

## A GOOD NEWS STORY



Photo: "Ltshears"

In Khichan a small village in the Jodhpur district of the Indian state of Rajasthan, situated near the town of Phalodi on the Jodhpur-Jaisalmer road, some of the villagers have established a tradition of "Bird Feeding" by offering up to 5 quintals (1 quintal = 100kg) of grain every day to the local Demoiselle Cranes, *Anthropides virgo*. As a result, Khichan village now hosts over 9000 Demoiselle Cranes during the northern hemisphere winter months (August to March). Khichan has not only become popular among bird-watchers, but is also shown as "Khichan - the Demoiselle Crane village" in "Birding World" magazine.

Each morning the Cranes fly into specially created rectangular enclosures of 50 x 60m, at the edge of the village, called "chugga ghars", where they have a feeding session of about ninety minutes. The various groups are fed one after the other. Their flight to and from the feeding session present brilliant photo-ops for the large number of tourists who flock to the village to see the Cranes. After feeding, large congregations of the birds are seen at the ponds and sand dunes to the north of Khichan.

The Cranes fly in small family flocks, in a disciplined order led by the female, followed closely by two young ones, with the male forming the rear guard. At midday, they assemble for a drink, followed by a bath, and a second feed. Acrobatic exhibitions of mutual affection between couples is also seen. At night they roost some distance from the village in agriculture fields.

Donations from the local people, and visitors, are managed by Kuraj Samrakshan Vikas Sansthan, a society established in Khichan for Crane care and protection. The Marwar Crane Foundation has also been set up recently, this organisation supports the efforts of the community whose Crane feeding actions have brought both national and international recognition to this somewhat remote village. The State Government of Rajasthan has now has now recognised Khichan as an official tourist site.



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