

## Hike Report – Crane Foundation on 21 December 2025

### Leader – Libby Deysel

The long-term weather forecast for 21 Dec was not that favourable with heavy rain predicted all day but at the eleventh hour, it turned in our favour with a cloudy morning and rain in the afternoon predicted, so the hike was on!

The group met at Linga Lapa and proceeded in convoy to the Usher Conservation Centre and the plan was to hike through the Bill Barnes Crane and Oribi Nature reserve, via paths through farming areas, to the bird hide and back. This unique conservation area has created a model for environmentally responsible farming, biodiversity stewardship and conservation. It is home to resident breeding pairs of Wattled and Grey Crowned Cranes, as well as Oribi and many other bird and mammal species, and offers several trails through the Grassland Biome for visitors to enjoy.



So once the group was assembled and ready, 16 hikers (with many keen birders amongst them) set out to follow Libby into the beautiful grasslands. The path meandered down towards a wetland area which we crossed using a well-constructed and maintained boardwalk. However, from then onwards, the path was very muddy, and we had to watch our step. Due to the amount of rain the Midlands have been experiencing all summer, the wild flowers were many and varied and it was not long before the keen birders in the group were treated to a rather special experience. As the path started to climb up a ridge towards the Fordoun Spa, a pair of smallish birds were seen putting on an aerial display and swooping fast in big circles but what was so fascinating about this, was the swooshing drumming noise they were making. This puzzled us as we could not get a good look at them to identify them but Pat knew

exactly what they were – African Snipe, and apparently the sound is caused by the vibrations of their outer tail feathers. This was a very special sighting.



We continued up onto the ridge and along and here we were treated to wonderful views of the Drakenberg and the sleeping giant of Giants Castle as well as a pair of Wattled Cranes in the valley below. When we crossed the stile over the fence to Sukhoon farm, we were greeted by a warning sign – Please beware of the dog! The sign informed us of the presence of a dog named Angus who is an Anatolian Shepard dog who guards the herds against danger and predators. The sign proceeded to give us instructions on what to do if we encounter him (i.e. freeze!) I must say I was a bit nervous and resolved not to linger too far behind the group. However my fears were unfounded. We did encounter Angus when we were looking for a path round a herd of cows who were blocking the stile we needed to climb. He appeared on the ridge with his shepherd and they proceeded to herd the cows away from the stile and up the hill. Angus was big, blonde and a beautiful looking dog and as we were now not anywhere near his herd, he ignored us.

We continued on to the bird hide next to the dam and had a welcome break and sit down and enjoyed the bird viewing from the hide.



For the return journey, Libby lead us on the low road along the wetland areas and we were privileged to spot three Oribi running across the ridge.

Once back at the Usher Centre, very muddy boots were removed and packed into plastic bags to be washed later as we need to ensure that we don't contribute to the spread of foot and mouth disease. Several hikers then headed back to Linga Lapa to enjoy a well earned coffee and to reflect on the wonderful experience of being immersed in nature and this little piece of natural paradise that is found in the Midlands!





*Photo Credits – Thank you to the following for supplying photos to be used in this Hiking Report:*

*Alan, Cynthia, Margaret, Penny, Haneefah, Carolee, Tersia, Este, Libby and Rose.*

*(Report by Jay Hichens)*