Our Five cent bird, our National bird!

Contributed by SJ du Toit

The Overberg is now generally regarded as the last stronghold of our national bird, the blue crane, whose true habitat is the short grasslands in the northern and eastern parts of the RSA
The blue crane is found mainly in South Africa but unfortunately its numbers have dwindled by up to 90%. This is a matter of great concern to many people. In most cases poisoning, high voltage power lines, forestry activities and nest robbers who trade in young chicks, have been responsible for their near extinction.

The elegance and dignified beauty of the blue crane has thrilled man for many centuries. Their trumpet call and their exquisite mating dance are among the wonders of nature. The blue crane pair mate for life and raise one or two chicks per year. However, survival rates are not very high. A pair of cranes has been coming to our farm near Stanford to make their nest at the “Sekretaarsbos”, usually raising only one chick. Year after year, we have had the pleasure of witnessing their mating dance next to the big farm dam.

Before 1980 these birds were not so plentiful in the Overberg, but thanks to the continued efforts of landowners, farm workers and conservation organisations the number of blue cranes in the Overberg has increased dramatically. The Overberg Blue Crane Group, under the chairmanship of Wicus Leewner exert themselves for conservation in our region. Countless educational projects and workshops have been presented in co-operation with Cape Nature Conservation, and these are now bearing fruit.

Wicus Leeuwner once remarked: “It says much about a community when a species that has been classified as highly endangered on the international red data list can be induced to increase its numbers within a man-made habitat such as the Overberg grain fields.”
Endangering blue cranes is a criminal offence. There are still unscrupulous people who make money out of selling the chicks, and they be stopped. Any transgressions should be summarily reported to Cape Nature Conservaton. Their telephone number is 082- 443 3326.

BLUE CRANE ROUTE

In addition to the Overberg’s fynbos route, whale route and wool route, there are now also blue crane routes at Caledon and at Bredasdorp. Others are in the process of being created at Heidelberg and in the Swartland. A motorist who descends from the Houwhoek Pass and sees the patchwork of fields of the Rûens lying in the valley below, will know that he is entering the home of the blue crane. Along this route there are several farms where the birds congregate in large numbers. Details may be obtained from the web site www.africandream.org or from the Overberg Blue Crane Group at telephone number 082 676 1734 (web site www.bluecrane.org.za) or from Overberg Tourism at their web site www.capeoverberg.org. Their e-mail address is info@capeoverberg.org.