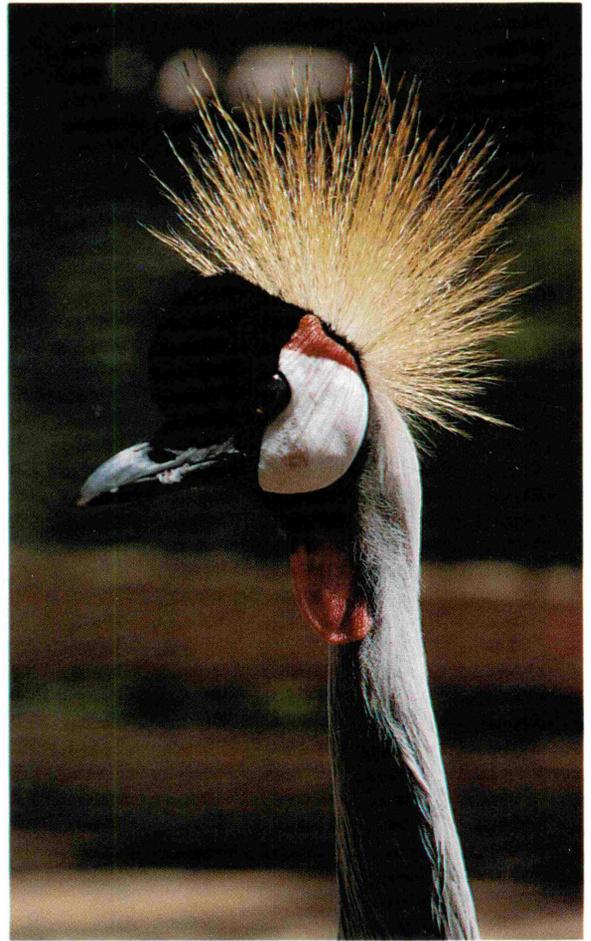




An average of two eggs are laid by Crowned Cranes. The chicks are covered with a tawny-brown down and are attentively cared for by both parents.



The Crowned Crane (*Balearica pavonina*), from Africa, becomes very bonded as pairs. Both sexes display a spectacular dance prior to the breeding season.

“Raising Crane”

by Joe Atkinson
Clements, California

The West African Crowned Crane (*Balearica pavonina*) is one of Africa's most photographed birds. It is a large bird standing nearly four feet tall. Their height, of course, comes from their long legs and long neck but their exotic look is due to their unusual head dress. When our young Crowned Cranes first arrived, our youngest daughter called them birds with the tumbleweeds on their heads. I think the crown feathers look more like a dandelion puff but tumbleweed or dandelion, they are eye catching.

The head has a large white cheek patch which is soft skin, not feathered. An orange-tipped black wattle is conspicuous under the lower beak and becomes somewhat inflated when the birds vocalize. With an orange spot above the white cheek patch and with a velvet soft black patch on the front of their head, it is easy to understand why these colorful birds are so often photographed.

Crowned Cranes spend most of their time on the ground grazing on grasses and hunting small mammals, reptiles



The parent birds become very defensive of the nest during both the incubation and rearing times. A large amount of straw was used for nesting material.

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* Position open — contact regional vice president if interested

** Indicates 2 year term has been fulfilled. If no new interested party comes forward and indicates a desire to serve, incumbent remains in position.

For information about contacting any of these member clubs,
please call that club's state coordinator.

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Mark these dates and plan to attend!

AFA Board of Directors Meeting

AFA CONVENTION 1993

August 3 - 8
(Tuesday thru Sunday)
Salt Lake City, Utah
Little America Hotel

and insects.

Young Crowned Cranes look quite different from the adults. They are light brown with white spots all over their bodies and the dandelion crown feathers are much smaller. At the first molt they change to the adult color of powder gray with black, white and brown wings. Although the youngsters resemble adults, they do not mature until their fourth year and often do not breed until their tenth year. In captivity some never breed.

Before our cranes arrived I talked to as many people as possible about flight size and breeding requirements for these large birds. Pens a 100 feet long and 50 feet wide were recommended but we had to settle for a pen 45 feet long by 30 feet wide. When the birds casually hopped over the seven foot fence we covered the top of the whole pen.

Our breeding plan was to move the cranes into a larger flight during their sixth year. This, we surmised, would give them time to mature. Imagine my surprise when they laid in their fourth year. My first clue was when the male stopped me at the door to the flight and would not let me take another step inward. Our nice, tame Crowned Cranes became the most aggressive birds imaginable.

Next there appeared a light blue egg that was in their food tray and broken. WOW! Even though the egg was broken, at least we were on the right track although ahead of schedule. As Crowned Crane clutches usually contain three eggs, I was hopeful they would lay another egg or two.

My wife suggested that the egg was broken because the birds did not have a proper nest. I was told that the cranes prefer a nest of sticks and grass so I gave them a large amount of hay. They dragged the hay all over the flight but didn't make a nest of it. Then I made a circle of wire three feet tall and filled it with sticks and hay. This worked because the wire wall kept the nest together.

Three days after the first egg was laid a second one was deposited in the new nest. Worried that it also might be broken, I considered taking

the egg for incubation. Once again the male Crowned Crane changed my plans. He allowed no one to enter the flight. OK — plan B — fine — you're on your own! Three days later the third egg was laid. Nothing changed — plan B was still in effect.

It was most interesting to watch the parents go about the business of brooding their eggs. Both male and female incubate them. During the hot summer days one or both birds would spread their wings to shade the eggs. On June 5th 1992, about 29 days after the first egg was laid, out hatched a bouncing baby crane. The next egg hatched shortly after.

At this time we didn't know if the parents took food to the young or what. I did know that baby cranes like to eat meal worms so we added the worms to the regular diet of chicken lay pellets, dog kibble, pigeon grains and game bird flight conditioner. About 18 hours after the eggs hatched, the hen answered my question about feeding by walking off the nest followed by both babies. They followed like chicks do a mother hen and pecked at everything in the flight.

Since this flight was not intended for young cranes, there were many hazards that could be dangerous to baby birds. The babies would walk from one hazard to another much to the vocal concern of the parents. Clearly the young cranes would not survive in this flight so I decided to catch them for hand raising. My wife refused to face the aggressive male so I served as a distraction. Actually, it was easier than we thought. We just waited near the gate and scooped up the babies as they walked by.

We took the babies in and made a great effort to raise them although cranes are very difficult to hand feed. The parents are constantly encouraging them to feed, showing them a variety of things to feed on. Sadly, we were not able to keep the babies interested in eating and we lost them both.

One nice thing about birds is that they pass no judgement on their keepers and they do not hold a grudge for long. We will be better prepared this coming breeding season. ●