

A Feeding Program For Cranes

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There are probably as many different diets fed to cranes as there are collections with cranes. Some feeding programs are quite different from others but many have been successful in maintaining and breeding some species of cranes. Most diets consist of a mixed grain ration or a commercial grain-based pelleted ration. These diets usually vary in protein from 20% — 40% for the breeder diet. Some of these feeding programs may also be supplemented with fish or meat.

The International Crane Foundation in Baraboo, Wisconsin maintains a captive propagation program with 14 of the world's 15 species of cranes. Because of the large number of cranes in the collection and the emphasis on reproduction, a feeding program was established that is economical, easy to handle, and provides for the nutritional needs of the birds. This feeding program is based on four diets, each developed specifically for a certain time in the bird's life and for the changing seasons of a temperate climate.

The Breeder diet is a 20.5% protein ration with 2.45% calcium and .89% phosphorous. This diet is custom manufactured in a 3/16" pellet and is fed to all adult bird 3 years old and older during the breeding season. The Breeder diet is started the first of September. No fish or meat is added to the diet although the ration does contain fish and meat meal. The only supplement given during the breeding season is ground oystershell. The oystershell is available at all times in a separate container. Studies at ICF have shown that some birds eat very little oystershell while those that do, generally eat more towards the end of the laying season. In some individuals the daily oystershell consumption peaks approximately 48 hours prior to egg laying.

When the breeding season ends the birds are placed on the Maintenance diet for the fall and winter. This diet is a 19.4% protein ration with 1% calcium and .86% phosphorous. Like the Breeder diet it is custom made in a 3/16" pellet. During the cold weather of a Wisconsin winter the birds are given a small amount of whole corn daily for additional carbohydrates.

The Maintenance diet is fed year round to immature birds for their first three years.

Newly hatched chicks are started on a 23% protein ration in a 1/8" pellet. The pellet size is not difficult for the birds to eat and seems to aid in teaching them to accept food from a spoon during their first few days. The chick's growth rate must be watched closely to avoid overweight birds and subsequent leg problems such as slipped tendons on the hock joint. Generally, a crane chick will lose weight for the first days before beginning to gain weight. At about 10 days to 2 weeks of age the chick's daily weight gain will approach 20%. At this time the chicks are switched from the Starter diet to the Grower diet which is the same basic formula as the Maintenance ration. The only difference in rations is that the Grower is made in the 1/8" pellet. The 19.4% protein of the Grower ration slows down weight gain allowing the chick's legs to strengthen to accommodate the increase in weight as it grows. When about 6 weeks old the chick can eat the larger 3/16" pellet. From day 1 to 3 months the chicks are exercised daily to help control weight gain and strengthen their legs. During these exercise periods the chicks frequently eat numerous grasshoppers, crickets, and other insects. The chicks are also given access to and use of a small pool to swim in.

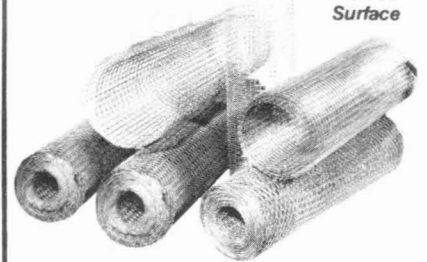
For large numbers of cranes a pelleted ration has many advantages, it is easy to store, convenient to feed, and provides the birds a well balanced nutritional diet. The use of four separate diets allows for the changing nutritional needs of the birds at different ages and during different times of the year.

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Products mentioned in text: ICF Crane Diets, custom manufactured by Mays & Kienast Company, Beaver Dam, Wisconsin.

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