

DEMOISELLE CRANES (ANTHROPOIDES VIRGO)
— AN ATTEMPT AT SURVIVAL

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If you wish to become crane-minded, watch the Demoiselle crane, and you will be lost for ever. That is, if you can find the Demoiselle in its natural habitat: breeding in the dry of the steppe; resting by a dried lakeside during the night or wintering in the green fields of the tropical regions.

The Demoiselle crane is not 'endangered'. Their numbers are not that low, but each crane species, and almost all bird species will be endangered if we continue to build, to farm, to electrify, to hunt and to drain as we have done in the last hundred years. The crane habitat is important for so many other birds that we should pay much more attention to these birds than to many others. The cranes are by no means the easiest birds to ensure protection for, but if we achieve success here, there will be important habitat provided for many other bird species and animals. The protection (or wise use) of their habitats means a continuous battle against all who want to use these areas for other purposes. We don't want to be losers again, as many areas have been in the past and the remaining areas are needed for breeding, wintering and stepping stones between them.

The photographs of Bengt Berg taken in the thirties along the river Nile show us flocks of Demoiselle cranes in an area where nowadays the cranes have gone. The flocks of wintering cranes in Gujarat (India) seem to be smaller than those of several years ago. And why is it very difficult to find juvenile birds in these flocks even in early wintertime? No population can survive if there are insufficient or no young at all born each year.

It is nice to know that there are many crane species in captivity and it will be possible for several centuries to see cranes in captivity. However, cranes in the fields, in their own habitat is something different. The sight of cranes in a nice garden is pleasant, but to see a flock of 5000 cranes landing in a lake is unforgettable.

All these activities have to go hand in hand to ensure that cranes can be enjoyed by people.

Let us return to the Demoiselle. Not endangered on world scale but serious decreases can be registered from breeding sites in Europe and Africa. According to *Cramp* and *Simmons* the sites in northern Africa (Tunisia, Algeria and Morocco) have no breeding cranes. Only in mid-Morocco does a small population appear to remain. It is one of the tasks of the Working Group to find out what is going on in this area and what kind of protection measures have to be taken. One hopes the species can be reintroduced from this small remaining population to former breeding sites in North Africa. Once again the Working Group offered help to Morocco—either personnel or financially—if projects can be developed to protect the last Demoiselles in west Africa.

In Europe we lost during the last few centuries, breeding Demoiselle cranes

(*Cramp* and *Simmons*) from Romania (till 1926!) and other countries, but breeding had never been completely established and profitable.

Now we have to fight for the last pairs in eastern Turkey. Mount Ararat is surrounded by marshes. Though other use is made of these marshes, the population seems to return each year. The remnants of Noah's Ark seem to keep a vigilant eye upon this small population.

The most important breeding area however stretches from west Russia to east Mongolia. Very little is known about the breeding sites here, and we can only judge the result by observing the Demoiselle cranes during their migration and in their wintering areas. It is remarkable that Johnsgard mentions in his book 'Cranes of the World' that: "Unfortunately, there is no good information on the incidence of juvenile birds in fall or winter flocks, although such information should be easily obtainable".

"Easily obtainable". Travelling behind them by many years I can assure you that nothing is easy with cranes. From five years of observations of Demoiselle cranes in Cyprus during the end of August I can give one figure. In several groups during these years with in all a little over 200 birds, there were just 15 juveniles. In the other flocks it was not possible to recognize any juveniles, caused by late arrival of the cranes or disturbances by military activities. "Easily obtainable". Demoiselle cranes migrate early. Though even this fact cannot be proved satisfactorily, Demoiselle cranes can be seen at the end of August in Cyprus and in Turkey. Later in September we have never had the opportunity to see Demoiselles. It is not clear where the Cypriot nesting cranes are coming from. As no regular observations are undertaken in the most important resting area in Cyprus (Akrotiri lake) there is a big gap in information. It is also not surprising that, also caused by the lack of this information, the destruction of this lake seems to be inescapable. The Cypriot government prefers the short-term profits of tourism to long-term wise management of the Akrotiri-area. After the Cyprus ambassador in Strasbourg declared in 1983 that the area would be protected, much was expected, however further destruction was planned, and an important area between Russia and Africa may be lost. The consequences for the remaining population can only be judged after many years. As such processes are irreversible, one would expect more responsible behaviour from a member of the Council of Europe.

During two visits in 1983 and 1984 at the wintering areas in mainly Gujarat (India) one gets the impression that there are still Demoiselle cranes: large flocks of up to 5000 birds use the 'tanks' (water reservoirs) as their resting place and they feed in the fields during day time or when there is a full moon. More information on the Demoiselle in India will be assembled by P. Gole and myself in 1986 after another visit.

The Indian attitude towards cranes, and birds in general is ideal for protection of the species. They are easy to see and to study, and Indian people enjoy the cranes' presence — so do I. Various projects developed in India to protect cranes and other animals are all very successful, as the people themselves want to protect the natural resources of their country. Once again: the number of juveniles among these wintering cranes seems to be very low. In several groups one can hardly find any young, although in winter they may be easily recognized. We would like to know more about the Demoiselle crane. It may be that others learn from our past mistakes, and can win the battle in India.

Demoiselle cranes are almost always given names which describe their virgin beauty. So far, I have only found a small variance on this theme in Hungary and Turkey. In Turkey the word *Telliturna* is generally used. It means thread-crane; crane

decorated with a thread or a string. The Hungarian name Pártás expresses more clearly the combination of virginity and beauty. Young Hungarian girls dance with a 'párta' in their hair—a kind of lace cap or string with hanging ribbons.

There is no better honour to our Hungarian hosts than to compliment them upon this name in the hope that the Demoiselle crane will once again find its way to Hungary.

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A pártásdaru (*Anthropoides virgo*) — túlélési kísérlete

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A pártásdaru nem veszélyeztetett faj, mégis törekednünk kell arra, hogy megvédjük. Olyan élőhely jellegzetes madara, amelyet a fokozódó emberi behatások (építkezés, lecsapolás, mezőgazdaság stb.) folytonosan fenyegetnek. Keveset tudunk a pártásdaru szaporodásáról s annak sikeréről, mert kevés juvenilis egyedet lehet találni a telelő csapatokban. Észak-Afrikában már csak Közép-Marokkóban van egy kis költő populáció. A fő költési terület Nyugat-Szovjetuniótól Kelet-Mongóliáig terjed. Az előbbi területről induló madarak vonulásának fontos állomása a ciprusi Akrotiri-tó, amelyet infrastrukturális fejlesztés fenyeget. Indiában viszont ígéretes a helyzet a pártásdaru védelmét illetően.

FOSSIL DATA ON CRANES IN HUNGARY

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Our knowledge about the ancestors of birds is — chiefly in comparison with that of mammals—very imperfect. The evolution of a lot of orders of birds is even today wrapped in mystery, and some very fragmentary, newly discovered remains throw often new light upon the relationships of them.

On the other hand, this is not the case with the group of cranes! More than a hundred years ago (1871) there were described remains of an about 40 million years old (Oligocene) crane, *Palaeogrus excelsa* (Milne Edwards) from the classical french locality “St. Gérard le Puy” (*Lambrecht, 1933* etc.). Since that found we have known of a lot of bone remains of at least twenty different species emanating from the last 60 million years, from Asia, Europe and North America. The evolution of the crane group produced very different forms, small and large, some of them also flightless and not only waterforms but also didactylous birds, such as were accommodated to desert conditions (*Urmiornis*) etc.

As it is generally known, the territory of today's Hungary was covered by sea up to the last 2—3 millions of years and, therefore, the conditions of preservation of bird bones were former not given. Thus, founds of fossil bird remains which are characteristic of younger periods are well represented in our territory, start only with the last 15—20 millions of years, ranking former as Pliocene, but newly classified now as Miocene. In the hills of Western Hungary lies the locality Csákvár, with a cave which was at that time on an Island in the Pannonian inland sea. This yielded the oldest crane remains of our territory, *Pliogrus pentelici* Gaudry in size and morphology not very far from our recent crane. About half a million years old crane remains were discovered in the travertines of the Castle Hill of Buda and some hundred thousand years old ones also in the hills of Transdanubia, near lake Balaton, at Lovas. The very regular and numerous bone-remains of cranes of our archaeological sites of the last ten thousand years show the great interest of our ancestors in these birds. Nearly in all archaeological localities from the Neolithic Period up to the Middle Ages there are numerous bones of cranes, the most common among subfossil bird remains at all. According to the size of remains these birds were 10 to 20 percent larger than the ones we have today. The birds were surely bred, reared, consumed and hunted for their plumage. In later centuries ranking after the eagles it was the most common heraldic bird (*Jánossy, 1981, 1985*).

According to literary data, the crane has during the last two centuries—if such thing as ornithological investigation and research in our territory can be mentioned at all—never been a regular breeding species. However, it always had a regular migration route through Hungary, chiefly through its eastern part. The great interest of our country men in this bird in recent times transpires from the large number of local names connected with the cranes (in Hungarian = daru).

I have collected chiefly from very old military maps printed in the last century names of ponds, barks, small waters, farms, sand banks etc. connected with this bird. If we pin-point these places on a map of Hungary, we get an interesting picture (Fig. 1.) These points are scattered about the whole territory of our country, but they are considerably more frequent on the eastern part of Hungary, where even today the main migratory routes of these birds run. You can find in these territories within one square kilometer names of crane lakes, crane barks, crane farms, crane islets, crane pits and crane fountains etc. which names these places acquired by no accident. Also I have found in the Hungarian Diploma-Dictionary (*Szomota—Zoltai, 1902—1906*) the earliest hint on cranes dating from 1367, as “Darvas”, *Terrum paludosum que vocatur daruosto, gruibus copiosus*; in German: “reich an Kranichen”. The locality

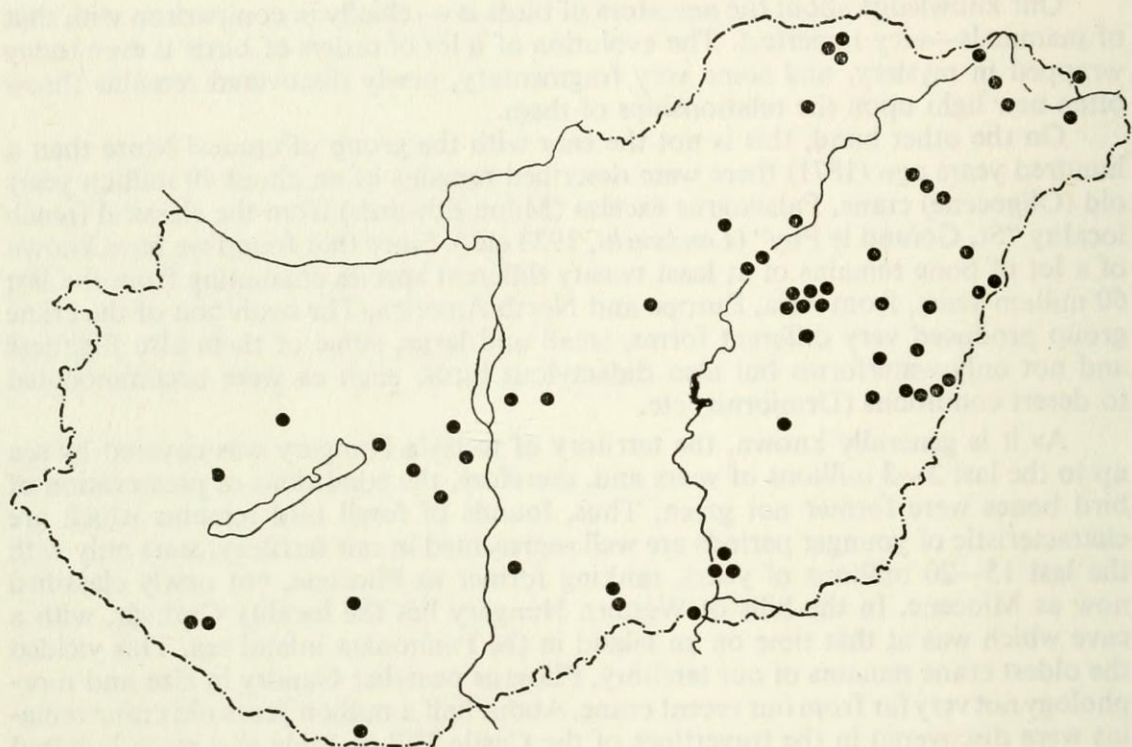


Figure 1. Geographical names connected with cranes in Hungary — A daruval kapcsolatos helységnevek Magyarországon

is also in the Eastern part of the present-day Hungarian territory (“Hajdúság”). Thoma Darw as a family name originates as a first reference from 1526.

The cranes, this superb group of birds is our heritage from the evolutionary processes of the far past. They were connected with man former from utilitarian aspect, but today we have to protect them for the future for their aesthetic, melancholic cries that we hope will sound through the great plains for many more centuries to come.

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Adatok magyarországi fosszilis darvakról

Dr. Jánossy Dénes

A darvak a madarak ősi csoportja. Az elmúlt 60 millió év alatt legalább 20 különböző méretű és alakú forma fejlődött ki. Hazánk területéről a legkorábbi daru-előfordulás a miocénből való, ezenkívül még félmillió és százezer éves maradványok kerültek elő. A régészeti ásatások szintén gazdag szubfosszilis anyagot tártak fel, tehát a daru őseink fontos tápláléka lehetett. A számos hazai, daruval kapcsolatos helységnév arra utal, hogy korábban is — elsősorban — az ország keleti része felett volt a fő vonulási útvonal.