



## CAIRNGORMS CRANES



SCOTLAND  
THE BIG PICTURE

## Frequently Asked Questions

### 1 What are cranes?

Common throughout most parts of Europe and Asia, Eurasian cranes (*Grus grus*) are large, charismatic birds. At more than 1 metre tall with a distinctive red patch on the crown of their heads and a loud trumpeting display call, they are difficult to overlook when strutting around their favoured wetland habitat.

### 2 What do cranes eat?

As opportunistic omnivores, cranes eat a wide range of insects, plants, amphibians, small mammals and birds, although foraged plant matter makes up the majority of their diet. During the breeding season, however, they favour insects and other small animals to feed to their young.

### 3 Why reintroduce cranes to the Cairngorms?

Eurasian cranes have been absent from Scotland for more than 500 years, largely due to overhunting. They have recently made a tentative return to the Aberdeenshire coastline but their numbers remain small. Cairngorms Cranes aims to reintroduce cranes to the heart of Scotland within the Cairngorms National Park and thus catalyse their recolonisation throughout their former range across Scotland.



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#### **How critical a species for reintroduction is the crane?**

The health of any living system relies on its component parts. While cranes may be less of a habitat architect than beavers for example, they are nevertheless an important piece in a complex ecological jigsaw, which remains incomplete in their absence.

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#### **What are the benefits to reintroducing cranes?**

As large, striking birds with both a visual and audible presence, cranes act as a flagship species bringing attention to wetland habitats and the need for their restoration. The environmental benefits of larger, inter-connected wet landscapes include increased biodiversity, carbon sequestration and a reduction in flooding, but cranes will also attract more visitors drawn to a nature-rich landscape, providing opportunities for local businesses.

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#### **Are there any concerns or risks?**

Cranes do predate smaller animals and compete for food with species such as herons. However, they also contribute to the wider ecological landscape and help drive natural processes such as predation, scavenging and nutrient cycling. It should be remembered that for millennia, cranes co-evolved with all our other native flora and fauna so any impact is part of a healthy, functional living system.

Cranes can eat farmed crops, particularly during winter months when they venture away from their breeding territories. It might therefore be necessary, or beneficial, to support the early stages of the reintroduction by putting out supplementary grain at certain times of the year. We hope to work with the few arable farmers in the Cairngorms to explore ways in which any damage can be minimised.



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## **Is there suitable habitat in the Cairngorms for cranes?**

Our feasibility study confirmed that there is suitable and sufficient habitat within the Cairngorms to support a viable population of breeding cranes, and with major river, peatland and wetland restoration projects planned or already underway within the Park, these habitats look set to increase further over time.

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## **How will the cranes be reintroduced?**

Over a 4-year period, we plan to employ experienced aviculturists to remove up to 24 first-clutch crane eggs each year, from wild and captive cranes in England (pairs will re-lay another clutch after around 12 days). We will then costume-rear the resulting chicks in specially built facilities at a quiet location in the Cairngorms National Park. After fledging, they will be slowly released to the wild. We expect the birds to remain close to the release facilities over their first winter, gradually becoming more confident, expanding their range and learning to find food for themselves. After four years, we expect to have released approximately 75 juvenile cranes, and of those, it is hoped that enough birds will go on to breed to form the foundation for a viable population.

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## **How is the project progressing?**

We are currently in a year-long development period preparing all the necessary processes and permissions to apply for a reintroduction licence from Scottish Government. If all goes well, we hope to be able to collect our first round of crane eggs in spring 2023.

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## **Who is involved with Cairngorms Cranes?**

Cairngorms Cranes is led by SCOTLAND: The Big Picture in partnership with Trees For Life. We are supported by Wildland Ltd. and the Wildfowl and Wetland Trust and seek advice from many other organisations such as NatureScot and the Cairngorms National Park Authority.



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## Will the cranes migrate or stay in Scotland over winter?

In keeping with other reintroduction projects, we expect released juveniles to form a resident population with local movements during winter to locate food. Continental migratory cranes are occasionally reported within the Cairngorms region and so, as our resident population expands, some of the youngsters may learn migratory routes as they join small cohorts of those birds passing through.

In order to monitor the whereabouts of our juvenile cranes and to ensure their health and welfare, we plan to fit satellite-tags to a proportion of the young birds.

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## Can I visit the cranes?

Unfortunately, our rearing facility will not be accessible to the public as we need to minimise their contact with people. However, once the fledged birds are released and begin to explore the wider environment, they will be visible in small groups exploring a variety of local habitats.

