Rare wattled crane chick adopted by red-crowned cranes at ZSL Whipsnade Zoo

Tuesday 4 August, 2015

A rare and endangered wattled crane chick has been adopted by two red-crowned cranes at ZSL Whipsnade Zoo after it was abandoned, as an egg, by its parents.

With only eight wattled cranes in UK zoological collections, bird experts at ZSL Whipsnade Zoo, keen to save the abandoned wattled crane egg, placed it in an incubator until it was ready to hatch. The egg was then placed in the nest of a pair of red-crowned cranes that are experienced parents, in the hope that the red-crowned cranes would adopt and rear the chick as their own.

The move proved to be a success, with the red-crowned cranes not only feeding the adopted chick, but also teaching the developing crane social, foraging and predator aversion skills.

ZSL Whipsnade Zoo's Bird Team Leader, Jamie Graham said: "With only eight wattled cranes in the UK, and between 4000 and 6000 left in the wild, our team here at ZSL Whipsnade Zoo decided to collaborate with Paradise Park in Cornwall and Paignton Zoo in a final attempt to breed the species in Britain. It was always going to be difficult because wattled cranes are renowned for very low fertility rates.

"Four birds were assembled here and eventually a compatible breeding pair was established. After months of courtship behaviour, we were delighted to see that the pair had produced an egg, and obviously very disappointed when it was abandoned.

"Introducing the egg to the red-crowned cranes was a delicate process, but we're thrilled to see how they've accepted and raised the chick. It's a real coup for the breeding programme, and an important development for the protection of the species."

The wattled crane *(Bugeranus carunculatus)* is the second tallest species of crane, at a height of up to 5.7ft. In the wild, it is found in sub-Saharan Africa and is the most endangered crane species on the African continent. The speed of decline in the population is thought to be because of a loss and degradation of wetlands. Wattled cranes are categorised as Vulnerable by the IUCN. International conservation charity ZSL is working for wildlife through a number of bird conservation projects, including saving the Indian vulture and remote monitoring of Antarctic penguins. (https://www.zsl.org/conservation/species/birds)

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Editor's Notes

High res photos available to download here: https://zslondon.sharefile.com/d-s07b2002a37148478

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