

APPENDIX 1.

I asked the CC staff at our final workshop to send me a brief assessment of the Darwin project and how it was implemented. They probably could have been slightly more critical!

1)

Report on the Darwin Initiative Project – Bradley Gibbons (Field Officer – Karoo)

The Darwin Initiative Project in South Africa has been a valuable project for me. There have been many lessons that we have all learnt out of the project and I will discuss some of these lessons that I have personally learnt.

Firstly, this has made me understand the importance of data collection and the value it can have for conservation. The other important part of data collection is the manner in which it is collected and what information is required in order to conduct a study. For cranes, this has made me realise what information is still need and what conclusions can be obtained from the data that we have already collected.

Regarding data analysis, the Darwin Initiative Project has helped ease the stress of data analysis using computer programs that seemed complicated at first. Through training, I have become familiar with these programs, including GIS which I had never used in the past. Some more of these programs would include MS-Excel that I had not used intensively before the Darwin Initiative Project and got to know it very well throughout the duration of the project. MS-Access would be another example of a program that I learnt a lot about.

We were also taught the types of statistics that can be used for various analyses. Both Richard Pettifor and Raj Amin have always been willing to teach us more about statistics and always made themselves available to answer any questions that we have when they were back in the United Kingdom. They have been a valuable source of information for us.

We also learnt a lot about management of populations (such as the Population Viability Assessments) and planning for the future.

The project also encouraged a lot of teamwork amongst colleagues, such as from the teaching point of view (when Kirsten Oliver taught us a lot of GIS). We also had to help each other on many occasions – during workshops as well as back home. This teamwork has been a valuable component for our working group and hopefully it will continue into the future.

A Darwin workshop was always a lot of fun as well as something to look forward to. Although we learnt a lot from the workshops, the lessons were done in a fun way. This project has also given me the opportunity to enjoy the data collection and also see the results of it (and to be able to do something with the data on my own).

I look at work in a different way now and understand a lot of concepts. I will continue to help collect useful data for our working group in the future.

The only negative aspect is that I missed 2 workshops and it would have been great to attend all of them. Sometimes our tasks that we had to do when we were back at our places were a bit difficult, as assistance was not as easy to get compared to when we were together.

My thanks go to both Richard and Raj for always being there for us. A very big thank you to the Darwin Foundation for the money towards this project and for giving us the opportunity to learn in such a great way.

2) Darwin and the Western Cape Crane Conservation Project – Bronwyn Botha (Field Officer)

Darwin has helped the project to streamline its data and field objectives. DI has given crane work a focus and helped to avoid unneeded effort. I now know what we are trying to answer and can collect data in a standard way that can be used to answer these questions via the database. DI has increased my confidence in analysing and writing up findings through the many training courses we have gone through like GIS, Access, Vortex and ULM. DI also showed us the importance of regular training and re-capping as well as get-togethers where we can come up with solutions using the combined experience of the entire team.

DI has shown the importance of standardised data collection and the safe storage of this data. DI has pointed us in the right directions through the compilation of a forward strategy where we now have a black and white guideline to keep our efforts on course. DI also made it possible to get crane staff together as well as to receive input from other conservation organisations and specialists from whom we have learnt a great deal.

For the Western Cape project, DI has gone far and beyond with the aid of finances to run the project for a few months while it was in transition from the Overberg Crane Group to the Endangered Wildlife Trust.

Darwin has helped crane conservation in many ways and it is fantastic to see the results from the outcomes we have spent three years working on. Not only do we have good long term research projects, but we have been able to use the data in the database to answer questions that have long time eluded us. We have a population Viability Analysis on Blue Cranes, a comprehensible forward strategy and couple of research papers that have arisen from DI.

We now have the tools to carry crane conservation into the future and hopefully ensure the existence of all three crane species for generations to come.

Thank you Darwin!

3) Darwin Debbie Thiar (Administration Coordinator)

The Darwin Initiative has been active with crane conservation within the EWT for the past 3 years. I was fortunate enough to have been introduced to it in April 2008. My main role over the past year has been to monitor the budget effectively and to ensure quarterly reports were forwarded timeously. My predecessor had the opportunity of working with the project since inception; I had a lot to learn when I took over. Budgets are all very similar but many have different formats and its up to the user to decipher, the only problem I found with the budget was the lack of funds allocated to workshops, having said that, we seem to have come through successfully even with the exchange rate fluctuating. With Dr. Richard Pettifor as my mentor and the timeous delivery of field staff claims I managed to complete the quarterly reports correctly.

During and in between the Darwin workshops the team worked studiously at achieving the deliverables at the outset of the project. I have watched the team grow as they assisted each other in problematic areas, no task too big or small, each had the patience to guide the other. The team is now fully fledged to write scientific papers on some aspects of their work. I am honoured to have been privy to the teamwork as this depth of knowledge, training and the journey of science is not always available to all and sundry.

Appendix 1

Kirsten Oliver was patient enough to entertain us internal administrative staff with her database, well lo and behold, I was focused for maybe a half an hour but then I was lost to a world of figures, positions, entries and data. Thank you for attempting to convert the administrator to a scientist, but this is best left in your capable hands.

Thank you to Dr. Richard Pettifor, Raj Amin and the Darwin Initiative for putting crane conservation within the EWT at the forefront of conservation organizations.

4) Darwin Initiative support – Glenn Ramke, Wakkerstroom Area

For one not having grown up in the age of computers and being very computer/data base etc. illiterate, I had not known just how advantageous a good data base would be to the planning and management of the future of our working group in its quest to ensure that cranes remain a part of our country well into the future. Besides this, although I collected data in a way that I was told to do, I had not realised the reason and importance of accurate and definitive data collection and entering it correctly onto the sheets devised to give the best output in the future.

It is doubtful that I would ever have come to this knowledge without the benefit of the workshops that were run in which in-depth discussion and practical experience was forthcoming. It took me a long time to really understand what it was all about and although I doubt I will ever be a computer genius, I certainly gained an enormous amount of insight into the workings of input and output and an understanding of why and how data should be collected in specific ways.

My feelings are now that I have more understanding, when I am able to spend time with my younger colleagues, I will at least know what they are talking about and with their guidance, I feel that I can make a more meaningful contribution.

One of my biggest problems through life has been a lack of self confidence and I would like to lay at the Darwin funding door with gratitude, the confidence building exercises that, even though late in life, I have found and am enjoying immensely. For me personally, this was one of the great pluses to come out of the funding. I am now giving talks at schools with confidence and hopefully sharing my experience over many years of working with cranes, with young minds who may find a new way of looking at the environment and its inhabitants.

Besides this, I am, together with BirdLife SA, mentoring two young Zulu men with whom I enjoy many in depth discussions and hopefully with encouragement, they will make something of their lives and make a difference to other lives with whom they come in contact in their communities and at the schools we visit together.

The Darwin Funding also gave the field workers of the Crane Conservation group and the administrative staff, many occasions to spend time together at workshops, working, mixing, living together for relatively long periods of time, getting to know each other and our strengths and weaknesses and backgrounds and in so doing, making us into a stronger team of people, bent on doing the best we can to give the environment and cranes in particular, a future.

Many thanks to the Darwin Initiative funding for all of this together with the great leaps and bounds made by my young colleagues and to Dr. Richard Pettifor for his patience, understanding and tremendous support throughout the three years and to Dr. Raj Amin for his expert guidance and input.

5) Lessons for me out of the DI project Kerryn Morrison Manager ICF/EWT Partnership for African Cranes & Host Country PL of DI Project

I was involved in the initial workshops when the project was being developed and had limited involvement until January 2008, when I was then integrally involved. I had been aware of the dynamics of a workshop where people start off enthusiastic, driven, excited and hopeful, only to go through what is commonly known as a “groan zone” before coming out with confidence, clarity and focus. The DI project for me followed the exact same course and I do feel that I came in right in the middle of the groan zone. Adding to this was the fact that Leon Jacques Theron had just left the EWT which magnified the uncertainties, anxieties, frustrations and aggravations. I remember the first workshop I attended in Dullstroom that February – everyone knew that they had been collecting data and information over the past 18 months, and knew where they had to be going, but how to get there was not clear at all initially. I must admit that I too was a little sceptical of how and whether we would get the outcomes we needed. The last 6 months of the project though has been incredible, with everything falling into place so well. The outputs are there, the team is stronger than ever and we have a foundation on many fronts to move us forward.

Starting with some of the lessons learned that I do feel should be considered in any such project. Partners were integrally involved in the development of the project, but were then not kept abreast of the progress being made until the last third of the project. This meant that additional effort was required to bring them up to speed and get them on board before we ended the project. I do think that we were successful here, although time limiting, there are several additional partners that we need to still develop lasting relationships with. The second learning point for me was the need for something in writing between the key partners, outlining the roles and commitments made by each – this would have prevented key partners publishing results that could have been published in a much stronger manner.

In terms of the key strengths of the DI project. Without a doubt, the project highlighted the need for sound science when making decisions – increasing too the credibility of the organisation. Collecting data relevant to and in a way that can be used by other organisations for conservation planning, increases the relevance of the group as well. These two aspects together, combine to ensure that the EWT becomes the partner of choice for any crane and associated habitat issues.

The many workshops provided a key opportunity for the team to get to know each other well, and I know that everyone has come away naturally gravitating to a person with particular skills in an area. This is invaluable in a team that is spread out over the country and strengthens the work that we do. The length of the workshops was, although long at time, was often good. Of particular note was the development of the forward strategy which was strengthened significantly by the time opportunity we had to translate this into annual work plans. I have seen a significant improvement in the monthly activities and reporting. Everyone now has a clear sense of where they are headed and how to get there.

I would have no doubt recommending another such DI project to anyone and feel that it has stood us in fantastic stead. Thank you to Defra and the Darwin Initiative for this opportunity. Thanks especially to Dr Richard Pettifor who lead the process well, even through its ups and downs and trials and tribulations. Through the many changes that the group saw through the project, Richard supported the team and kept them all together, and also provided enormous support to me personally on many occasions. Thanks too to Raj Amin who provided invaluable input on the database and GIS side!

6) The Darwin Initiative Project – Integrating Crane Conservation with Sustainable Habitat Utilisation – Kirsten Oliver, GIS and Database Coordinator

Highlights

The DI project for me was a significant project in which I grew tremendously. It was a challenge, offering new arenas of learning and development, but at the same time was an opportunity for me to contribute the skills I already possess and improve on them. Some of the highlights that I felt really worked and would be of benefit to any successful project are outlined below.

- Workshops – these were held every couple of months during the project and allowed the entire crane team to get together and brainstorm about planning issues and then work together on analysis projects that we could take away and develop further. I felt the workshops were key elements in ensuring everyone's voice was heard and that everyone had a contribution to decisions being made, and also simply for building the cohesion and camaraderie within the group.
- Training – during the project all staff were trained in a number of skills including GIS, access and population modelling. The skills allowed the group to realise the potential impact the work they are doing can have on biodiversity conservation as well as directly on crane species survival.

Challenges

- In terms of the database side of the project, a challenge that was underestimated in the planning phase was the enormity of the task of getting all crane data into a useable, standardised format for storage in the database. The task was completed, however and the results very rewarding, and will ensure a long-term high standard of data collection and management.
- One of the biggest challenges of this project was the change in working group management and as a result in the in-country investigator three times over the three years. The change meant a fair amount of discontinuity in the understanding and direction of the project. In particular, some of the tasks put in place by the original investigator were not clearly understood by the subsequent manager and valuable time was wasted grappling with the same issues that were raised in the original planning phase. The changes also resulted in low morale among many of the remaining staff, which again wasted time in finding ways to get motivated and moving on projects again.

Comments on the principle investigator

This project certainly could not have asked for a more dedicated, enthusiastic and encouraging principle investigator. Richard was, without doubt, the key pin in the success of this DI project. As a project manager he was engaged and focussed and kept the team on track through easy times and through difficult ones. He imparted an enormous quantity of knowledge and information on everyone in the team and encouraged everyone to develop their own skills and interests as far as possible. In some areas Richard was inclined to demand tasks and information of the team without a clear explanation of what the end objective for that specific task would be, but I think he quickly realised his oversight when people went off track and he addressed those areas immediately. All in all Richard was a PI who made the most of the project through and through and treated the in-country team like family he could teach and family he could learn from.

7) Tanya Smith, Field Officer. Darwin Initiative Report EWT – Eastern Cape Crane Conservation Project

I unfortunately was not with the former 'South African Crane Working Group' before the Darwin project came into effect, but I have definitely witnessed and experienced the impact of the project and the changes it has brought to the group. For me personally the Darwin Project has broadened my skills base, so much so I feel that I can make a significant contribution to conservation in South Africa. The training workshops have taught me invaluable skills in GIS, population modelling, Microsoft Access and excel, as well learning how to communicate effectively in a group and think bigger than oneself. The project has made us challenge the way we think and how we approach our work; it has also made us more scientific and methodical in our data collection. The latter is vital to improve our credibility as a conservation NGO and to instil confidence in key stakeholders that we are the partners of choice.

From the improved data collection and analysis, we are now in a position to publish the results of years of good, hard work. I personally have been given the opportunity to assist with the Quantitative Site Assessments for Grey Crowned Cranes and Blue Cranes in South Africa. I have also analysed other data to try and answer key questions including land use utilization by Grey Crowned Cranes, as well as causes of mortality, all attributed to the functional database created through the Darwin Project. We are now in a better position to assist other African countries in their quest for conserving Cranes, as what we have learnt through the Darwin Project can be passed onto others.

The Darwin Project has really enabled the EWT's South African Crane Conservation Programme to lay the foundations for strong conservation action well into the future.

8) Ursula Franke, Field Officer, Darwin Initiative Report EWT - Highveld Grasslands Crane Conservation Project

My first introduction to the Darwin Initiative was in October 2007 when I attended the EWT-SACWG DI Basic GIS workshop at Hebron Haven in Kwa-Zulu Natal as a crane ethology student. This was a couple of months before I had the pleasure of becoming part of the 'crane team' in April 2008. Although I have therefore not been part of the DI Project from the start, I was fortunate in that I stepped into my new position with many of the objectives, methods for data collection, etc. already in place.

Due to these clear guidelines I was able to immediately start collecting sighting- and breeding data in the correct format for inclusion into the database. During the winter months of 2008 I monitored three Blue Crane flocks and two Grey Crowned Crane flocks. I also had four ring resightings of Blue Cranes in these flocks. During my first breeding season of 2008/2009 I monitored the status of one Wattled Crane nest site, five Blue Crane nest sites and one Grey Crowned Crane nest site and collected data on several more Blue- and Grey Crowned Crane breeding pairs. I also completed the three Fixed Routes for my area during the months of June, August and October 2008.

The DI workshops that were attended during the past 15 months further honed my skills in the use of spreadsheets, GIS, Population Viability Assessments (PVA's), and Access. This training has enabled me to query the database, contribute to the Quantified Site Assessments for all three crane species and understand the functions of PVA's. If time had allowed, more training in statistical analysis would have been beneficial.

In conclusion I believe that the DI Project contributed in making me a better field worker as I have an improved understanding, not only of correct data collection, but also of data analysis. I hope to make good use of these improved skills for the continued conservation of our South African cranes.