



## HPH Publishing

**The Sentinels – Cranes of South Africa**

**Daniel Dolpire & David Allan**

**Photography by Daniel Dolpire**

**Text by David Allan**

In September 2013, photographer Daniel Dolpire set off on a passion-driven odyssey that would consume the next five years of his life. *The Sentinels – Cranes of South Africa* is the culmination of that epic journey.



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## About The Sentinels

It is little wonder that cranes so captivated Daniel. They are some of the most stately and spectacular of all birds. The largest of them are the tallest flying birds on the planet. Their plumage is typically striking and members of the family are acclaimed for the intricate patterning on their faces and heads. The habits of these elegant birds are no less entrancing. Their joyous and acrobatic dancing is simply breathtaking. The sounds of their resonant trumpeting calls are among the most powerful and evocative in the avian world.

Sadly, cranes are also some of the most threatened of birds. No fewer than 11 of the world's 15 species are now considered in danger of extinction. The main threats come from the wanton destruction of the expansive wetlands that these birds are so reliant on for their continued survival. But other perils intrinsic to our increasingly crowded planet also take their toll. The demise of cranes is by no means unavoidable though. They are adaptable animals capable of living alongside humans if they are afforded a measure of tolerance.

South Africa supports three crane species. The courtly Blue Crane occurs virtually nowhere else in the world and is the country's national bird. The majestic Wattled Crane is among the most endangered birds in South Africa. The ornate Grey Crowned Crane is one of the most beautiful birds on earth but, worryingly, it seems to be decreasing across its broad African range even faster than the other two species.

The Sentinels is a photographic festival celebrating the beauty and uniqueness of these remarkable birds. Daniel travelled through the heart of South Africa's 'crane country', meticulously documenting these birds in their natural habitat. Sharing with us timeless images of cranes at rest and in action as they go about their daily routines, he draws us deep into the private lives of these flagship species, even revealing intimate details of their nesting activities.

Towards the end of the project, Daniel brought in local ornithologist David Allan to ensure that the volume was underpinned by a scientifically rigorous text.

The Sentinels provides an unmatched window into the allure and wonder of South Africa's cranes and the enchanting places they call home.





## Author Biographies

After retiring from a successful business career, Daniel focused his energy and passion on becoming an accomplished nature photographer. In 2013, he was first introduced to cranes and was immediately enthralled. He undertook to photograph all three South African crane species, a task he expected to take two years. It ended up taking five. Often rising long before dawn and finishing a shoot after sunset, he captured tens of thousands of images and travelled many thousands of kilometres. The project became an endeavour of epic scale. Daniel's photographic journey with cranes became an obsession as he realised the importance of these birds as sentinels indicating the fragility and health of our natural resources, particularly wetlands and water catchments. The Sentinels provides insight into the fragile, threatened life of cranes and their habitats – a world that we need to protect and nurture. For this we owe Daniel a huge debt of gratitude. During the years spent photographing cranes, he made many new friends and admirers. In the company of farmers, conservationists and bird lovers, he also indulged his passion for great food and wine. Throughout this crane mission, Daniel's wife Di was an unfailing source of support.

David has been Curator of Birds at the Durban Natural Science Museum for 22 years. Before this he worked for nearly a decade at the FitzPatrick Institute of African Ornithology and the Avian Demography Unit, both at the University of Cape Town. His research at the former was mainly on Blue Cranes and formed the basis of his MSc degree. At the latter his main role was as field worker for the first bird atlas project. His ornithological career started with the Transvaal Division of Nature Conservation, where he worked on raptors and threatened Highveld birds. It was during this formative period that his interest in cranes began, encouraged by work on Wattled Cranes in the Steenkampsberg. The author of several books on birds of prey, David has also written a volume on geographical variation in southern African birds. He was a co-editor of The Atlas of Southern African Birds, a landmark two-volume treatise, and has a wide range of additional publications to his credit, both scientific and popular. He has been a regular contributor to the magazines Africa – Birds & Birding and African Birdlife.



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