



Welcome

Welcome to the third newsletter of the Great Crane Project - the project that aims to re-establish a population of these magnificent birds in the Levels and Moors and enrich the Somerset landscape in an inspirational way.

The first eggs...

This April, members of the project team travelled to the Scorfheide-Chorin Biosphere reserve in Eastern Germany to work with the local conservationists to collect eggs from wild cranes under licence from the German authorities. The nests were found in a variety of habitats – some came from alder swamps within dense forests, others from more open reed and sedge - dominated feld-sols or 'field hollows' surrounded by arable crops.



Typical crane nesting habitat in Eastern Germany.

25 eggs were collected early on in the crane laying season, but after 15 days of incubation. This ensured that the eggs were robust enough to survive transportation, whilst giving the birds time to lay again within the same year.



Placing eggs into a portable incubator

The first birds....

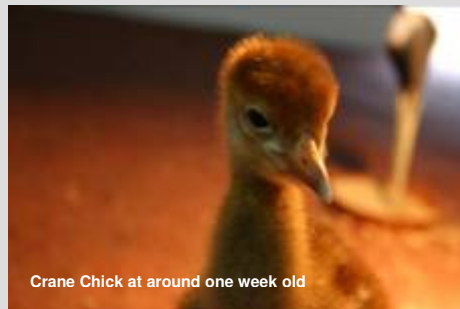
After weighing and measuring in the field to ensure that the eggs were incubated for the right length of time, they were driven to a temporary incubation room in an old mill before being transported by road, rail and air back to WWT Slimbridge for hatching.



Crane chick hatching

© Nick Upton.

Of the 25 eggs transported to the UK, 24 went on to hatch successfully with the first hatching, rather appropriately on St Georges day – April 23rd.



Crane Chick at around one week old

The chicks have been growing rapidly ever since, and their care has been a round-the-clock job for the two dedicated crane aviculturalists, Amy King and Roland Digby.



Roland with a couple of six week old cranes at the WWT Crane School in Gloucestershire.

All rearing has been undertaken using the 'puppet rearing technique', which in other crane species, has successfully produced young hand-reared cranes that behave as wild birds on release.

The Cranes are coming.....!



A young crane being fed by puppet head.
© Laura Whitehead.

There are currently twenty two healthy cranes that are approaching fledging age and ready for the big move from the Crane School in Gloucestershire to the Crane Academy in Somerset. This move will take place sometime in August, with the first birds leaving the enclosure around mid September. The team of volunteers in Somerset will be busy making things ready for the birds over the coming weeks.

Other works over the summer include planning the crane/schools education work; finishing off interactive mapping and 'meet the cranes' sections of the website; planning and creating some demonstration crane breeding habitats on Greylake RSPB reserve; and of course getting the birds settled, established and closely monitored in Somerset. Expect much more on this in the next edition in the autumn!

To follow the project's progress and to find out more information please visit:

www.thegreatcraneproject.org.uk

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A brighter future for Somerset's wetlands