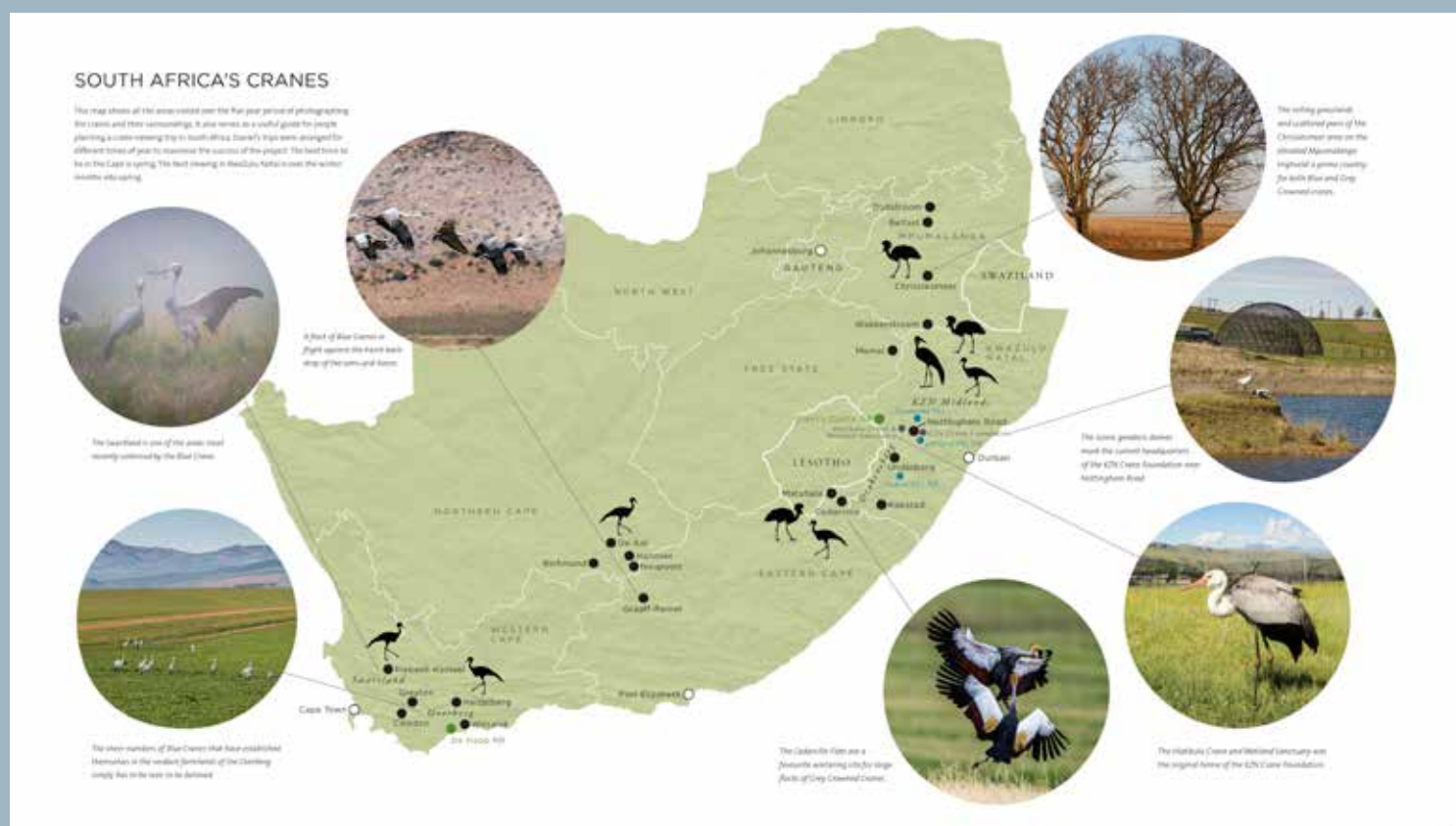
*the Grey Crowned Crane
the Blue Crane
& the Wattled Crane*

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‘Perhaps more than any other living creatures, cranes evoke the retreating wilderness, the vanishing horizons of clean water and air upon which their species –and ours, too, though we learn it very late– must ultimately depend for survival.’ Peter Matthiessen



GREY CROWNED CRANE FACT SHEET

Balearica regulorum

FACT FILE: Height 1.0-1.3 m; weight 1.8-2.5 m; mass 3-4.5 kg

DESCRIPTION: An ostrich-like crane with a short beak and short, stout appearance. Short black safety feathers on forehead and crown, a spiky crest of long, curved, straw-like golden feathers (shaped like a fan) at rear of head, a low white face patch sometimes, intense red along the top ear edge and fringed with black feathering to the chin, a large pendant red wattle on throat, and a small pair grey with feathers of the neck, especially the lower, rounded, and mottled throat and lateral, remaining upper parts and underparts dark grey to blue with long feathers towards the back. Upperwing (and underwing) coverts white giving a broad white wing patch in the folded wing, innermost greater upperwing coverts brightened into long, flame-like golden feathering at distal ends. Forewings black, secondaries mostly rhinoceros and broad, covering the short black tail at rest. Eyes light blue. Bill short, black and black, with a black tip. Feet black. Seven also, male slightly larger female brownish face patch with fine cream feathering, safety feathers of forehead and crown tipped with black, crest less well developed, under black or grey with fine cream feathering. Back and underpart feathers brown with buff tips, white wing patch less distinct, with each feather broadly tipped brown. Secondaries dark brown, lack golden wing coverts plumes. Eyes pale brown.

VOICE: The typical call is a mournful and penetrating double-syllabled 'woon'. The similar call, often given pre-dawn, is a prolonged, low pitched and rhythmic booming chant.

DISTRIBUTION: In South Africa, restricted to the east where it is quite widespread in wetland regions. Only a few sites in southern and western South Africa. Further north, common and widespread in the wetlands, mostly in the central regions. Strangely common in the extensive wetlands of northern Namibia and Botswana, and central Mozambique. Its distribution extends north of southern Africa to East Africa.

POPULATION: In South Africa, estimated at about 6,000 globally at 2000-2010.

HABITAT: Tied to wetlands with tall emergent vegetation for breeding, but wanders widely into adjacent open to highly wooded grasslands when foraging. Like the Blue Crane, has adapted particularly well to agricultural districts, where it inhabits crop fields and pasture.

MOVEMENTS: Not known to be migratory and essentially sedentary, although vagrants are fairly frequently recorded well out of the normal range. Flocks of non-breeding birds make local movements, and are sometimes joined to this by breeding birds during the non-breeding season.

DIET: Mostly insects, comprising both plant and animal material: small beetles, seeds (including of grasses and sedges), leaves, invertebrates (including ticks, grasshoppers, crickets, caterpillars, army worms, millipedes and crabs), frogs, lizards, small rodents and shrews have also been recorded. Also feeds on crops, perhaps especially maize.

BREEDING: Nest a mound of sparse vegetation in a wetland, typically covered by tall emergent vegetation. Egg laying in southern Africa October-May (mainly November-February). Eggs 4-6, mainly 2-3 (average 3.0); pale blue and unmarked, unlike eggs of Blue and Kudu cranes. Incubation 28-30 days. Young require flight at about 8-10 weeks.

CONSERVATION: Considered Endangered both globally and in South Africa. Major threats are loss and degradation of wetlands and surrounding grasslands, deliberate poisoning and shooting related to hunting in croplands, collisions with overhead lines, disturbance when nesting and the taking of this as a trophy.

(Crested crane: left) and park bird and connected center for eggs of other crane species with the South African photograph birds of all crane birds. (Crested crane) also have strongly white wing coverts and white-brown-colored coverts on the back.)

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In September 2013, photographer Daniel Dolpire set off on a passionate odyssey that would consume the next five years of his life. ***The Sentinels – Cranes of South Africa*** is the culmination of that epic journey. It is little wonder that cranes so captivated Daniel's heart. These are amongst the most stately and spectacular of all birds. The largest of them are the tallest flying birds on the globe. Their plumage is typically striking and the family is acclaimed for the intricate patterning on their faces and heads. The habits of these elegant birds are no less entrancing. Their joyous and acrobatic dancing is simply breath-taking. The sounds of their resonant trumpeting calls are amongst the most powerful and evocative in the avian world.

Sadly, cranes also feature amongst the most threatened of birds. No less than 11 of the world's 15 species are now considered in danger of extinction. The main dangers come from the wanton destruction of the expansive wetlands that these birds are so reliant on for their continued survival. But other perils intrinsic to our increasingly crowded planet also take their toll. The demise of cranes is by no means unavoidable though. They are adaptable animals capable of living alongside humans if they are afforded a measure of tolerance. South Africa supports three crane species. The courtly *Blue Crane* occurs nowhere else in the world and is the country's national bird. The majestic *Wattled Crane* is one of the most critically endangered birds in South Africa. The ornate *Grey Crowned Crane* is one of the world's most beautiful birds but, worryingly, it seems to be decreasing across its broad African range even faster than the other two species.

The Sentinels is a photographic festival celebrating the beauty and uniqueness of these remarkable birds. Daniel travelled through the heart of South Africa's 'crane country' meticulously documenting these birds in their natural habitat. He shares with us priceless images of cranes as they go about their daily routines. Daniel draws us deep into the hidden lives of these species, revealing the most intimate details of their activities. Towards the end of the project, Daniel brought in local ornithologist David Allen to ensure that the volume was underpinned by a scientifically rigorous text.

The Sentinels provides an unmatched window into the allure and wonder of South Africa's cranes and focuses our attention on the very real dangers they face.

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Daniel Dolpire gave up a successful business career to focus his energy and passion on becoming an accomplished nature photographer. In 2013 he became captivated by cranes and undertook to photograph all 3 South African species, a task which took him 5 years. Often rising long before dawn and finishing a shoot after sunset, he captured tens of thousands of images and travelled many thousands of kilometres. The project became an endeavour of epic proportions as he realised the importance of these birds as sentinels of the fragility and health of our natural resources, particularly wetlands and water catchments. *The Sentinels* provides insight into the threatened life of cranes and their habitats – a world that we need to protect and nurture. We owe him a huge debt of gratitude.



David Allen has been Curator of Birds at the Durban Natural Science Museum for 22 years. Before this he worked for nearly a decade at the FitzPatrick Institute of African Ornithology and the Avian (now Animal) Demography Unit, both at the University of Cape Town. His research at the former was mainly on Blue Cranes and formed the basis of his MSc degree. During his ornithological career he has worked on raptors and threatened Highveld birds and developed a close interest in cranes, working on Wattled Cranes in the Steenkampsberg. The author of several books on birds of prey, David has also written a volume on geographical variation in southern African birds. He was a co-editor of *The Atlas of Southern African Birds*, a landmark two-volume treatise, and has a wide range of additional publications to his credit, both scientific and popular. He has been a regular contributor to the magazines *Africa: Birds & Birding* and *African Birdlife*.

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