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## DEMOISELLE CRANES ON AGRICULTURAL LANDS IN THE UKRAINE

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**Abstract:** In Eurasia, the western range of the demoiselle crane (*Anthropoides virgo*) includes the southeast of Ukraine. Here the species nests, forms flying and pre-migrating concentrations, and participates in migration. The number of demoiselle cranes in April-June is about 600-700 individuals (200-250 nesting pairs), and toward the end of the year the population can reach 900-1000 individuals.

Of cranes observed during 2000-2008 in the Crimea, 42.3% of pairs ( $n = 151$ ) nested on agricultural fields: 21.5% on virgin land, 16.1% on cropland, and 3.4% on fallow lands. Principal characteristics of the demoiselle crane nesting locations were wavy relief, scarce herbage, low background herbage, and proximity and accessibility of water (usually 3-5 km distant or farther), absence of danger, or minimal likelihood of disturbance. The height of herbage around the observed nests averaged 1.35 cm (range 0-75 cm,  $n = 95$ ), and the density of soil cover by herbage averaged 37.2% (range 0-90%,  $n = 97$ ). The species of grassy vegetation was not important to the cranes for nest placement. In agricultural fields, as in the natural steppe biotopes, the determining factor for them is the presence of herbage, its height and its density; most frequently from complete lack of it to low and rarefied.

The capture of insects by the demoiselle crane during the nesting period showed that the food base in the agricultural fields is no worse than on the steppe. The major threats are the expansion of agricultural areas that are not suitable for nesting (i.e., water saturated earth, perennial grasses, and crops in need of frequent cultivation); disturbance of birds by humans during mass hay harvesting, picnics, disorganized tourism (a disturbance to the daily rhythm of the birds, which disrupts social interaction between them and leads to the loss of abandoned eggs and nestlings); destruction of eggs and death of chicks from the onslaught of agricultural technology during cultivation of the fields; the collection of eggs and chicks for trade and for exchange between bird collectors; and an increase in the number of predators, especially domestic (stray dogs) and synanthropic Corvidae.

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**Key words:** *Anthropoides virgo*, demoiselle crane, population distribution, threats, Ukraine.

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