

Insecticides Killing the Threatened Sarus Crane (*Grus antigone*) in Eastern Maharashtra

Mukund Dhurve¹ and Raju Kasambe²

Here we present instances of death of the threatened Sarus Crane *Grus antigone* in eastern Maharashtra, most of which were due to poisoning with insecticides.

2006 and 2007: Sarus deaths

In October 2006, two immature Sarus Cranes were found dead on the edge of a

small pond at Ghat Temhni village in Gondia district. A dozen other waterbirds were found dead near the carcasses of the cranes. It was later found that some fishermen had put insecticide into the small tank (locally called a *bodi*) to kill the fish, which resulted in killing of the Sarus Cranes also.

In January 2007, two more immature Sarus Cranes died of electrocution by crashing into power lines near Bazar Tola village, Gondia district. Notably, the adults did not get electrocuted as they were able to manoeuvre safely.

2010: Three Sarus dead

Two immature Sarus Cranes were found dead near a small tank between Kamtha and Panjra villages in Gondia district on November 16, 2010. The villagers informed the forest officers about the death of the birds. As nothing suspicious was found near the birds, a search was undertaken by birdwatchers in the area around smaller tanks where the birds forage. It was found that rice poisoned with an insecticide (Thimet) was kept at many places around a small tank called Zilmili Talao which is adjacent to Gondia Airport. But the purpose of keeping poisoned rice seemed to be to kill waterbirds such as ducks, and not Sarus Crane, otherwise the poachers would have taken away the dead birds. Post-mortem examination revealed that the Sarus had died of insecticide poisoning.

It should be noted that another immature Sarus had died at this Zilmili tank earlier (July 2010) in similar circumstances and the carcass was recovered. Zilmili once was home to six Sarus Cranes, of which only three are alive now.



Corpses of Sarus Crane killed by consuming poisoned grains



Rajesh Rampurkar

Treatment being given to the ailing Sarus Crane

2011: The last pair of Sarus near Navegaon National Park dead

The last pair of resident Sarus Cranes of the Shrungarbandh *bodi* near Gothangaon in Arjuni Morgaon tehsil, Gondia district, 20 km from Navegaon National Park died on July 29, 2011. This was a very famous pair as many tourists visited the Navegaon National Park only to see these beautiful birds. The pair was successfully breeding there, well protected by the villagers for the last 15 years (Dhurve *et al.* 2010). A farm owner at Kadoli village 3 km from Shrungarbandh *bodi* noticed the unconscious birds in the afternoon and informed the forest department. A forest guard took custody of the birds, which died in the evening.

It was suspected that the birds might have died after consuming insects, fish or frog which had residues of Thimet. Farmers excessively use Thimet to control sucking pests, mites and other major insect pests on a wide variety of crops (see http://articles.timesofindia.indiatimes.com/2011-07-30/nagpur/29832721_1_saras-bird-species-forest-guard).

Latest Sarus Count in Eastern Maharashtra

A Sarus count was done on June 12, 2011 by birdwatchers and members of Gondia Nisarg Mitra, Gondia. A total of 45 Sarus were actually sighted, and including the secondary information the count was put at 63 birds.

Acknowledgements

Thanks to members of Gondia Nisarg Mandal for help in the conservation of the Sarus Crane in Maharashtra. Thanks to Mr. Bhimsen Patil Dongarwar for information, and to Mr. Sawan Bahekar and Prof. Gopal Paliwal for the photographs.

Reference

Dhurve, M., Gautam, I., Akare, S. and Kasambe, R. (2010): Status of Sarus (*Grus antigone*) in Maharashtra. *Newsletter for Birdwatchers*. 50(6): 81-82.

Contact:

1. Balaji Nagar Layout, Gouri Nagar Road, Ganesh Nagar, Gondia 441601, Maharashtra
2. A-205, Trimurti Apartments, Near Tilak Nagar Vidyalaya, Dombivli (East) 421201, Dist. Thane, Maharashtra