Crane

**Conservation Status:** Vulnerable (Wattled) and Endangered (Crowned)

There are two crane species in Gorongosa: grey crowned crane (*Balearica regulorum*) and wattled crane (*Bugeranus carunculatus*). The grey crowned crane has a pale gray neck, which contrasts sharply with its black and white wings, crest of golden feathers on top of its head, and bright red pouch that hangs below its throat. Its head is black, with a large patch of bare white skin on the cheeks and a red spot above. Its legs and feet are black. Males tend to be slightly larger than females but are otherwise indistinguishable.

The wattled crane is a large bird with a long white neck and breast. The underparts are black, while the body is gray. They have a black “cap” on top of their head, bare red facial skin, and long wattles that bear white feathers and give rise to their common name.

**Fun Facts**

1. Grey crowned cranes stomp their feet as they walk across grasslands to help flush out insects and other potential prey.
2. Crowned cranes are the only species of crane that can roost in trees, thanks to their gripping hind toes that allow them to grasp tree limbs.
3. Crowned cranes will sometimes feign injury to lure predators away from a nest site.
4. The wattled crane is the largest of the six crane species found in Africa.

**Habitat**

Cranes are usually found in wetlands and grasslands near bodies of water.

**Diet**

Seeds, plants, grains, insects, worms, frogs, lizards, small fish, eggs, rootstalks, and sedge tubers

**Predators**

Jackals**,** hyenas, lions, and leopards

**Behavior**

Grey crowned cranes are social and gregarious birds living in flocks of up to 200 birds the majority of the year. They are not migratory, but they may make variable local and seasonal movements depending on the availability of food, nesting locations, and rainfall.

Wattled cranes are typically seen in pairs or in trios consisting of a breeding pair. They will form flocks, often joining other birds and grazing mammals. They are nomadic animals that move in response to flood and drought cycles. When threatened, the bird’s long wattles will shrink, but when the wattled crane becomes aggressive their wattles will elongate.

**Breeding**

During the breeding season, both male and female crowned cranes participate in an elaborate mating dance. Pairs will jointly build a large, circular nest, made of grasses and other vegetation, in a marshy area. Females will lay two or three bluish-white eggs. Both parents incubate the eggs: Females incubate them at night while males incubate them during the day. After 28 to 31 days, the eggs will hatch.

Wattled cranes engage in a wild courtship dance that includes jumping, bowing, tossing grass high in the air, calling in unison, and coiling the head over their back and extending their bill toward the sky. Wattled cranes build large grass nests in low, marshy areas. Usually, a single egg is laid, and if two are laid, just one chick will typically be reared.

**Size**

Length:1-1.2 m

**Weight**

3-7 kg

**Life Span:** 20-30 years

**Incubation Period:** 28-31 days (crowned crane); 90-130 days (wattled crane)

**Average number of offspring:** 1-3