

# THE ICF BUGLE

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World Center for the Study and Preservation of Cranes

## Cranes on the Farm

by Jim Harris, Deputy Director and  
Jeb Barzen, Director of Field Ecology

In 1934, it seemed cranes might vanish from the upper midwest. Whooping Cranes had disappeared decades earlier. Hunting, wetland destruction, and plowing of the prairies had decimated flocks of the once abundant Sandhill Cranes. Aldo Leopold estimated that no more than 20 breeding pairs remained in Wisconsin, confined to the largest and most remote wetlands.

Sixty years, however, have brought immense change. People learned to restore marshes and their wildlife. Cranes have learned to live among people. Today's situation for Sandhills has little resemblance to our market-hunting past. In the 1990s, the study of cranes now reveals as much about people and their patterns of land use, as it does about the cranes themselves.

Cranes now breed on smaller and smaller wetlands, some less than an acre. While cranes still nest and sleep in wetlands, they now feed extensively in croplands. Primal prairies and fire-scarred savannas have been replaced by pastures, alfalfa, corn, and soybean. When associated with wetlands, this new humanized landscape serves the ancient cranes well.

Sandhill flocks continue to grow. The Sandhill Crane Count, organized by the International Crane Foundation (ICF), has tracked this change over 20 years. In Wisconsin, volunteer counters found 3,000–6,000 birds each April in the early 1980s, but over 12,000 birds in 1995. Pairs are recolonizing wetlands long abandoned in Iowa, southeastern Minnesota, northern Illinois and Indiana.

The Sandhills' recovery provides a rare exception to the global declines in wildlife.

Their story in the midwest suggests that even imperiled cranes of Asia or Africa can regain good populations in this modern world, once people have a change of heart.

### A growing threat to crops

Crane Count results reveal that most cranes do not live in northern Wisconsin where the most wetlands occur and the least people reside. Sandhills do best where wetlands mix with farmlands: the central and southeast parts of the state.

Fortunately, cranes do not eat ripening corn in late summer and fall. They avoid walking among the dense stalks. After harvest, however, cranes glean the stubble and plowed fields for waste grain, an ideal sharing of the farmer's resource.

Yet as cranes have increased, so have complaints that cranes damage crops. In

spring, cranes can uproot newly emerged corn and eat the kernels, destroying the plant. Though Wisconsin's Department of Natural Resources (DNR) and the Animal Damage Control Office of the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) have heard these complaints, there is little they can do. Farmers are compensated for losses due deer, geese, and turkeys, all game animals, but not for non-game species like cranes. Portions of hunter license fees are set aside for this program. No comparable mechanism exists for cranes. Damage avoidance techniques that often work for geese have failed with cranes.

The result has been growing frustration among farmers. Sandhills delight crane lovers but in some areas, crop losses already have reached unacceptable proportions. A solution is crucial. Throughout the world,



Sixty years ago, Sandhill Cranes had almost disappeared from the upper midwest. In recent decades, as the Sandhill population has recovered, the cranes have learned to feed on farmlands. Photo by Carl R. Sams II.



## Cranes on the Farm

*Continued from page 1*

the successful crane populations have thrived because they utilize farmlands in place of lost grasslands. But in Wisconsin farming communities, and many other regions, cranes may lose their welcome if crop damage continues uncontrolled.

### A hunting season for Wisconsin cranes?

Hunting is being offered as a solution for the crane problem—proponents urge that if a growing population of cranes has caused the problem, then a lowered population should reduce it. To open a hunting season on cranes in Wisconsin, however, would be highly controversial. Sporting groups, landowners, and bird watchers are all key constituencies for cranes. In the past, these groups have worked well together to reduce long-term losses of wetlands, a major threat to wildlife. But the issue of hunting may force a highly divisive debate.

Current research, moreover, indicates that hunting will not provide an acceptable solution to crop losses. Most crane damage occurs in spring. Sandhills have learned to follow corn rows and use the young seedlings to guide them to the kernels. Non-breeding flocks of cranes can destroy entire fields. While cranes sometimes damage other crops, corn is most at risk. For any one field, corn seedlings generally are vulnerable for a two week period beginning slightly before germination.

An autumn hunt is poorly suited to change this crane behavior. Cranes will not leave croplands in May because someone hunts them in October, unless crane numbers are greatly reduced. Now that cranes have learned to forage on farms, crop

damage might not subside in proportion to declining cranes. Do we want only half or a quarter as many cranes in Wisconsin as now?

The public may not accept the alternative: a spring hunt would kill paired cranes incubating eggs or leading downy chicks. Spring hunting would also disrupt other species nesting in the same wetlands.

Crane hunting in Wisconsin may have its merits, as a sport and sustainable harvest. But hunting should be debated as an entirely separate issue from crop damage. Other, much more promising responses to crop damage deserve first priority.

### ICF studies cranes at Briggsville

Those who love cranes owe farmers a special thanks. In the past, publicly owned marshlands allowed midwestern Sandhills to recover. Now, most cranes live on private lands; farmers fulfill a key role in supporting this and other wildlife species. The public should be quick to assist with solving the crane damage problem.

In response to this urgent need, ICF has begun a three-year study of movements and foraging behavior for cranes in farm areas. Our work focuses on a dense crane population near Briggsville, 20 miles from ICF. Our project attempts to combine ICF expertise on cranes with farmers' close knowledge of local birds and the land.

Crop damage has developed as crane numbers have grown, but does not happen randomly. Local movements of cranes during their breeding period (when young corn is vulnerable), and their choices of where to feed and when, must be understood as we devise ways to change these behaviors. Simply moving cranes from one farmer's land to another's is not a solution.

Cranes have a distinctive social structure. Breeding pairs defend territories consisting of both wetlands and uplands. Cranes too young to breed, or unable to claim a territory in crane-crowded Briggsville, gather in flocks that feed on lands not defended by breeding pairs. These breeding and non-breeding components of the crane population both cause crop damage, but require different strategies for control.

Since 1989, ICF has been color banding Briggsville cranes. We have marked birds on 20 territories, plus many subadults in the non-breeding flocks. Watching banded cranes reveals the size of territories, and how territory size and local movements change through the growing season.

### A partnership with farmers

More than 30 farmers have granted us access to their land to observe, catch, and band birds. Moreover, our discussions with farmers have identified promising techniques for controlling crop damage. For example, farmers have helped us understand what fields are most vulnerable to cranes. Cranes most easily extract seed corn from sandy or wet soils. Thus, cranes do not necessarily damage croplands closest to their wetland roosts. Furthermore, flocks avoid many fields defended by pairs.

This spring, we worked on five farms to observe fields prone to damage, and to experiment with repellents (another idea from local farmers). Chemicals already licensed for farm use—fungicides, for example—may be distasteful to cranes. During these preliminary tests, cranes have not damaged our treated fields, but our sample size is so small that luck may explain our result. This year's experience, however, allows us to design larger tests next year. We will also work with USDA to test repellents on captive Sandhill Cranes. We need repellents that will not harm cranes or other species.

Our experience in trapping cranes suggests how to reduce crop damage due to foraging by breeding pairs. By regularly placing small piles of shelled corn within a breeding territory, we can induce crane pairs to visit and eat the bait immediately after leaving the roost each morning. Such full breakfasts leave little appetite for the rest of the morning. We hope this same technique will divert crane pairs during the crucial corn seedling period.

It has been especially rewarding to work with farmers actively helping wildlife on their land. Tom Summers and Arthur Anacker both plant corn near the wetland edges of their land for deer. Their



Wisconsin's Sandhill Cranes are most abundant where wetlands intermingle with croplands. In fall, cranes feed on corn only after the harvest. In spring, however, cranes have learned to uproot corn seedlings and eat the seeds. Considerable damage occurs in some areas. Photo by Jim Harris.



stewardship has provided us valuable insight into cranes as well. Mr. Anacker's corn, treated with our repellent, was almost entirely destroyed during the weeks after planting; but hundreds of tracks and holes made by raccoons, compared to just a few crane signs, revealed the culprit. Mr. Summers' treated fields were untouched.

Bill Lafleur is frequently out photographing wildlife on his land. He has invited ICF researchers to watch feeding cranes from his deerblind, and even arrives there ahead of us for a morning's watch. One of his fields was half destroyed by cranes. Another 40 acres just north of Briggsville—not far from one of our treated fields—was so badly damaged the farmer had to replant.

As word of our work spreads, more people add their own crane news. The Cleary brothers showed us a crane nest in their hayfield, far from water. They had mown carefully around so that the cranes could complete their incubation. An upland nest site is rare in Wisconsin, probably indicating that more cranes are trying to breed than can find suitable wetlands for nests.

Our research gathers the detailed knowledge held within this farming community. But we also will examine the crane situation across all Wisconsin, using Crane Count data, crop damage reports, wetland maps, aerial photos showing land use, soil maps, and crop data. The state-wide analysis will place Briggsville within a broader context and help develop predictions of where crop problems will become most severe or will change as crane populations grow or farming practices evolve.

We have gained much from our work with people near Briggsville. While no one can guarantee solutions to the crop damage, we feel a strong responsibility to address a problem increasingly serious for those whose living depends on farming. We hope all who care about cranes will support the search for a secure and benign niche for cranes on the farm. ■

*ICF's study is conducted by Ms. Su Liying, who is working for a Ph.D in Zoology at the University of Wisconsin. Funds have come from ICF members, the Wisconsin Society for Ornithology, and the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service. The USDA and Wisconsin DNR are providing in-kind support, including wetland maps and crop damage data. More funds are urgently needed. We hope our members will help by using the attached gift envelope.*



Photo by Jim Harris

## **Crane Ambassadors Working for the Future of Cranes**

By Marshal Case, Deputy Director

Crane Ambassadors, already 5532 strong, are part of a new program to encourage more young people to be involved in crane activities both in Wisconsin and in many corners of the five continents where cranes live in the wild.

"As an ambassador, I understand that I play an important role in protecting the environment on which both wildlife and people depend." This is the pledge found on the membership card now in the hands of the first participants. Phase one of the new education program encourages students, who visit ICF with an organized school group, to share the experience through a crane ambassador brochure with their family and friends. Hopefully, Crane Ambassadors will return to Baraboo with family members and friends and share the wonderful experience.

Development of an "Educators Activity Book About Cranes" is the most important next step in order to reach students too far from Baraboo to participate in an organized school trip to ICF. This publication will be created from existing information as well as from new materials tied to professional educators who are ready to help—on a volunteer basis. For example, Larry Johnson—master storyteller and teacher in the Minneapolis public school system—will write an interactive chapter using crane stories he has gathered over the years. And, Sidney Wildesmith—master artist from Sante Fe—will create an exciting chapter on cranes and art. Zuni colleagues are providing information on the Zuni Sandhill Crane Clan and we are searching for more information on crane clans connected to Native American tribes and customs. This information will be pulled together in a chapter connected to art, science and language as it relates to Native Americans. When the publication is complete, it will be used as our core material for teacher staff development in targeted areas around Wisconsin, in Minneapolis, and in Chicago. Eventually, we hope to extend our reach and include other crane specific areas.

Once teachers are trained in use of the materials in the educators activity book, selected individuals will be designated coordinators of additional workshops in their communities. Children will receive a Crane Ambassador membership card, an interactive information pamphlet about cranes to take home and share with family members, and copy-me materials from the educators activity manual. Each participating classroom will be able to adopt-a-crane. This "club" approach will personalize ICF and should result in encouraging more participation by more young people in many more locations.

International connections will follow as we develop program components to include extension of art exchanges (BUGLE spring 1996), video exchanges, internet connections, and more teacher exchanges.

Crane Ambassadors—working for cranes, wildlife, the environment, and positive international relationships. ■



## Russian Egg Lift Up, Up and Away

By Debbie Carley, Bugle Co-Editor  
and Claire Mirande, Conservation Coordinator

It was quite a journey for the 15 endangered Red-crowned and White-naped Crane eggs. Seven aircraft take-offs and landings, nine hours overnight on the Trans-Siberian railroad, and a long jeep ride before they arrived at their destination. They traveled together in a padded blue box, along with their boarding pass labeled simply, "Mr. Box/Egg." At a scheduled stop in Magadan, in a remote part of Russia, the plane landed on a desolate and very bumpy air strip. Flight attendants provided extra seatbelts to secure Mr. Box. In the end, all 15 eggs arrived—intact and alive.

The egg lift, as it is called, is part of a three-year-old program organized by ICF to bolster the endangered Red-crowned and White-naped Crane populations in Asia. It's a collaborative effort involving a host of zoos and colleagues in both the United States and Russia, all working together on a common goal.

The problem is this. High quality, long-term studies of cranes and storks have been conducted at Khinganski Nature Reserve in Siberia by Russian research scientists, Vladimir and Rimma Andronov. They have discovered that large tracts of habitat near people are not being used by the cranes. It appears that the birds don't tolerate disturbance in nesting areas since they were hunted earlier this century. The challenge lies in getting the birds to adapt to the presence of people, and to utilize the available habitat.

The goal is to increase the carrying capacity of the habitat. So, researchers are attempting to modify the behavior of the wild crane population by releasing birds that are more tolerant of people. Russian scientists are releasing Red-crowned and White-naped Cranes that have been

hand-raised and therefore are acclimated to people. Already, some of these birds have joined the wild birds and paired with them. However, even if they simply settle in unused territory, their presence may encourage cranes from the wild flock to nest there as well.

The procedure for hand-raising the birds is similar to the one used at ICF but chicks grow up near an immense and wild wetland. Rimma Andronov cares for and rears the young chicks while rearing her two young boys. Working with a nearly non-existent budget, and minimal facilities, the Andronovs and their colleagues have supported the project with their life energy, carried it a considerable distance, and raised a number of birds for release.

In the fall, the young birds are introduced to the wild flock. The food at the feeding stations is decreased in hopes that the birds will leave with the migrating birds. Cranes that don't leave are chased away but most do not migrate until their second year. These birds are overwintered indoors in town nearby and introduced to the wild flock again the next spring.

Among cranes, younger birds that are not as strong or not yet established are normally unable to secure territories in the prime areas. Khinganski researchers hope these released birds will inhabit unused areas upon their return in the spring. The movement of the cranes will be monitored through radio tracking to determine local movements, wintering sites and to which areas they return in the spring. The tracking capabilities will also help these scientists observe movements of the released birds and their interaction with wild birds.

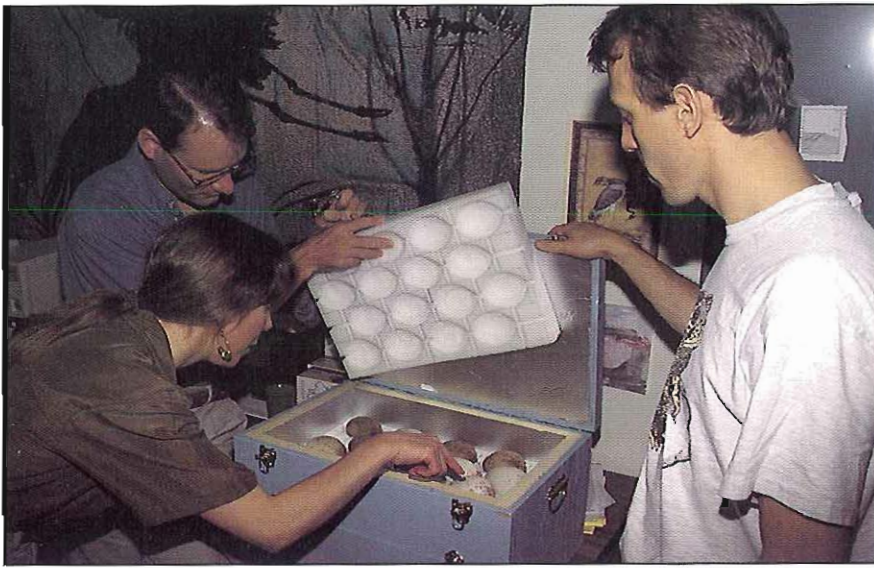
The program utilizes eggs that are surplus to the breeding program in North America—eggs from pairs that are already well represented in the Species Survival Plan. It offers an opportunity for zoos, where the captive birds are bred, to have direct involvement in field work while using eggs that would not otherwise be allowed to mature.

The release project started in Russia in 1985 when chicks were rescued from grass fires. Since 1994, U.S. zoos have collaborated to send eggs and provide critical funds. Eggs have been donated by the National Aviary in Pittsburgh, Memphis Zoo, Wildlife Conservation Park, Franklin Park Zoo, Cincinnati Zoo and ICF.

To encourage zoos with limited budgets to participate in field conservation, a small grants program was pioneered. Each zoo covers the cost of hand-carrying eggs to ICF and "sponsors" its egg. Collectively, these funds add up and can go a long way at Khinganski. These funds have enabled the staff to rear chicks, provide health care, and build







winter facilities. Additional funds have been provided by Disney Foundation Conservation Excellence Fund for radio tracking and Toresella Wines for aerial surveys. The Woodland Park Zoo has provided local transport and incubators during layovers in Seattle, and the American Association of Zoo Keepers of Memphis, Columbus Zoological Society and Sunset Zoo have provided additional support.

The benefits of the program have been many fold. All parties are gaining from reciprocal visits by Russian and U.S. colleagues that have allowed for exchanges of techniques and ideas. Quality information is resulting from long-term field studies in Russia, where the Ardronovs further develop tested techniques. This years visit by veterinarian Dr. Don Neiffer helped address high mortality in 1995 so that there were minimal problems this year.

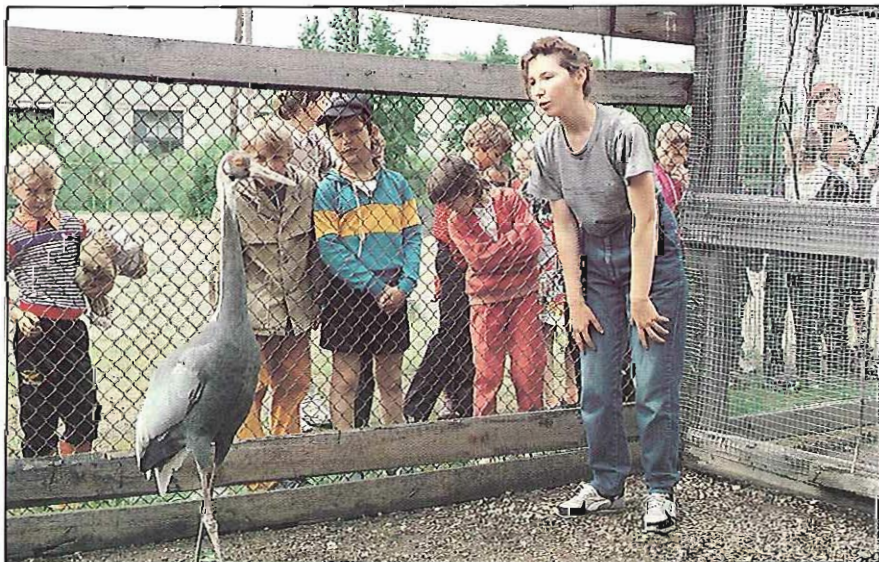
The program will continue next year with another egg lift. The National Aviary will assume the primary role in coordinating the program. In addition, next year two specialists from Russia will come to the United States to study veterinary procedures for cranes. But perhaps one of the most valuable benefits of this collaborative endeavor is the opportunity to explore different approaches to releasing birds and to exchange techniques and information. ■

**Far Left:** Thirteen-year-old Svetlana cares for Red-crowned and White-naped Crane chicks beside a wetland at Khinganski Nature Reserve. Photo by Jim Harris.



**Top:** Jim Bonner and Dr. Don Neiffer of the National Aviary in Pittsburgh with ICF's Claire Mirande examine the eggs one last time before Bonner and Neiffer depart with the eggs for Russia. ICF organized efforts of nine U.S. zoos to deliver eggs from American captive flocks to Khinganski, where the chicks are being reared for an experimental release program. Photo by Debbie Carley.

**Middle:** Large tracts of available habitat in Khinganski Nature Reserve are unused by cranes due to human disturbance. Researchers hope to encourage wild flocks to utilize the habitat by introducing cranes that are acclimated to people. Photo by Jim Harris.



**Bottom:** Rimma Andronov explains the behavior of this White-naped Crane to children living near the nature reserve. Khinganski maintains captive cranes at its headquarters in the town of Akhara where some of the release birds overwinter. Photo by Jim Harris.





Ms. Wang Yongchen, a senior broadcaster at China National Radio, participated in ICF programs and interviewed staff during June. Her visit was arranged through the Institute of International Education which administers the annual program for Chinese women. This year's focus is environment and community. Photo by Su Liying.

## Contributions

Received April through June, 1996



**Lufthansa**  
ICF's Official Airline

**Grants & Awards:** Mr. & Mrs. Christopher Addison; Akan Board of Education; Walter Alexander Foundation, Inc.; American Association of Zoological Parks & Aquarium; Amoco Foundation, Inc.; George Archibald; Baraboo Junior High School; Myrtle C. Baskerville; Judith C. Bautch; Helen M. Best; Helen V. Brach Foundation; Michael Bress; Mary Griggs Burke; Emily Campbell; Elvira & Pat Cardin; Gertrude Carter; Glenda Cartwright; Chapman Foundation; Catherine Cleary; Dr. & Mrs. Joseph B. Conolly, Jr.; Gale L. Davis; John G. Day; Department of Public Instruction; Thomas E. Donnelley, II; Alma Dolen Trust; Phil & Lynne Effinger; Evjue Foundation, Inc.; Franklin Park Zoo; Lemuel A. Fraser; Chuck & Lynne Gibbons; Mr. & Mrs. Theodore Griggs; Nina B. Griswold; Brian Guthman; H.J. Hagge Foundation, Inc.; Ralph & Peggy Hudson; Institute of International Education; Institute of Museum Services; Ken & May Lee Jacobs; Mr. & Mrs. Reinhardt H. Jahn; Betsy & Jim Johnson; Mr. & Mrs. Samuel C. Johnson; Catherine P. Jordan; Kiwanis Club of Wisconsin Dells; Theodora H. Kubly; Lands End, Inc.; Jeffrey Larson; Nora Himel Lincoln; Albert Lindeke, Jr.; Herbert J. Louis, M.D.; Susan Lunsford; John D. & Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation; Mr. & Mrs. Richard Magnuson; Mrs. John F. Markham; Mrs. Robert E. Matteson; Ronald Mattox; Mr. & Mrs. Oscar G. Mayer; Julia Meech; Mekong River Commission; Memphis Zoo American Association of Zoo Keepers Chapter; Memphis Zoological Society; Menasha Corporation Foundation; Ann S. Merritt; Carl Miller; Peter & Julie Miller; Miller Brewing Co.; Kuniyazu & Yulia Momose; Moore, Costello & Hart, P.L.L.P.; Mujako Murase; National Aviary; National Cooperative Refinery Association; Dr. & Mrs. E.J. Nordby; Oshkosh Area School

District; Betty Perego; Marvin Pertzik; Pat Pierce; Ellen & Robert Rasch; Rawhide Boys Ranch; Sand County Foundation; Teruo Sato; Kris Schilling; School District of West Salem; Bick & Russ Simpson; Emily Smith; Mary Sonnack; Edmund A. Stanley, Jr.; Eleanor Sullivan; R. Roberta Throne; Turner Foundation, Inc.; U.S. Fish & Wildlife; U.S. Department of State; Webb High School; Mr. & Mrs. William G. Wigton; Wild Bird Society of Japan; Windway Capital Corporation.

**Patron:** Anonymous; Derser Family Foundation; Pat & Dave Hurd Foundation; The George Kress Foundation; Meadowood Foundation; Judy & Michael Steinhardt Foundation; Elizabeth Towell.

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The **ICF Bugle** is the quarterly newsletter for members of the International Crane Foundation (ICF). Articles review ICF programs as well as crane research around the world.

**Co-Founders:** George Archibald  
Ron Sauey  
**Editors:** Debbie Carley  
Marshal Case

ICF offers memberships at the following annual rates:

<b>Student or Senior Citizen</b>	<b>\$20</b>		
<b>Individual</b>	<b>\$25</b>	<b>Foreign</b>	<b>\$30</b>
<b>Family</b>	<b>\$35</b>	<b>Sponsor</b>	<b>\$500</b>
<b>Associate</b>	<b>\$100</b>	<b>Patron</b>	<b>\$1,000</b>



# A Little Money Can Go A Long Way

By Gordon Dietzman,  
Education Coordinator

One morning a year ago last June, I found two letters in my mailbox. The first, from a foreign colleague, asked ICF to underwrite a country-wide survey of Grey Crowned Cranes in Kenya. The second, from a school class, asked the perennial question, "What can we do to save cranes?" It was this fortuitous simultaneous arrival of two letters, one asking for help and the other wanting to help, that led to the creation of the Small Grants Conservation Program (SGCP).

ICF international programs are often conducted in countries where local conservation projects are run on financial shoestrings and where small sums of money can have significant impacts. The SGCP program will pair small donors, such as school classes, with foreign biologists and educators who need funding for conservation projects.

Grant proposals are limited to no more than \$400 with an annual application deadline of August 1. Projects are selected by ICF staff based on value and cost. Groups or individuals interested in sponsoring one of these projects can contact ICF to receive a listing of available projects. Both ICF and sponsors receive a final report from the grant recipient. All projects must be completed by April 15 of the following year, so schools supporting one of these projects can receive final reports before the summer recess.

As a condition of the grant, each grant recipient will conduct an educational program in the project area. This may take the form of employing a college student as a project assistant, making presentations in local schools, or conducting an art exchange with a U.S. school.

For this program to live up to its potential however, we need additional funds that augment the revolving account, started with a gift provided in memory of Patty Kovar by her cousins. You can contribute to the fund by using the envelope enclosed in this issue. Since these account funds are distributed to grant recipients and then reimbursed by sponsors, your gift will be used over and over again. Call or write ICF to find out more about the Small Grants Conservation Program and how you can play a role. ■

## Introduce a Friend to ICF

Membership support and involvement is the backbone of ICF. Approximately 45% of our operational support comes from memberships, tour income, and sales in the gift shop. We hope you will visit ICF this year with a friend. You can also request ICF to send information to your friends by filling out the back of your membership renewal envelope.

Our future growth depends on expanding our support and membership. Remember, members and special category guests visit ICF free. ■

### ANNOUNCING:

# ICF's Annual Meeting

## Saturday, September 21, 1996

ICF members and their guests are invited to attend the annual meeting and dinner.

Reservations are required, so please use the form provided below.

Be sure to respond by September 17, since space is limited.

### SCHEDULE

10:00 a.m., 1:00 & 3:00 p.m. Regular tours.

**SPECIAL EVENTS** for members & guests:

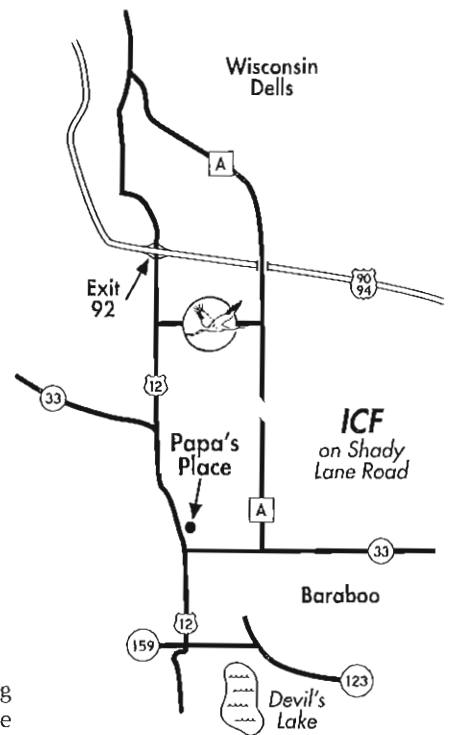
• 1:00–4:30 p.m.: **The Japanese Crane**, photos by Teruo Sato. Lower level of Ron Sauey Memorial Library for Bird Conservation.

• 1:30 p.m.: **Crane City Tour**—a rare opportunity to see ICF's breeding facility. Or, **Restoration Tour**—see ICF's prairie, oak savanna, and wetland restorations.

• 3:30 p.m.: Jim Lewis, National Whooping Crane Coordinator will give a status report on Whooping Cranes—meet at the **Amoco Whooping Crane Exhibit**.

• 5:30 p.m.: **Hospitality Hour** (cash bar) at Papa's Place.

• 6:30 p.m.: **Annual Meeting Program** at Papa's Place starts with dinner, followed by a slide presentation by George Archibald, focusing on highlights of 1996, featuring cooperative efforts on behalf of Whooping Crane recovery.



Please clip or copy, and mail to: ICF, P.O. Box 447, Baraboo, WI 53913-0447.

Reservation deadline—September 17

\_\_\_\_ Please make dinner/program reservations for \_\_\_\_ people.  
My check for \$18.00 each is enclosed.

\_\_\_\_ This will be my first time attending an ICF annual meeting.

\_\_\_\_ I cannot attend the meeting, but please send me a copy of the Annual Report.

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_



# A Blueprint for Crane Conservation

By Curt Meine  
Crane Action Plan Coordinator

What do crane conservationists do? This is always a hard question to answer, since crane conservation is not one thing, but many things, in many places, involving many people. In just the last year, for example, crane conservationists have: flown over remote bogs in northwestern Russia in search of Siberian Crane breeding sites; organized an international conference to discuss development plans for the Mekong River watershed; published the first collection of scientific papers on Africa's cranes and wetlands; and raised Whooping Cranes for release to the wild in Florida. Among other things!

Of course, the needs and opportunities for action always outstrip the available time, money, and personnel. Deciding how to use these limited resources to maximum effect is itself a constant challenge. To help assess the state of the cranes and determine conservation priorities, ICF has supported preparation of a new publication *Cranes: Status Survey and Conservation Action Plan* (for short, the Crane Action Plan, or CAP). The CAP has been three years in the making. It represents the first comprehensive summary of the conservation status and needs of the cranes.

The CAP has been developed under the auspices of the Species Survival Commission of the World Conservation Union (IUCN), and will be published by the IUCN as the latest in a series of conservation action plans. The director general of the IUCN describes the action plans as "practical guides to action to safeguard components of the world's biological diversity."



The Sarus Crane is one of four crane species that may be added to the IUCN Red List of Threatened Animals. In India, the fate of the Sarus Crane depends in part upon maintaining the water quality in small wetlands. Photo by Belinda Wright.

The IUCN action plans are prepared by various "specialist groups." The Crane Specialist Group, currently led by ICF director George Archibald, includes about 70 members. They, along with ICF staff and dozens of others, contributed to the CAP by drafting and reviewing text, providing new data, and recommending conservation actions. The final product provides a blueprint for crane conservation activities around the world over the next decade.

The CAP is divided into three sections. Section 1 provides a basic overview of the conservation biology of cranes. Section 2 includes up-to-date accounts for each of the fifteen crane species. Building on these accounts, Section 3 provides, for the family as a whole and for nine "crane regions" around the world, a list of high priority conservation actions.

The CAP has already yielded substantial dividends. For example, the conservation status of the cranes is being revised based on new information that has been gathered for the CAP. The CAP has been

used at international meetings to define priorities for the East Asian cranes and for the Central and Western populations of Siberian Cranes. The CAP has contributed to other initiatives, ranging from the establishment of new protected areas in Ukraine to the production of improved species range maps.

The state of the cranes and their habitats remains precarious. Their fate will be determined by the daily actions and long-term aspirations of people on five continents, under widely varied circumstances. The Crane Action Plan, through its combination of basic biological information, species status reports, and coordinated recommendations, provides direction in the endeavor to ensure that the cranes will find safe passage into and through the 21st century. ■

*For information on receiving a copy of the Crane Action Plan, contact ICF or the IUCN Species Survival Commission, c/o Chicago Zoological Society, 3300 S. Golf Rd., Brookfield, IL, USA, 60513.*

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