

## CRANE COUNT REPORT 2020

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The Annual Crane Count took place on Saturday 5 and Sunday 6 September 2020.

### CENTRAL TABLELANDS

The Saturday count took place in overcast conditions with intermittent drizzle which did not bode well for identification. However, the number of birds seen but not identified dropped from 61% last year to 26% this count. There were fewer participants in 2020 but they were probably more experienced counters.

The number of overall birds counted on the Central Tablelands was marginally down, but the proportion of Brolga had risen considerably. Willets Swamp in particular had 57% Brolga, almost all of which were in place when the count began. It is probable that all the birds flying in to roosts after sunset which were classed as No ID were in fact Sarus. Only 17 Brolgas have previously roosted at Hasties Swamp and Lake Tinaroo combined in 20 years, and Brolgas tend to arrive earlier or are on the ground when the counting begins at 4pm.

Hasties Swamp rebounded from no birds last year to 260 this year. Bromfield was slightly up at 269.

Following a sighting by John Grant of cranes on a small lake near the Atherton to Malanda Road, Nicholas Creek Overflow was counted for the first time and produced 168 cranes. The cranes seen earlier in the afternoon at the end of Kirra Koppa Road appeared to make their way to this site as darkness fell.

This year 162 Sarus landed at Pelican Point, possibly due to reduced human activity. A large number of birds flew over and continued up the north east arm of the lake, as reported last year.

Willets Swamp continued its dominance of the roosting counts with 58% of all birds counted. 2017 was the first count at Willett's Swamp, accounting for 58% of 1309 birds counted that year. In 2019 it supported 66% of 1797 birds counted. In 2018, however, Willetts Swamp only supported 17% of the meagre 649 birds counted.

Our data collection does not provide any explanation for these gross fluctuations in numbers of cranes from year to year, nor the differing choices of roosting sites. Presumably it has to do with the breeding success and the food resources in their warm season habitat in the Gulf and the food availability on the Tablelands and further south around Innot Hot Springs. So far, we have been unable to unravel this complex situation.

However, on a brighter note Elinor Scambler, the first convenor of the Crane Count, has led a team to produce a paper covering the first 20 years of our counting of the cranes. The paper is published in the *Birdlife Australian Journal*, *Australian Field Ornithology*, as Scambler, E.C., Nevard, T.D., Harrington, G.N., Edwards, E.C., Simmonds, V. & Franklin, D.C. (2020). Numbers, distribution and behaviour of Sarus Cranes, *Antigone antigone gillae* and Brolgas *A. rubicunda* at wintering roosts on the Atherton Tablelands, far north Queensland, Australia. Volume 37, 87–99. R

**Roost Count**

	<b>Sarus</b>	<b>Brolga</b>	<b>No ID</b>	<b>Total</b>
<b>Bromfield Swamp</b>	198	44	27	<b>269</b>
<b>Willetts Swamp</b>	108	350	146	<b>604</b>
<b>Hasties Swamp</b>	7	0	253	<b>260</b>
<b>Mt Quincan Upper Lagoon*</b>	0	0	9	<b>9</b>
<b>Reisen Farm 1 and 2</b>	46	0	18	<b>64</b>
<b>Pelican Point</b>	162	0	0	<b>162</b>
<b>Nicholas Creek Overflow</b>	43	11	114	<b>168</b>
<b>TOTALS</b>	<b>564</b>	<b>405</b>	<b>567</b>	<b>1536</b>

\*Kirra Koppa Road

**Day Count**

	<b>Sarus</b>	<b>Brolga</b>	<b>No ID</b>	<b>Total</b>
<b>Willetts Swamp</b>	0	143	31	<b>174</b>
<b>Kairi Route</b>	349	0	0	<b>349</b>
<b>Mt Quincan Route</b>	173	206	0	<b>379</b>
<b>East Barron Route</b>	2	132	51	<b>185</b>
<b>Mareeba to Rocky Creek</b>	10	0	6	<b>16</b>
<b>TOTALS</b>	<b>534</b>	<b>481</b>	<b>88</b>	<b>1103</b>

**SOUTHERN TABLELANDS****Roost Count Saturday 5 September 2020**

	<b>Sarus</b>	<b>Brolga</b>	<b>No ID</b>	<b>Total</b>
<b>Elicks Dam</b>	16	62	33	<b>111</b>
<b>Hardwicks Dam</b>	1	705	0	<b>706</b>
<b>Bullock Swamp</b>	0	55	42	<b>97</b>
<b>Sinapius/Edwards Dam</b>	4	9	8	<b>21</b>
<b>TOTALS</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>831</b>	<b>83</b>	<b>935</b>

**Roost Count Sunday 6 September 2020**

	<b>Sarus</b>	<b>Brolga</b>	<b>No ID</b>	<b>Total</b>
<b>General Plains Swamp</b>	17	396	7*	<b>420</b>
<b>Nettle Creek Ponds</b>	7	0	17	<b>24</b>
<b>Avocet Dam</b>	9	39	8	<b>56</b>
<b>Clearwater Dam</b>	0	0	0	<b>0</b>
<b>TOTALS</b>	<b>33</b>	<b>435</b>	<b>32</b>	<b>500</b>

\*2 hybrid birds included in this figure

**Day Counts**

	<b>Sarus</b>	<b>Brolga</b>	<b>No ID</b>	<b>Total</b>
<b>Innot Hot Springs Area</b>	14	350	380	<b>744</b>
<b>Kaban/Tumoulin Route</b>	35	301	107	<b>443</b>
<b>TOTALS</b>	<b>49</b>	<b>651</b>	<b>487</b>	<b>1187</b>

**MAREEBA AREA**

	<b>Sarus</b>	<b>Brolga</b>	<b>No ID</b>	<b>Total</b>
<b>West Barron Storage</b>	4	34	175	<b>213</b>
<b>Forever Wild Pandanus Lagoon*</b>	2	45	12	<b>59</b>
<b>TOTALS</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>79</b>	<b>187</b>	<b>272</b>

\*The banks of the lagoon at Forever Wild Tropical Wetland, formerly Mareeba Wetlands, have now been cleared of tall grass and cranes are beginning to roost there again.

**Feeding Areas**

The type of areas cranes were feeding on as observed in the day counts were:

	<b>Ploughed</b>	<b>Ex Wheat</b>	<b>Ex Maize</b>	<b>Pasture</b>	<b>Other</b>	<b>Total</b>
<b>Sarus</b>	64	0	21	488	10	<b>583</b>
<b>Brolga</b>	0	0	131	578	423	<b>1132</b>
<b>No ID</b>	0	0	461	114	0	<b>575</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>64</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>613</b>	<b>1180</b>	<b>433</b>	<b>2290</b>

**Crane Count 2021**

**Crane Count 2021 will be held on Saturday 4 September 2021. Please make a note in your diaries.**

Thank you to all the following who took part:

<i>Viola Barnes</i>	<i>Alan Gillanders</i>	<i>Gwyneth Nevard</i>
<i>David Blair</i>	<i>Maria Gillanders</i>	<i>Tim Nevard</i>
<i>Simon Burchill</i>	<i>John Grant</i>	<i>Yu Ota</i>
<i>Pippy Cannon</i>	<i>Dinah Hansman</i>	<i>Ceri Pearce</i>
<i>Tani Cooper</i>	<i>Graham Harrington</i>	<i>Yvonne Perron</i>
<i>Tony Cummings</i>	<i>Dominic Harrington</i>	<i>Ray Pierce</i>
<i>Arthur Day</i>	<i>Terry Heidenreich</i>	<i>Noel Preece</i>
<i>Sally Day</i>	<i>Sigrid Heise-Pavlov</i>	<i>Pam Schultz</i>
<i>Jo Doecke</i>	<i>Fiachra Kearney</i>	<i>Candida Secomb</i>
<i>Ceinwen Edwards</i>	<i>Wise Lum</i>	<i>Peter Valentine</i>
<i>Andrew Forsyth</i>	<i>Golo Maurer</i>	<i>Graham Wardle</i>
<i>Trish Forsyth</i>	<i>David Merrall</i>	<i>Barbara Warren</i>
<i>Juergen Freund</i>	<i>Margaret Merrall</i>	<i>Terry Warren</i>
<i>Stella Freund</i>	<i>Helen Myles</i>	<i>John Winter</i>
	<i>Jonathan Munro</i>	

Thank you to Geoff Reisen, Graham and Felicity Johnsson, Kane and Sharon Booth and Alan and Muriel Booth for access to their properties on the Central Tablelands.

On the Southern Tablelands thank you to Dustie and Jack Fox, Mitch Jonsson, Grant Newman and Robbie and Paige Dalgety for access to their properties.

Thank you to Kate and Peter Waddell at Innot Hot Springs for access to General Plains Swamp and the Nettle Creek dredge ponds.

Apologies to anyone missed and for any spelling errors.