

Birdlife North Queensland Crane Count Report 2021

Graham Harrington, Ceinwen Edwards & Edward Bell

This years annual Crane Count took place on Saturday 4th and Sunday 5th September 2021.

The count this year was a bit of an undertaking with a transition of survey leaders. Graham Harrington stepped in to take over from David Merrall who has led the count for the last 4 years and decided his time had come to pass it on. We'd like to thank David for his dedication and effort these last few years. Edward will be taking over the coordinator position alone next year. The response to a call out for volunteers was slow at first and had us worried but we ended up being overwhelmed with over 66 volunteers taking part over the 2 days.

Day Transects

Transects were carried out across both days with the majority being covered on the Saturday and the Innot Hot Springs cluster being done on the Sunday. Across both days we managed to sight 2174 cranes which is 6% down on last year.

The sightings break down to Sarus Cranes 22%, Brolgas 47% and Unidentified birds making up 31%. The number of unidentifiable birds is still high this year and a problem we will need to solve to improve the usefulness of the count.

As per previous years the land use of the paddocks where cranes were sighted was identified. The large spike in Brolgas on grain crops (Fig 2) can be attributed to a very large flock sighted by the Innot Hot Springs team on Sunday. This data is something we will continue to gather as crop changes could impact on the number of over wintering cranes in the years to come.

Table 1: Day Transect Totals

Date	Route	Sarus	Brolga	No ID	Site Totals
04/09/2021	Kairi	246	0	0	246
04/09/2021	Reisens	77	45	18	140
04/09/2021	Mt Quincan	22	9	2	33
04/09/2021	Mareeba	85	62	160	307
04/09/2021	East Barron	28	92	226	346
04/09/2021	Kaban	5	51	270	326
05/09/2021	Innot Hot Springs	14	762	0	776



Figure 1: Brolgas in a paddock. Credit: Geoff Stapley

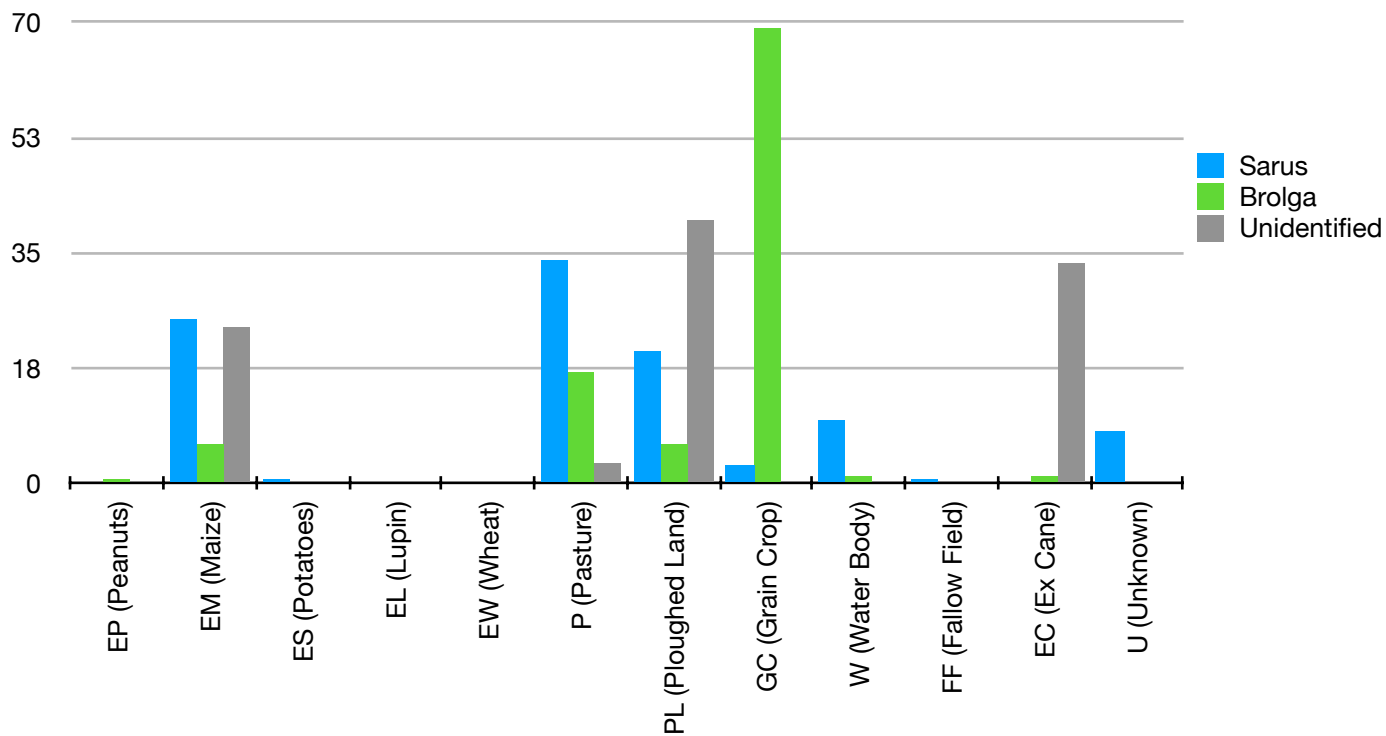


Figure 2: Land use by species as a percentage (%)

Roost Counts

Again this years count was carried out in less than ideal conditions with intermittent drizzle affecting visibility across many sites.

Overall across both days we counted 3805 birds, an increase of 16% on last year! This was surprising as Hasties Swamp returned to having no birds again and Bromfield Swamp was low compared to previous years with only 119 birds reported.

Tinaroo proved to be problematic with lots of birds reported to be flying North over surveyors but not enough landing to correspond with those seen overhead so more searching to locate roosts will be needed next year - we'll be looking for volunteers in the run up to the count to check suspected roosts so let us know if you'd like to be involved.

Willetts Swamp continued to dominate the Central Tablelands in terms of numbers with 637 birds being counted on Saturday night. However, the surprise of the night was the West Barron Storage Pond with 677 birds (see Tables 2 & 4)

Due to logistics the Innot Hot Springs counts were carried out on the following day, Sunday 5th September. Brolgas made up the majority of birds seen with a flock estimated at 750~ being seen during the day transects. The evening count was carried out across a number of pools in the area but the majority of Cranes roosted at General Plains Swamp as in previous years. (See Table 5)

Table 2. Central Tablelands Roost Count Totals 04/09/2021

	Sarus	Brolga	No ID	Site Totals
Willetts Swamp	280	302	55	637
Reisens Farm (Combined)	124	0	1	125
Godfrey Farm	0	0	20	20
Bromfield Swamp	51	20	48	119
Hasties Swamp	0	0	0	0
Koci Farm	73	0	0	73
Pelican Point	20	0	0	20
Battles Swamp	87	29	69	185
Central Tablelands Totals	635	351	193	1179

Table 3. Southern Tablelands Roost Count Totals 04/09/2021

	Sarus	Brolga	No ID	Site Totals
Bullock Swamp	4	98	0	102
Elicks Dam	0	13	4	17
Sinapius/Edwards Dam	10	3	3	16
Hardwicks Dam	0	147	80	227
Southern Tablelands Totals	14	261	87	362

Table 4. Northern Tablelands Roost Count Totals 04/09/2021

	Sarus	Brolga	No ID	Site Totals
West Barron Storage	121	78	478	677
Mareeba Wetlands	0	118	4	122
North Tablelands Totals	121	196	482	799

Table 5. Innot Hot Springs Roost Count Totals 05/09/2021

	Sarus	Brolga	No ID	Site Totals
General Plains	39	625	799	1463
Avocet Dam	0	0	0	0
Clear Water Dam	0	0	0	0
Mid Point Dredge Ponds	0	0	2	2
Dam Wall Dredge Ponds	0	0	0	0
Innot Hot Springs Totals	39	625	801	1465



Juvenile Brolga. Credit: Geoff Stapley

Photos contributed by volunteers from this years count



Interspecies dispute at Willets. Credit: Cameron De Jong



Brolgas in harvested maize paddock. Credit: Geoff Stapley



Sarus family flying in. Credit: Cameron De Jong



Mixed Group Flying in. Credit: Cameron De Jong

Thoughts for next year...

The number of birds unidentified was higher this year than last with 41% of birds being unidentified. This is a recurring problem that we will look into solving. Some suggestions have included using night vision binoculars/cameras and doing some checks at dawn which we may trial in 2022. If anyone has any night vision equipment we'd love to hear from you so please get in touch - edbelljsy@icloud.com

When we email out next year we'll also ask if you are able to help out identifying roosts in the run up to the Crane Count. Normally in the 2 weeks before the organiser and a few others scope out known historical roost sites to check whether cranes are present. If you live on the Tablelands and fancy helping out in advance of the big day again let us know next year when we send out reminders.

Don't forget - keep logging your crane sightings either on Bird Data or Ebird as its good to know where and when they are turning up.

Acknowledgements and Thanks

Firstly we would like to thank all the landholders that granted access to their properties; Alan & Muriel Booth, Dustie Cockayne & Jack Fox, Mitch Cole, Robbie Dalgety, J & D Godfrey, Graham & Felicity Johnsson, Owen, Kathy & Mitch Jonsson, Matthew Klein, Peter Koci, Grant Newman, Geoff Riesen, Kate & Peter Waddell and the Board of the Forever Wild Shared Earth Reserve (Formerly Mareeba Wetlands)

Secondly to all the volunteers that took part and made the count a success - we look forward to seeing you all again next year!

Eda Addicot & John Allen	John Frois	Ray Pierce
Rebecca Aitchison-Gill	Lois Haywood	Shirley Prout
Leonard Arnolda	Terry Heidenreich	Alec Rolfe
Peter & Mulga Barker	Sigrid Heise-Pavlov	Giovanni Ruggeri
Liz Bashford	Britta Jackle	Dale & Nicola Salisbury-
Ken Bisset	Andres & Pam Kabel	Faulkner
Sanne Boland	E & F Kearney	Ron Schweitzer
Sabine Both	Samuel Kroon	Jules Seabright
Bill & Diane Brookes	Malcolm Macdonald	Candida Secomb
Simon Burchill	Stella Martin	Geoff Stapley
Pippy Cannon	Angela & Mark McCaffrey	Ellen Terrell
Wendy Cooper	Jonny McGannon	Peter & Trixie Tuck
Mark Davis	Michael McMaster	Peter Valentine
Cameron De Jong	Lucy Morris	Dennis Walls
Jo Doecke	Jonathan Munro	Graham Wardle
Kay Dorricott	Gwyneth & Tim Nevard	Barbara Warren
Keith & Lindsay Fisher	John Ogden	Jill Windle
Jürgen & Stella Freund	Tim Paine	Tong Yun Yan

Date for your Diaries: **Saturday 10th September 2022** for next years Crane Count. Please note we have postponed the count by one week in order to miss the road closures associated with the Targa Rally.

(P.S apologies if anyones name has been misspelt)