



Zoo Landau – Report of Funds September- December 2020

Project Title

Community involvement in the protection of Grey Crowned Cranes and their habitats.

Project Summary

During COVID-19, we saw the huge benefits and successes of our community conservation model of Champions and Rangers who were able to quickly and efficiently respond to cases of poaching and other illegal activities despite the lock-down and travel restrictions for our core team based in Kigali. RWCA has also been hit by a reduction in donor funding. Strengthening our teams of Champions and Rangers can help us build a resilient approach to conservation and adapt to the long-term impacts of COVID-19. The Zoo Landau funds have specifically supported the capacity building of our community teams through ongoing training and mentorship from RWCA staff, including field visits, regular communication and check-ins providing motivation and support with challenges. The RWCA staff also work hard to collect all the monitoring data for analysis.

Community Marsh Rangers

The funding from Zoo Landau has helped us to support and strengthen our team of Community Rangers at Rugezi Marsh. Their role is to patrol the Marsh, monitor and protect Grey Crowned Cranes as well as educate community members about the need to protect the habitat. The Rangers record illegal activities and report serious offences to local leaders for follow up.

In the period from September to December 2020 covered by this funding, the team of Rangers completed 470 patrols of the Marsh (an average of 118 per month). During that time, they recorded 1,030 illegal activities, 66% of which they reported to local leaders for follow-up. They recorded 387 sightings of Grey Crowned Cranes using the CyberTracker app and have also been monitoring and protecting crane breeding sites, recording 32 breeding pairs and with 67 chicks hatch.

RWCA staff have been regularly calling and consulting with the team of Rangers to receive feedback, follow up and advise on challenges, and provide encouragement. The work of the Rangers has been particularly important at this time as we have seen an increase in illegal activities such as women cutting grass from the Marsh to make mats, a small increase in fishing and some hunting activities. We work closely with the communities to understand the changes such as the economic impact of COVID-19 and an increase in poverty and hunger and try to respond appropriately.

Our Rangers at Rugezi Marsh continue their patrols



RWCA staff visit the Rangers to discuss the successes and challenges of their work and find solutions to any problems.

A large part of the Rangers' role is education and in addition to their patrols, they find opportunities for community education. Despite restrictions of COVID-19, they were able to reach 878 community members through 11 events to raise awareness between September and December 2020.

Community Conservation Champions

The funding from Zoo Landau has helped us to support and strengthen our team of 27 Community Conservation Champions who work in biodiversity hotspots all over the country, monitoring Grey Crowned Cranes and educating community members. The Champions have been instrumental in continuing our work during lockdown as they live within the communities they work.

The Champions have continued their weekly field visits throughout the time of COVID-19 and have continued to monitor Grey Crowned Cranes and their breeding activities. In the period that the Zoo Landau funds were issued, the Champions recorded 198 sightings of cranes using the CyberTracker app. They have also monitored crane breeding sites, recording 37 breeding pairs and protected nests and eggs from predators or poachers to see 67 chicks hatch.



One of our Champions monitoring a Grey Crowned Crane breeding site in his area.

Another key role for the Champions is educating their fellow community members about the importance of protecting cranes and their habitats. They usually do this through joining community meetings, in collaboration with local leaders and meeting small groups of people e.g. a group of rice farmers. From September to December 2020, our team of Champions have managed to reach 1,790 community members through 16 events. Some of our Champions have become very creative with the COVID-19 restrictions restricting group meetings and found other ways to spread their messages. This Champion used a loud speaker and walked around during market day to educate his community about the importance of Grey Crowned Cranes and their habitats.



One of our Champions raising awareness within his community

Success Story

Jacques is a wildlife lover and one of our 30 Conservation Champions. He lives in a community nearby Akagera National Park and works with RWCA monitoring Grey Crowned Cranes in his area and educating his fellow community members about the importance of protecting wildlife and their habitats.

During the coronavirus pandemic, Jacques was approached by some local children telling him that they had seen a crane chick wandering around. The children knew about the importance of cranes after participating in an education campaign by RWCA at their school. The children told him it had escaped from someone's house who had tried to poach it. Jacques followed the children and was able to capture the crane and keep it safely while he called us.



Our Champion with the Grey Crowned Crane chick rescued from poachers

With a lockdown in Rwanda at the time, no inter-district travel was allowed so this was a tough call for us and we were unable to respond as we usually would. However, Jacques came up with the idea of checking a family of cranes that he had been monitoring nearby and sure enough, one of their chicks was missing. He then decided he would try to release the chick back to its family. Jacques carefully and successfully reintroduced the chick and spent a lot of time monitoring the family and checking that all was well.

Saving this crane chick would not have been possible without dedicated people like Jacques working within their own villages. This shows that our model of conservation, of empowering and involving communities, allows us to continue our work at times like this. Building ownership and leadership within communities allows them to find their own ways to respond and protect wildlife.

Wildlife protection is continuous and should not stop with global crises such as the one we are facing now. The key is to find ways around it, building ownership and leadership of those who are close to the habitats so that they can find their own solutions and respond effectively. This is sustainable community conservation at its best!



The Crane chick reunited with its parents

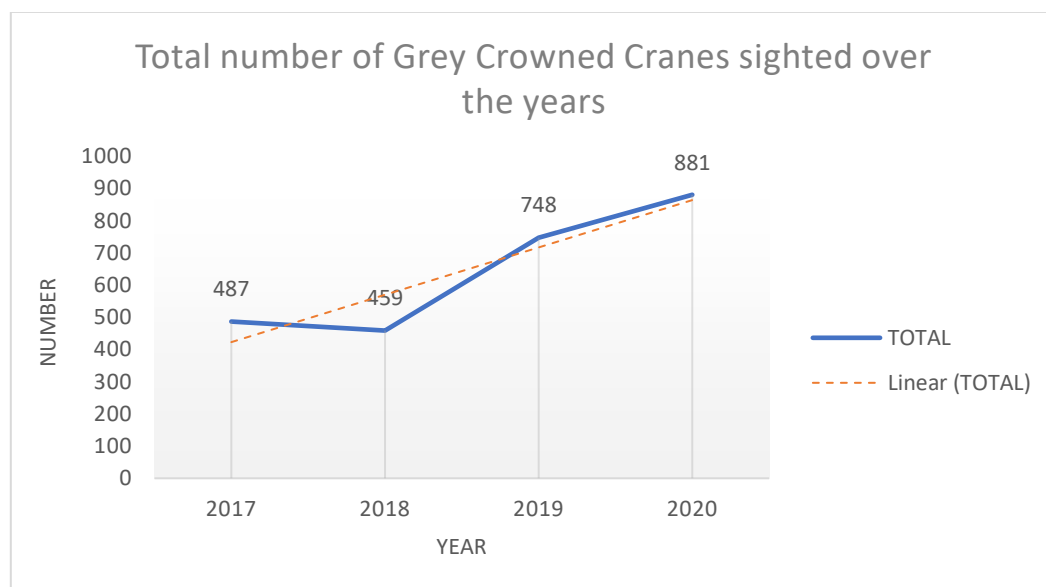
Impact

Zoo Landau funds directly contributed to the achievement of the objectives outlined in the project proposal.

- 1) During 2020, Rangers completed 1,398 patrols, educating community members, reporting illegal activities and recording sightings of cranes.

- 2) During 2020, Champions completed an average of two field visits a per week, raising awareness among at least 5,650 community members through meetings and events and recording sightings of cranes.
- 3) Regular monitoring of the breeding behaviour of cranes at key crane habitats, recording 69 breeding pairs and 134 chicks hatched.

These objectives contribute to the overall goal of decreasing the number of illegal activities and poaching events and increasing the population of Grey Crowned Cranes in Rwanda. In our national annual Grey Crowned Crane census in August 2020, we sighted 881 Grey Crowned Cranes across Rwanda, up from 487 sighted in 2017.



The funding from Zoo Landau also contributed to RWCA's core organisational costs. We will soon share with you a summary of our achievements throughout the whole year of 2020 to give you a more general overview of our work and where your funds have made an additional impact.



Thank you so much for your ongoing support. We could not continue making an impact without you!