



### Welcome

Welcome to the eighth newsletter of the Great Crane Project - the project that aims to re-establish a population of Eurasian cranes in the Levels and Moors and enrich the Somerset landscape in an inspirational way.

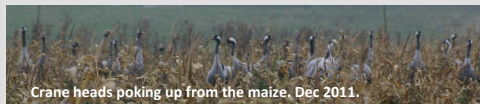
### Thirty-four and counting....

All the birds have benefited this year from the very mild winter and they have been observed feeding happily in grazing pastures on worms and other invertebrates throughout the winter.



Cranes in un-harvested barley, surrounded by starlings.  
John Crispin, November 2011.

The provision of three acres of unharvested barley and maize on Aller Moor provided rich pickings for them through the autumn too. These uncropped areas also benefitted other birds such as wintering skylarks and starlings, as well as small mammal populations. These, in turn, drew in birds of prey such as hen-harriers and short-eared owls, which were seen frequently through late autumn.



Crane heads poking up from the maize, Dec 2011.

The thirty four birds that can be seen regularly comprise 18 released in 2010, 15 of those released in 2011 and one un-ringed wild migratory bird which turned up in November and stayed. We don't know that this will do in the Spring – but will be watching closely.

### Necessary Nasties

Sadly, in early December, one bird, named Gizmo by Middlezoy Primary School, was taken by a fox near his night-time roost. Post mortem revealed that he had an empty gut – symptomatic of him being unwell – and analysis showed him to be infected with the common gut parasite, coccidia; the common bacterial infection, campylobacter; and a dose of worms!



Gizmo shortly after release.  
John Crispin, September 2011.

It's a tough life becoming a wild crane – and these are all natural diseases that the cranes need to build up an immunity to, in order to survive in the wild. We are all amazed that this is actually the first known loss to a fox since the first birds were released in Aug 2010.

### Crane World Fact-File: No 1.

*There are 15 crane species spread across the world in all continents except Antarctica and South America. Each issue of the newsletter will highlight a different species.... this time, for no other reason than it looks STUNNING it's*

#### The red-crowned crane. *Grus japonensis*

World population of approx. 2,000 birds – globally threatened, split between Japan and China.



The red-crowned crane or 'Tancho'.

The red-crowned crane is doing well in Japan after reaching an all-time low of around 30 birds in the 1950's. At Akan on the island of Hokkaido, the cranes are artificially fed in winter and are a very popular tourist attraction with over 60,000 people visiting annually.

Across the rest of their range in China and s.e. Russia they are declining as a result of habitat loss to agriculture and industry - principally the drainage of wetlands. This is affecting both breeding and wintering sites. However, there is much conservation effort to protect them. More: [www.savingcranes.org/red-crowned-crane.html](http://www.savingcranes.org/red-crowned-crane.html)

### THANKYOU to Viridor Credits!

In early 2012 we received the fantastic news that Viridor Credits Environmental Company would continue to fund the project for a further three years. This will enable the project to rear and release up to 72 more birds, create and enhance wetland habitats in Somerset, and bring the story of the cranes to more people throughout the county by funding a Wetland Community Officer due to start April 2012.



Bugling cranes on Aller Moor.  
Nick Upton, November 2011.

### Crane 'Dates with Nature'

Six organised visits to see the cranes were run through January and February in collaboration with the Willow & Wetlands Centre at Stoke St. Gregory and a local landowner who granted access to a private viewing area in return for a donation to The Somerset Hospice. The first six dates sold out completely and a further four had to be arranged. The cranes have been real stars and did not disappoint.

### What's happening now?

The cranes are often bugling with their morning calls heard drifting across the moors. The rearing facilities are getting a spruce up ready for another batch of eggs, and plans are being made for the third trip to the east of Germany. Currently it is -20°C so we are all hoping it will warm up a bit!

### More information



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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 sustainable population of common cranes in Britain, securing its future as a breeding species.