



Omid's absence from Iran causes concern for the extinction of the western population of Siberian cranes.

# Omid's likely midway break

## Glass half-full side of Siberian crane's absence from Miankaleh wetland

Social Desk

A specialized committee will decide the status of Roya, the mate chosen for the sole surviving western Siberian crane named Omid, announced the Director General of the Office of Wildlife Protection and Management of Iran's Department of the Environment (DoE). Omid, who has been migrating alone from Siberia to Iran for 15 years, finally found his mate, Roya, last year, IRNA reported. However, due to unsuitable conditions for the long journey to Siberia, Roya stayed behind while Omid embarked on the migration. Now, after a year of anticipation, there is still no news of Omid's return to Iran, causing concern for the extinction of the western population of Siberian cranes. The Siberian crane population is divided into three main groups: eastern, western, and central. The central

population, which migrated to India, has already become extinct. The western population used to visit Iran, but now only Omid remains as the last male crane. If Omid were to perish, the Western population would face complete extinction. However, the eastern population, with around 3,000 cranes, still migrates to China. Iran is particularly worried about the disappearance of the western flight path of Siberian cranes to the country with the potential loss of Omid. To address this concern, the DoE initiated negotiations with Belgium to bring a mate for Omid. Finally, on January 26, 2023, Omid's mate Roya arrived in Iran. Roya was carefully transported to Miankaleh wetland and placed in a specially prepared cage. This year, despite autumn passing and winter arriving, there is no sign of Omid. The DoE official stated that the delayed arrival of Omid could be attributed to less

severe weather conditions this year. "It is possible that Omid halted his journey midway, as these birds are influenced by climate factors. However, this perspective remains the optimistic side of the story," said Gholamreza Ebdali. He also mentioned Omid's history of late arrivals in Iran, citing examples such as his arrival in December 2009 and instances when he did not come at all, possibly due to a lack of extreme cold temperatures. Regarding the absence of tracking devices on Omid, Ebdali explained that the risk involved in capturing the last remaining crane prevented the installation of a tracker. Concerning Roya's condition, Ebdali assured the media that she was in good health and being kept in her cage. "If Omid fails to return, a specialized committee will decide on Roya's future placement."

# Plans to transform cultivation practices in Lake Urmia's watershed

Social Desk

Farming of three water-consuming crops, including apples, sugar beets, and alfalfa, will be discontinued in the watershed of Lake Urmia, as stated by the head of West Azarbaijan's provincial Department of the Environment (DoE). "We are determined to implement this program as soon as possible to gradually revive the lake," said Saeed Shahand, as reported by Tasnim News Agency.

cy. Regarding the current situation of Lake Urmia, Shahand explained, "In the second stage of releasing water from Kani Sib Dam and Zab Tunnel towards Lake Urmia, last week, with the completion of Silveh Dam, the water flow from this location exceeded 10 cubic meters per second, entering the Godar River and eventually being discharged into Urmia Lake." He further added, "In this manner, it is expected that 180 million cubic meters of water will enter

the lake." Shahand emphasized that the DoE's responsibility in this matter is to prevent unauthorized water withdrawals along the transmission route. "The Lake Urmia Restoration Headquarters' policy is to release water during the non-agricultural season when farmers do not rely on water collection," he stated. Addressing the decrease in rainfall in the catchment area of Lake Urmia,

Shahand noted, "This year, it was predicted that we would have good rainfall, but unfortunately, this did not materialize." Compared to last year, there has been a two percent decrease in rainfall and a 48 percent decrease compared to the long-term average. Despite these challenging conditions, the water release has taken place, and efforts are made to meet the maximum water needs of Lake Urmia. Referring to the favorable

conditions of the satellite wetlands of Lake Urmia, Shahand highlighted, "We have approximately 11 satellite and seasonal wetlands in Lake Urmia, and fortunately, last year, the maximum water requirements of these wetlands were met." "Despite the nationwide decrease in rainfall, we will continue with this process based on the decisions made this year," he added. "Our goal is to ensure that the satellite wetlands of Lake Urmia, which began filling up with water two weeks ago, remain in good condition." Shahand mentioned that most of the hardware proj-

ects aimed at saving Lake Urmia are nearing completion, and all projects will be operational by the end of the year (mid-March 2024). "Starting from next year, the headquarters' policy and plans will focus on agriculture. The provinces of East Azarbaijan, West Azarbaijan, and Kurdistan, which are within the watershed of Lake Urmia, are predominantly agriculture-oriented, greatly impacting the condition of the lake," the official explained. Shahand further stated, "Persuasion, building a culture, training farmers, and promoting the use of modern irrigation and agricultural systems, as well as engaging farmers' participation, are on the agen-

da of the national headquarters. We hope that by employing these methods, we will be able to provide more water for the lake." He clarified, "Another significant aspect is the modification of the cultivation pattern. Over the years, this pattern has shifted from planting grapes to apples and orchards with seed trees. Consequently, we have a plan to eliminate three water-consuming products, including apples, sugar beets, and alfalfa, and replace them with regionally compatible products that require less water." If realized, this will be one of the most crucial and fundamental steps toward the revival of Lake Urmia.

