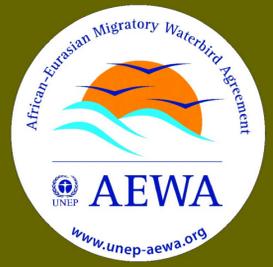


Common Crane

Grus grus



The Common Crane *Grus grus* is a large, elegant bird, with a wing span of 220-245 cm. Its plumage is mainly grey, but its head and upper neck are darker and marked by a white band from the eye and it has a prominent, red patch on the forehead. It is omnivorous, and feeds on a wide range of plants and small animals.



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Its breeding range extends from north-western and eastern Europe across Eurasia to northern Mongolia, northern China and eastern Siberia, with isolated breeding populations in eastern Turkey and Tibet. It probably once occurred right across Europe but it no longer breeds in southern and western Europe, the Balkan peninsula and southern Ukraine, mainly due to drainage of nesting areas. However, a small breeding population has established in Norfolk, England which does not migrate. The wintering range includes parts of France, Spain and Portugal, north and east Africa, the Middle East, India, and southern and eastern China.

Common Cranes nest in a variety of shallow freshwater wetland types including large wet meadows, bogs, forested swamps, sedge meadows, and lake edges. They generally prefer large, isolated nesting territories that are free from disturbance. However, they have adapted to human disturbance, and in some intensively cultivated areas, they nest in smaller and less wild wetlands.

The wintering grounds include a variety of upland and wetland habitats, from open oak woodlands in Spain and Portugal, to cultivated areas, shallow lakes, agricultural fields and deltaic wetlands.

In autumn, after the chicks have fledged, the cranes gather in large flocks in assembly areas such as floodlands and swampy meadows, in preparation for migration. Migration takes place along a number of routes, with the western population travelling to wintering grounds in France, Spain and Morocco, the eastern European populations moving south and south-west to north Africa and probably Ethiopia and Eritrea, and European Russian populations mostly heading to the Middle East. The route of the Turkish population is unclear but it probably also winters in the Middle East. During migration, the Common Crane readily crosses wide stretches of water.

During migration, Common Cranes regularly use staging areas such as Lake Hornborga (Sweden), Rügen-Darss (Germany), the Hortobagy (Hungary), Van-See (Turkey), Hula-Tal (Israel), Lac du Der - Chantecoq (France) and Laguna de Gallocanta (Spain). They forage in agricultural fields, pastures and meadows, and roost in shallow lakes, bogs, rivers, along the edges of reservoirs, and in other wetlands.



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Trends in European breeding populations of *Grus grus*, 1990 - 2003

Armenia	?
Belarus	→
Czech Rep.	/
Denmark	/
Estonia	/
Finland	/
France	→
Georgia	→
Germany	→
Latvia	/
Lithuania	/
Norway	/
Poland	/
Romania	↘
Russian Fed.	→
Sweden	↘
Turkey	↘
Ukraine	/
UK	↘

(BirdLife International, 2004)

The global population has been estimated to be around 270,000. Although it was considered to be Least Concern in the 2004 IUCN Red List, it is Vulnerable or Rare in many range States. The total population appears to be increasing although some local declines have also been reported.

The main threat to Common Cranes is habitat loss and degradation which has occurred throughout their range, in breeding and wintering grounds and along migration routes. The principal causes are drainage, dams, changes in agricultural practice, development and other human activities. Historically, hunting has threatened this species, and it remains a threat in Afghanistan and Pakistan but less so elsewhere in its range. It may be persecuted as a result of the damage it causes to agricultural crops in certain countries.

The Common Crane is legally protected in most range States. It has benefited from conservation efforts, particularly in western and central Europe, through, for example, improved legislation, research and monitoring programmes, and habitat protection and restoration projects. International cooperation and agreements, such as AEMA, have also facilitated better protection and monitoring of the species.

LEGEND

- Wintering Areas
- Breeding Range
- Autumn Migration Routes
- Important Sites
- Mountains
- Deserts
- Water bodies
- Wetlands
- Glaciers

Projection: Lambert azimuthal
Latitude of centre of projection: 30 00 00