



2025 Crane Count Report

Traditional Owner acknowledgement

We'd like to acknowledge that this survey was carried out on the lands of the Muluridji, Jirrbal, Tableland Yalanji and Ngadjon people. We'd like to pay our respects to them as the first custodians of this land.

Report authors

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Cover

Sarus in flight © Cameron DeJong

Introduction

The 2025 Crane Count took place on Saturday 6th and Sunday 7th September 2025.

We had fair weather and no rain for most of the participants. It was a great turnout with 68 people participating over the two days. We monitored 21 roosts and carried out nine transects. Overall numbers were a little up on last year but with some differences which we'll discuss in each section.

We had some drama with a power cut occurring late afternoon in Malanda just as the count got underway. While counting birds I tried to coordinate a way to inform everyone and unfortunately not everyone got the message – by all accounts the pizza place in Malanda did a roaring trade and I managed to reconnect with some counters there. Apologies but it was slightly out of my control. I have investigated methods for improving communication during next year's count.

Thanks to all the volunteers who took part. It's only with the community's support that this survey can be carried out!

Sarus Cranes © Martin Willis



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Day Transects

Table 1: Day Transect Totals 2025

Route	Sarus	Brolga	No ID	Site Totals
Saturday 06/09/2025				
Mt Quincan	0	0	0	0
Tolga	0	0	0	0
East Barron	0	14	8	22
Kairi	120	0	0	120
Mareeba to Rocky Creek	23	21	9	53
Kaban/Tumoulin	57	104	47	208
Riesens	25	57	0	82
Saturday totals	225	196	64	485
Sunday 07/09/2025				
Innot Hot Springs	63	353	0	416
Totals	288	549	64	901

The transects are carried out over two days due to the size of the area to be covered. The main Tablelands area from Mareeba to Tumoulin was covered on the Saturday and the Innot Hot Springs cluster was done on the Sunday. Across both days, we recorded 901 cranes.

This is a 39.9% decrease on last year's 1499 cranes.

This mostly indicates that we are missing cranes on their daytime feeding grounds in the north around Mareeba. This means more work is needed to identify foraging sites in the Paddy's Green, Chewko, Mutchilba areas. If you happen across cranes in these areas, please record it and let me know as these are important observations.

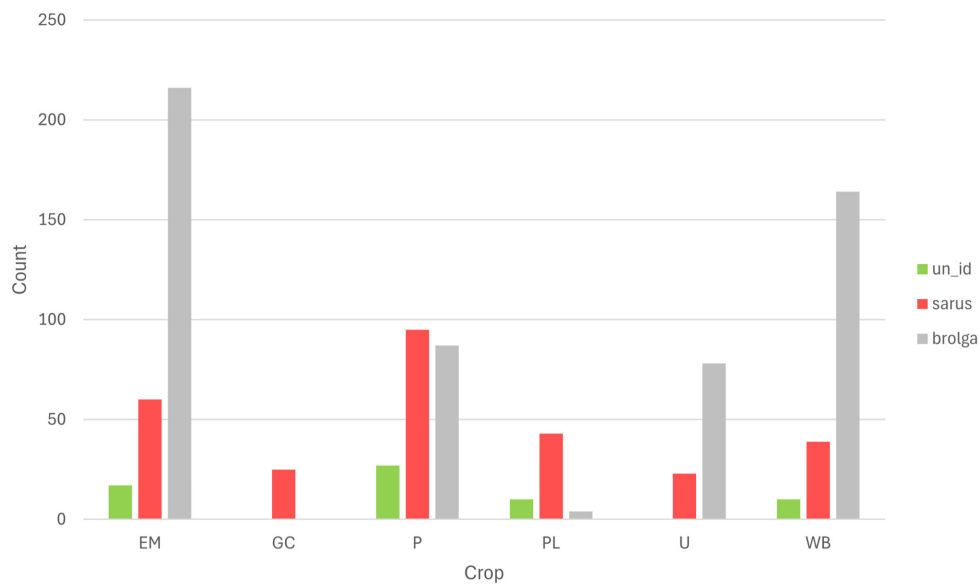


Figure 1: Total count of cranes seen on crop by species, (EM = Ex Maize, GC = Grain Crop, P= Pasture, PL = Ploughed, U= unidentified & WB = Waterbody).

There are continuing changes to the crops on the Tablelands and these are driven by a variety of factors. But there are two stories from this year that I feel were noteworthy in reference to cranes. First was the potential closure of the Tolga peanut processing plant and its eventual sale. Peanuts are a key crop for the cranes. Luckily from a human-wildlife conflict point they tend to forage on anything missed during harvest or self-seeded plants that have germinated in fallow fields from the previous year's crops. The bulk of the peanut harvest is usually over by the time of the count, so we haven't recorded any instances of them damaging peanut crops. The sale hopefully will mean that for the near future peanuts will continue to be farmed here on the Tablelands.

<https://www.abc.net.au/news/rural/2025-09-12/bega-group-sells-peanut-processing-assets-to-crumpton-group/105763466>

The other story has been a breakthrough by CSIRO and Queensland's DPI in the fight against Fall Armyworm which has been in Australia since 2020 and can devastate maize crops among others. Maize, and in particular the remnants of the crop left after harvest, is one of the key foraging sites for cranes on the Tablelands. Its decline and replacement with other crops such as sugar cane could be one of the contributing factors to overall lower numbers of cranes sighted each year, so fingers crossed a biocontrol hits the market soon and our farmers continue to grow maize for years to come.

<https://www.csiro.au/en/news/all/articles/2025/march/fall-armyworm-fungal-and-bacterial-biopesticides>
<https://www.abc.net.au/news/2025-03-27/australian-fungi-bacteria-kills-fall-armyworm/105069826>

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Roost Counts

Table 2. Northern Tablelands Roost Totals 06/09/2025

Site	Sarus	Brolga	No ID	Site Totals
West Barron Storage	60	71	596	727
Mareeba Wetlands	0	2	0	2
Species Totals	60	73	596	729

Table 3. Central Tablelands Roost Totals 06/09/2025

Site	Sarus	Brolga	No ID	Site Totals
Pelican Pt (Black Gully)	9	0	21	30
Lakeshore Farm (Old DPI)	28	0	0	28
Godfrey Farm	0	0	0	0
Reisens Farm	261	0	0	261
Willetts Swamp	0	0	0	0
Battles Swamp	26	0	37	63
Lagoon Rd	158	0	0	158
Yungaburra (Wrights Ck)	74	0	10	84
Ball Rd	11	0	2	13
Bromfield	3	0	0	3
Species Totals	570	0	70	640

Table 4. Southern Tablelands Roost Totals 06/09/2025

Site	Sarus	Brolga	No ID	Site Totals
Bullock Swamp	5	38	4	47
Elicks Dam	0	12	36	48
Sinapius/Edwards Dam	12	31	22	65
Hardwicks Dam	0	0	0	0
Species Totals	17	81	62	160

Table 5. Innot Hot Springs Roost Totals 07/09/2025

Site	Sarus	Brolga	No ID	Site Totals
General Plains Swamp	0	90	840	930
Avocet Dam	2	6	0	8
Clear Water Dam	0	0	0	0
Mid Point Dredge Ponds	0	0	5	5
Dam Wall Dredge Ponds	0	0	0	0
Species Totals	2	96	845	943

The total this year for all birds was 2472, an increase of 14.5% on the previous year.

The unidentified bird count increased again mostly due to the late arrival of birds at the two largest roosts – General Plains Swamp and West Barron Storage. While we can't be certain, a large percentage of these birds will be Brolgas so while Fig 3 shows a drop in Brolga numbers, I don't believe it accurately reflects the real numbers of birds on the ground.

Willetts was a shock this year with zero birds counted, whereas on 23/08/25 Delene kindly did a pre-count check and counted 98 birds. While this was not a high count like we've experienced before it does show cranes were present and anecdotally, I'd seen them there in the late afternoon while driving past on several days throughout the winter. Talking to the landowner, he has mentioned the peak numbers seem to have been earlier these last few years which raises the question of whether we are missing cranes.

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Figure 4. Species total counts by year with a 3-year running average.

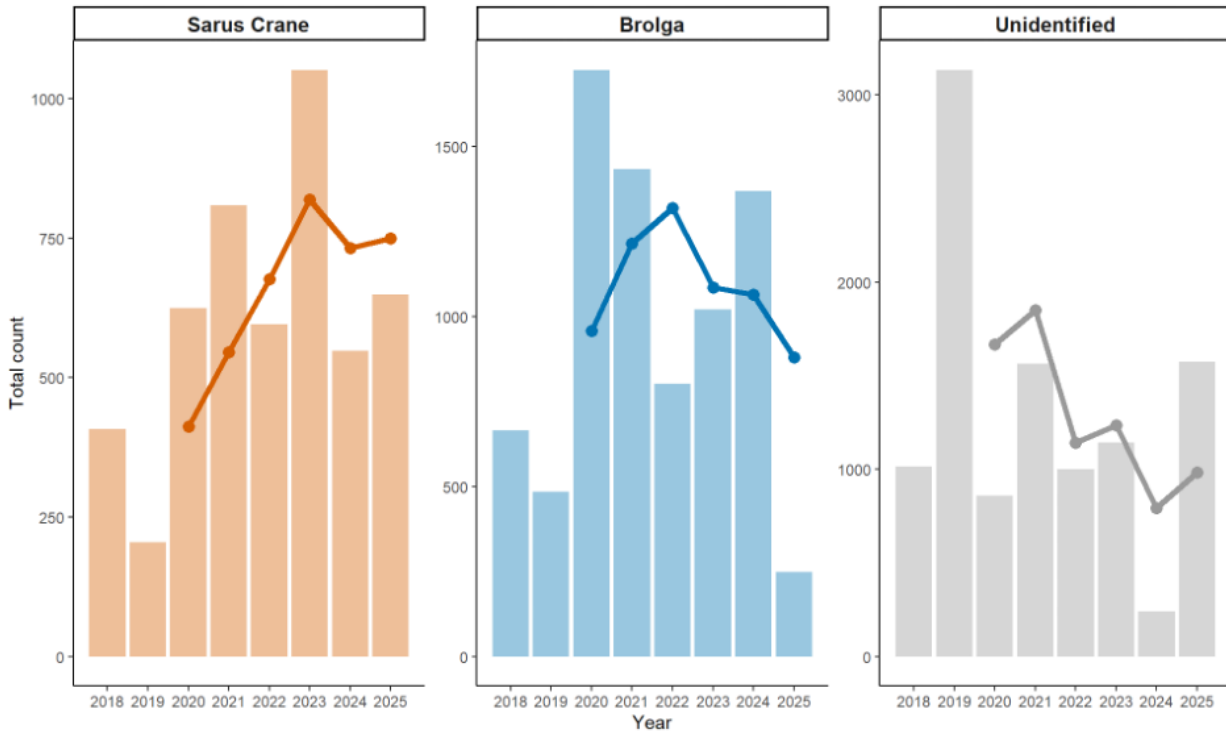
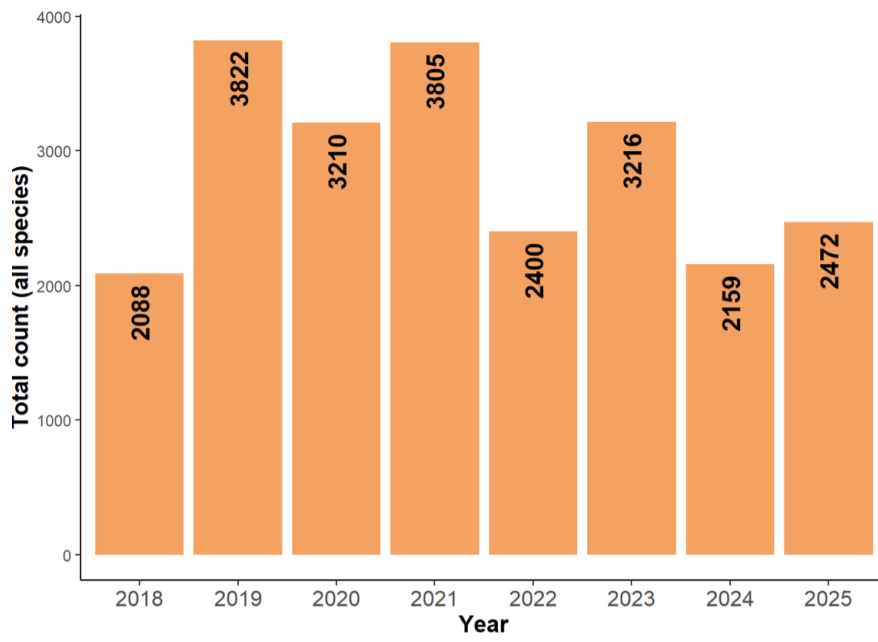


Figure 5. Total count both species and unidentified birds by year (2018–2025).



Acknowledgement and thanks

Firstly, we would like to thank all the landholders that granted access to their properties.

Alan & Muriel Booth, Dustie Cockayne, John & Daphne Godfrey, Peter & Chelley Howe, Graham & Felicity Johnson, Owen, Kathy & Mitch Jonsson, Matthew Kleyn, Grant Newman, Kate & Peter Waddell, Geoff and Katina Riesen and the Board of the Forever Wild Shared Earth Reserve (formerly Mareeba Wetlands).

We'd like to take this opportunity to remind all landholders who kindly allow us onto their properties that we always carry out risk assessments and all participants are covered under Birdlife's insurance. We can also adopt biosecurity precautions as required and we thank all of them for their continued support over the years and hope to continue working together into the future.

Secondly a huge thank you to all the volunteers who took part and made the count a success this year. We were overwhelmed with over 68 people taking part over both days, including students from the School for Field Studies. We look forward to seeing you all again next year!

Extra surveys

This year we were lucky to have Delene, Alison, Wayne and Renee help check out some sites throughout the winter. This really helps our understanding, not just in the immediate run up to the count with ensuring there are cranes at the roosts ready for counters, but also trying to gauge their numbers and movements.

We'd like to monitor at least Willets this year on a weekly to bi-weekly basis so we will be looking for volunteers to assist as well as checking other roosts throughout the winter and assessing numbers pre count.

Please get in touch using the email below if you'd like to get involved – the email address is checked more from May onwards so if urgent get in touch via the Birdlife Northern Queensland website and message will get forwarded on to us.

cranecountfnq@gmail.com

Don't forget to take the time to record cranes when you see them!

Both BirdData and Ebird are powerful tools for data collection. We'd appreciate if people are out birding and they see a flock of cranes that they can safely count they take the time to do a count and, if able, identify the family groups and how many juveniles are seen.

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Sarus Cranes on shores of Lake Tinaroo © Mel Christie

2026 Crane Count

Please note that the 2026 Crane Count will be held on 29th and 30th August 2026.

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