

Project Update: May 2019

In a recent field observation, we found black crowned-cranes in different wetlands in Jimma zone with declining numbers from previous years in some wetlands. Similar to other crane species, the black crowned-cranes uses wetland for feeding, nesting, and breeding purposes. Wetland overutilisation and encroachment for agricultural activities affects the daily activities of black crowned-cranes which directly affects its breeding success. Because of overexploitation of wetlands and agricultural expansions, the species survival is under question if the current situation is continued in the future without interventions. Wetlands resources are under serious pressure from agricultural encroachment which leads to reduction in water availability. Austin (2018) confirmed that reduction in water availability significantly affects crane population, distributions and breeding success. Increasing pressure on wetland resources are seriously affects black crowned cranes in Jimma zone. Irrigation practices mainly maize production affects breeding, feeding and roosting of black crowned cranes. Therefore, we are working to minimize the threats of the species through public awareness creations at different sites with stakeholders, community members, and youth in Jimma zone (Figure 1 to 3).





Figure 1: Awareness creation on the importance of conservation for Seka Chekors High school students



Figure 2: Students awareness creation on nature conservation at Seka Chekors Primary School



Figure 3: Top students award a reference book after awareness creation campaign

It is obvious that rapid human population growth accelerates agricultural expansion into wetlands to feed their families, which is one of the main key factors for the threats of black crowned-cranes in Jimma zone. In order to minimise the existing threats of black crowned crane, public education and awareness creation is essential not optional. In April 2019, we conducted student awareness creation at Seka Chekors Primary school and Seka Chekorsa high school, in which more than 3200 students in the presence of school teachers get awareness on the importance of black crowned crane and its habitat conservation. We informed the students on the threats of black crowned crane and its habitat specially wetlands, the problems of egg removal and destruction by children during breeding season, as well as the negative impacts of wetland degradation on ecosystem services and well being of the surrounding communities.

A successful environmental conservation workshop was held for both students and local communities particularly farmers who depends their livelihoods directly on the natural resources. Many children, teachers and farmers are participated in the organised workshop. We focused on children based on environmental policy of Ethiopia Article 4.1 which gives high attention to the education and care of children, especially in the context of development and the sustainable use of natural resources since virtually all values and the discipline of work are established during childhood. In addition to face to face training/workshop, various information was shared on social media, in which more than 4900 get information about our project activities. In addition to social media dissemination, our success story on the conservation of the vulnerable Black crowned cranes was shared for conservationist in the form of power point presentations on the Ethiopian Rufford Small Grants Conference.



Figure 4: Presentation on the Ethiopia Rufford Small Grants Conference, Addis Ababa (April 27, 2019)

The conservation of wetlands directly contributed for community livelihoods in the form of food provisions like fish productions and other hand craft production from Junkus. Thus, wetland conservation is crucial for the local community livelihoods if well conserved by all of us. Wetland is one of the potential tourist attractions

because of the existence of various birds and animals. We observed that black crowned cranes gather in large flocks during the dry season (non-breeding season) and move in pair (with their families) during the breeding season. This character of the species (moving in flocks during the dry and in small numbers during the wet season) has been proven by Archibald and Meine, 1996. Most of the local people are interested to observe flocks of cranes around wetlands. We have been working on the conservation of wetlands to protect the life of black crowned cranes from threats. The local community understand the importance of wetland conservation after we provided several training at different villages with the support of Rufford Foundation and in-kind contributions of Jimma University.

Nowadays, most of the community value wetlands for the existence of pure water, climate change mitigation and flood control in addition to livelihoods contributions. As we all know wetland is important for the development of fishery production, crop production, grazing lands for livestock, and handicraft preparation for commercial purpose. Thus, wetland conservation has directly benefiting the well being of the local communities. The Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia Environmental Policy of 1997 Article 3.4 indicates that *“water resources particularly wetlands and upstream forests, are fundamental in regulating water quality and quantity and to integrate their rehabilitation and protection into the conservation, development, and management of water resources”*. Thus, we are in the right direction to promote the conservation of wetland resources and its species.



Figure 5: Local community consultation workshop at Ula-uke village in Seka Chekorsa district