

## Short Communication

### The Status of Common Crane *Grus grus* and Demoiselle Crane *Anthropides virgo* in West Azarbaijan, Northwest Iran

HAMID RA'NAGHAD & AMIR-MAHDI EBRAHIMI\*

West Azarbaijan Provincial Office of the Department of the Environment, Uromiyeh, Iran

\* Correspondence Author. Email: amir720@hotmail.com

Received 17 December 2005; accepted 15 November 2006

در این تحقیق چهار زیستگاه عمده درناها در آذربایجان غربی و جنبه‌های حفاظتی آن‌ها مورد بررسی قرار گرفته است. مهمترین زیستگاه جوجه‌آوری درناى معمولی (*Grus grus*) در ایران، تالاب‌های پیراحمدکندی (۱ جفت) و ناور (۳-۴ جفت) در استان آذربایجان غربی هستند و مهمترین زیستگاه درناى طناز (*Grus virgo*)، نواحی اطراف چاه آرتزین سلماس (۳۰۰-۲۷۰ پرنده) و دریاچه سد ارس (۳۰۰ پرنده) است که درناها در مسیر مهاجرت خود در آنجا توقف می‌کنند. مهمترین عوامل تهدید مناطق جوجه‌آوری درناى معمولی، زهکشی و چرای دام و مهمترین عامل تهدید درناى طناز شکار غیرمجاز می‌باشند.

#### Common Crane

Mansoori (2001) cites West Azarbaijan as a wintering area for Common Crane *Grus grus*. Flocks of 70–80 individuals passing through on their migration visit areas near Lake Uromiyeh (B. Behrouzi-Rad *in litt.* to Editor), in particular places such as ZinehVar, Jabal-Kandy, Chiranlar to Kuh Zambil, and wetlands such as Jamal-Abad, and plains such as Uromiyeh, Naghadeh, Mahabad, Miandoab, and around Aras lake.

In 1991, H. Ziaie (pers. comm.) observed one breeding pair with two juveniles at Pir-Ahmad Kandi, Ghazy-Chay river, 52 km NW of Maku, in an area of c 100 ha at an altitude of 2195 m a.s.l. (39°23'30"N, 44°05'30"E). This is the first report of breeding Common Crane in West Azarbaijan. Before that there were no breeding records/reports of the species in Iran. Subsequently two adults together with their juveniles were observed in summer 1993 at Pir-Ahmad

Kandi wetland (S.M. Abbasnejad pers. comm., Fig. 1).

In 1997, a local person in Pir-Ahmad unfortunately has constructed a drainage canal in order to increase grazing lands and damaged about 80% of the surface of the first breeding site. Regrettably, breeding was subsequently



Figure 1. Two Common Crane *Grus grus* adults (left and right and two juveniles (centre) at Pir-Ahmad Kandi, West Azarbaijan, © S.M. Abbasnejad.

**Table 1.** Observations of Demoiselle Crane in West Azarbaijan.

| Birds observed    | Place              | Date       | Observer        |
|-------------------|--------------------|------------|-----------------|
| Feeding birds     | near Chah Artezian | 1995       | S.M. Abbasnejad |
| 270 flying birds  | near Chah Artezian | 2000       | A.M. Ebrahimi   |
| 400 feeding birds | near Chah Artezian | 2001       | DOE personnel   |
| 300 feeding birds | near Aras lake     | April 2000 | A.M. Ebrahimi   |

not recorded, at least not in the springs of 1999–2001.

In the same year, 1997, personnel of the West Azarbaijan Provincial Office of the Department of the Environment (DOE) also recorded breeding of 3–4 pairs of the species at a second site, Naver, 105 km SW of Maku, near the border with Turkey, 2500 m a.s.l. (39°20'N, 44°20'E).

Common Cranes arrive in early April, nesting in mid-April and departing in mid-September.

The nearest breeding site is located not far away over the border in eastern Turkey (Porter *et al.* 1996) and the Caucasus (International Crane Foundation) (undated) where 10–20 pairs were recorded for the 1997–2002 period in Armenia and 7–10 pairs for the 1994–2002 period in Georgia while 190–270 pairs recorded in 2001 in Turkey (BirdLife International 2004).

### Demoiselle Crane

Demoiselle Cranes *Anthropoides virgo* are passage migrants to Fars and West Azarbaijan provinces in spring and autumn (Mansoori 2001). In West Azarbaijan province, two migration sites were recorded, *i.e.* Chah Artezian plain, 25 km SE of Salmas, 1290 m, 38°13'N, 45°24'E (270–400 individuals) and Aras lake, *c.* 40 km along the Aras River, near the border with Autonomous Nakhchevan, 1500 m, 39°12'N, 45°10'E (north of the Marakan Protected Area) (300 individuals). They visit these areas from mid-March onwards for a few days only (the longest period was reported as two weeks around Aras lake, between Ghaghach and Ghanbar-Kandi villages). According to personnel of the West Azarbaijan Provincial Office of the DOE, the species has visited Salmas area for many years. The species is also observed around the Ghazy-Chay river, south of the Marakan Protected Area (Anon. 1993).

### Conservation

Important factors threatening *G. grus* are wetland drainage and grazing cattle and for *A. virgo*, illegal hunting. Various actions could restore or help the survival of the breeding sites of Common Cranes and the migration sites of Demoiselle Cranes on passage. These include the construction of low banks made of clay and stone, removing sediments by cleaning springs, avoiding overgrazing, controlling soil erosion, and teaching villagers about the importance of cranes. It is suggested that we should establish a seasonal station of the DOE by stationing Game Guards around the breeding sites of Common Cranes and during the migration period of visiting Demoiselle Cranes in order to protect them.

**Acknowledgements:** We thank Mohammd Sadegh Marjani, Head of West Azarbaijan Provincial Office of the Department of the Environment.

### REFERENCES

- Anon. 1993. *Marakan Protected Area* [Brochure]. West Azarbaijan Provincial Office of the DOE, Uromiyeh.
- BirdLife International 2004. *Birds in Europe: population estimates, trends and conservation status*. BirdLife International.
- Mansoori J. 2001. [A *Field Guide to the Birds of Iran*]. Zehn-Aviz Publishing, Tehran, 490 pp. [In Persian]
- Porter R.F., Christensen S. & Schiermacker-Hansen P. 1996. *A Field Guide to the Birds of the Middle East*. T & A D Poyser, London, UK, 460 pp.
- International Crane Foundation. (undated.) Eurasian Crane *Grus grus*. <http://www.savingcranes.org/species/eurasian.cfm>.

