



# THE ICF BUGLE

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World Center for the Study and Preservation of Cranes

## Europeans and Asians Meet Near Eurasian Cranes

by Sergei Smirenski

For millions of years the calls of Eurasian Cranes (*Grus grus*), the Old World's ecological counterpart to the New World's Sandhills, welcomed spring coming across the enormous territory of Eurasia, from Iberia to east Siberia. In winter, great flocks of cranes gathered on lowlands from Mediterranean to South China Seas. However, during the 19th century the cranes disappeared as breeding residents from Great Britain, France, Spain, and Italy: human prosperity spelled the demise of wetlands and wildlife. Fortunately, vast regions of eastern Europe and Asia remained a wild retreat for both the Eurasian Crane and their grassland counterpart, the Demoiselle Crane.

Last October, when about 20,000 Eurasian Cranes gathered at their main staging area near Rugen Island in northern Germany, 180 crane researchers and conservationists met in Stralsund for the third major meeting of the European Working Group on Cranes. Twenty-nine specialists arrived from Russia, Ukraine, Byelorussia, Latvia, Estonia, China, Iran, India, and the USA through the initiative of Prof. Hartwig Prange and generous support of Lufthansa—the official carrier of the International Crane Foundation. The participants underlined the necessity of coordination of the activities of all people and organizations who love cranes.

Although people have contributed to cranes' decline in certain areas, we have undoubtedly and quite unintentionally helped the Eurasian Cranes. Like Sandhills, Eurasians forage in upland habitats. Agricultural fields near wetlands, where crane pairs breed and where large flocks roost, often provide excellent feeding areas. Especially on the wintering grounds, gleanings from agricultural areas undoubtedly can support many more Eurasian Cranes than pristine wetlands and grasslands might have supported in former times. Eurasian Cranes are indeed common throughout much of the remainder of their wide range. Today, the continent is home to perhaps a quarter of a million Eurasian Cranes, almost half the population of Sandhills in North America.

The slow recovery of the Eurasian Crane in western Europe is a response to protection from hunting and from other forms of disturbance. In Germany, small dams were constructed to create wetland breeding habitat for cranes. In Great Britain, guards placed near the wetlands protected the cranes from "tickers" (bird watchers) and photographers in a nation where ticking is a rage. And cranes

started nesting in marginal wetlands which they would not have been expected to use in former times of greater disturbance from man. And after being absent since the 19th century, cranes recolonized Great Britain, France, Hungary and the Czech Republic as breeding residents.

Likewise on the wintering grounds, the numbers of cranes escalated. Sixteen years ago in Spain, the first systematic surveys located approximately



The Eurasian Crane and the great variety of situations in which it lives, are a reflection of the relationship between humanity and wildlife. The challenge is to achieve a balance whereby both cranes and agriculture prosper. Photo by Sture Traneving.

2,700 cranes. Today, partially because of more thorough surveys, more than 60,000 have been located. And in Israel, where cranes were primarily migrants en route to northeast Africa, the restoration of the Hula Wetland in the northeast, and the leftover peanuts on harvested fields nearby, have provided a sanctuary for cranes. Ten years ago, approximately 1,000 cranes wintered in Israel. Today there are more than 10,000.

The recent political and economic changes in eastern Europe and throughout much of the former USSR had various and contradictory consequences for wildlife. Agriculture is in decline and many former crop fields lie fallow and rapidly covered by weeds and bushes. Whereas more than 10,000 cranes once gathered in August and September on agricultural fields near Kargopol (north-east of St. Petersburg, Russia), numbers have recently dropped into the low thousands. Lack of food seems to be "pushing" the cranes south earlier thus causing early arrival on stopover resting areas in western Europe during recent years. Other former agricultural fields have flooded as a result of the collapse of drainage systems, thus creating new nesting areas for cranes.

Germany represents this contrast between what is happening to Eurasian

Cranes in the developed and the developing nations. In the former West Germany, wetlands have been drained, pesticides heavily applied to crops, and the cranes declined to a low of 17 pairs in 1972. A massive education program and productive habitat conservation and restoration efforts resulted in an increase to 65 pairs in 1989. In contrast, in the former East Germany, economic growth was much less; cranes and their breeding habitats and stopovers received strict governmental protection. A plethora of wetlands supported a flourishing population of approximately 1835 breeding pairs in 1993. During the last five years, however, the forces of modernization have accelerated in eastern Germany, and many wetlands are threatened.

Surprisingly, the cranes have started creating problems for people. Large flocks of nonbreeding cranes near breeding areas, and migrant flocks in Sweden, France, Spain, India, and Iran cause damage to agriculture. There is a growing threat of collisions of cranes with low-flying planes along migratory routes.

Fortunately, few attempts have been made so far to solve these problems by reducing the number of cranes. In many countries, cranes are protected by law. In Scandinavia, Russia, India and some

other countries, farmers and other people will not persecute cranes, due to ancient cultural traditions, even when the birds damage crops. This is a growing problem, not only for numerous Eurasian, Demoiselle and Sandhill Cranes, but locally even for endangered species of cranes.

The good news is that humans are coming up with peaceful and creative ways to resolve the conflict. In Meklenburg land of Germany, over \$285,000 US were paid in 1995 to farmers to compensate for crop damage. In Spain, the Government of Aragon compensates farmers who suffer losses due to cranes. Restoration of roosting sites, establishment of feeding stations, and planting of lure crops that attract cranes away from main concentrations have helped to minimize damage. And in Israel, migration monitoring of the cranes, storks, pelicans and raptors has helped drastically to minimize bird strikes with military aircraft.

The European Working Group on Cranes is perhaps the most active and effective of the regional working groups scattered through the world. By working together, members have achieved remarkable results, the basis for strong conservation of cranes in Europe.

Formerly, the Working Group on Cranes of the USSR was very successful. However, the collapse of the Soviet Union broke cultural, scientific and other relations among the new independent states; in addition, economic difficulties have frozen activity on crane research and protection over the vast territory of former USSR. Participants at the European Workshop from Russia, Ukraine, and Byelorussia informally discussed how to restore cooperation among crane researchers and lovers along the flyways of Eurasian Cranes. They suggested initiation of a Crane Newsletter and joint activities such as an international census of Eurasian Cranes and a program for an international children art contest "Crane, Bird of Peace" that has been held annually since 1995 by the Amur Branch of Socio-ecological Union (Bugle Volume 22, No. 2 May, 1996). Lack of funds is the chief obstacle to these ideas. ■



Migration routes of the main Eurasian Crane populations. Only in Europe and parts of European Russia have the populations been reliably surveyed and monitored on a regular basis. Trends in most populations are poorly understood. The total population is probably stable to increasing, with declines in some local populations (especially in the central and eastern portions of the range.) Map by Milford Muskett.



Students from Neenah Creek Elementary School use radio telemetry equipment to locate a Sandhill Crane that ICF has fitted with a radio transmitter. Students living in the Briggsville area were able to participate in ICF's studies of crane movements and use of farmlands. ICF's partnership with schools enriched science learning for the students, and strengthened ICF ties to local communities. Photo by Jim Harris.

## Local Schools Join ICF Crane Study

by Jim Harris, Deputy Director

During the past two years, five schools have joined ICF's research project centered on farmlands around Briggsville, Wisconsin. Most special for the schools has been the chance to participate in a real research project of practical importance to the students' own families and neighbors. ICF scientists are studying how and why Sandhill Cranes damage crops, and exploring solutions to the problem (see the August 1996 ICF Bugle).

Moved by the beauty of cranes, the students have wanted to share their discoveries with their communities and to help safeguard a place for cranes on the farm. Last November, seven students from Neenah Creek Elementary School gave a demonstration, "Calling All Cranes." The Wisconsin Dells School Board was their audience, with about 100 people attending the school board meeting. The students also presented their skit to 250 students from two other schools.

The students wrote their own script, and used ICF research equipment to demonstrate how to study cranes.

*Cody: One day we saw cranes dancing in the field. It was so neat watching them. They were so graceful. Would you like a demonstration? [Katrina dances!]*

*Abby Rose: Binoculars are also very helpful when the cranes are visible. Sometimes you can't see the cranes, maybe*

*trees or a hill may be blocking the view of cranes.*

*Randy: That's why radio tracking is so cool! You can find out where the cranes are hiding—even when you can't see them!*

*Katrina: Let's tell them how we went about doing this at Neenah Creek School.*

Through this project, students have learned how science can serve people, and how conservationists seek solutions to resource conflicts that benefit both farmers and wildlife. Many of the students live on farms, and almost all have cranes near their homes. For each school, ICF staff organized field trips to allow students to observe cranes in farm areas, including birds color banded by ICF, and to try out radio telemetry equipment. Back at school, students used some of ICF's actual radio data to plot locations of cranes on habitat maps of the Briggsville study area.

While students enjoyed handling radio receivers and antennae, our emphasis was not on "high-tech" equipment but on how scientists can answer difficult questions. Crane behavior is complex. It is not so easy to discover why just a few fields, out of many, are badly damaged when the corn sprouts in spring.

Neenah Creek Elementary School, located directly beside the cranes at Briggsville Marsh, carried their involvement far beyond our initial plans. ICF placed radios on two cranes living immediately beside the school. In fall, students used ICF's radio receiver to plot crane locations daily, documenting movements and preferred habitats for "their" birds.

Teachers Sue Johnson and Chris Nett reported that eager students wanted to stay after school, or come before school, to extend the research.

The students found multiple ways to act upon their knowledge and excitement about the cranes. The whole school participated in the ICF-sponsored students' crane art exhibit, with six art pieces going to Russia. The Science Club produced the crane skit, and arranged a bulletin board display for all school visitors. Chris and Sue have organized pen pal exchanges with schools in Russia and Sweden, so that the students are learning of the international nature of wildlife-farmlands issues.

For ICF, our work with the schools has been a way to give something back to the communities where we work. Conservation challenges cannot be solved among scientists and government officials alone. The people living among cranes have the central role in devising what future the cranes will have.

Our school project strengthened communication between ICF and the Briggsville community. We benefit from listening and responding to Cody and Randy and Katrina individually, because we cannot care for the cranes effectively unless we care for the people. This issue challenges ICF with our global mission and far scattered programs. Although cranes live throughout the world, their voices, their dancing, and short flights from marsh to farmland and back again have a clarity and impact unique to each location. The cranes draw us into each place like no other.

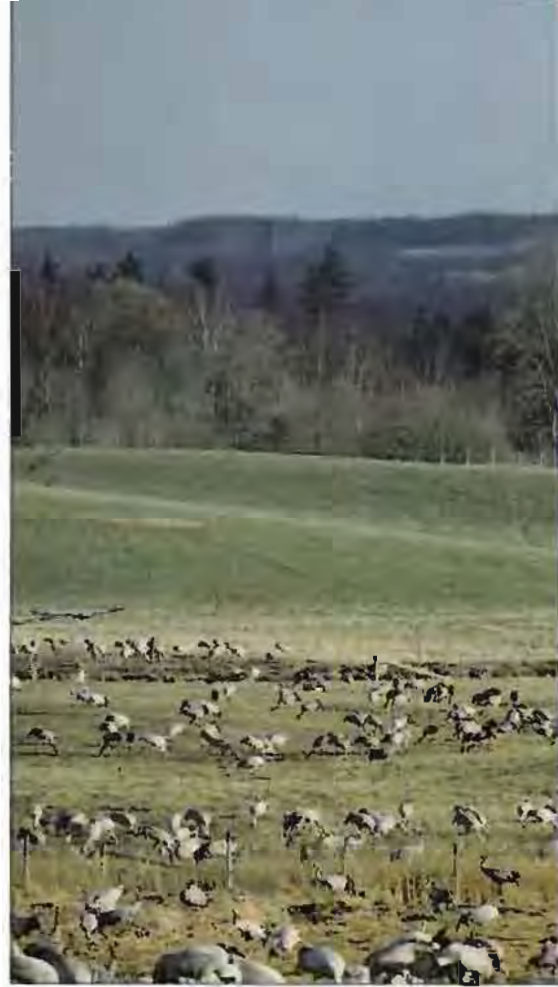
Conservation organizations, with limited resources and the awareness of so many problems, now feel pressure to devise education programs that serve many people over large areas. Modern marketing strategies, and the increasing size of many conservation organizations, lead in the same direction. Our school program at Briggsville offers a different model, however, that the best educational process engages "teachers" and "students" fully and uniquely, so that all are changed by the experience. Such engagement, now evolving at a few of the more effective crane reserves overseas, offers great hope for the cranes.

Our school project received financial support from the Wisconsin Environmental Education Board, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, the Francis R. Dewing Fund, and William and Eleanor Piel. ■

# Lake Hornborga, a Big Tourist Attraction in Sweden

Story by Britt Traneving Photographs by Sture Traneving

Lake Hornborga in Vastergotland, about 150 km east of Gothenburg, is a traditional resting area for Eurasian Cranes in Sweden. Our cranes winter in Spain, resting in France and Germany before arriving at their last resting place at Lake Hornborga, before breeding in the north of Sweden. About 10,000 cranes pass Lake Hornborga during April. Eurasian Cranes breed in all parts of Sweden (except Oland), but the big flocks at Lake Hornborga go to the north.



Many people visit this place every April to see the cranes. The heavy traffic was getting to be a big problem. In 1994, the National Road Administration in Sweden built an Information and Visitor Station with a big parking place in the crane area. This was in cooperation with the Swedish Nature Department, that is responsible for the feeding of the cranes. Some years ago the Nature Department planted potatoes for the cranes in cooperation with the landowners, but today only barley is laid out on the fields around the Visitor Center.

In 1995 about 120,000 people visited Lake Hornborga during April. It has been a big tourist attraction. Bird watchers from Sweden and many other countries in Europe, particularly Germany, are our guests. The peak of numbers in the middle of April is about 5,000 birds. Visitors have good opportunities to watch cranes very closely. The crane fields are under protection during day-time. Cranes are feeding and dancing undisturbed around the Visitor Center. At sunset the cranes move to roost in the lake for the night. In the morning, large and small flocks of cranes leave that part of the lake and come down spreading out for feeding, dancing and sometimes swimming.

There are good possibilities for photographers to hire blinds in the feeding area. The Tourist Agency in Falkopng rents out six blinds. But, if you want to be sure to get one, you have to book a year ahead. The experience to watch and photograph the spectacular birds so very close is a great adventure. After a long and dark winter in Sweden, cranes arriving at Lake Hornborga are a symbol of light and of spring—eagerly awaited every year. ■





Top: Cranes in front of the church of Stora Bjurum, that is situated in the protected area.  
Top left: A pair of cranes at Lake Homborga unison call, a territorial proclamation. Photo from a blind.  
Bottom left: Eurasian Cranes dance on a blanket of freshly fallen snow in early April.  
Bottom right: Cranes feed in front of the new visitor center at Lake Homborga.

# Contributions

Received Oct. through Dec., 1996



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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:

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



Photo by Debbie Carley

## Education Staff is Joined by a Familiar Face

Bryant Tarr joins the Education staff of ICF and brings along a bonus—"Vinegar" the red-tailed hawk! Bryant has recently returned to Wisconsin from ornithological work in the United Arab Emirates. Many members will remember his good efforts for ICF when he was with the Aviculture Department. Bryant along with lead Aviculturist, Marianne Wellington, will head up the volunteer tour guide and chick parent recruiting and training and invites all interested members and friends to join up for the new year.

"We will provide the necessary knowledge and training for you to become an integral part of ICF's on-site education efforts." Bryant invites all interested to begin with "Volunteer Recruitment Day" on Saturday April 5 from 9:00 a.m. to 1:00 p.m. in the ICF library. Training continues on Saturday, April 12 and Saturday, April 19. For more information call Bryant at ICF and plan to visit the cranes and meet "Vinegar" upclose and personal. ■

## Banner Attendance Year—35,016!

Education Department staff and volunteers were challenged to provide tours for a steady flow of visitors. Just last year, attendance had slipped and we wondered if ICF had reached a plateau in visitation.

Favorable weather, good advertising, and a significant increase in group tours combined to expand attendance by more than 4,000 over the 1995 season.

Volunteer tour guides and chick parents, along with our seasonal staff, provided the knowledge and enthusiasm to inspire and entertain more than 35,000 visitors! ■

## Siberian Cranes in Iran and India

During the past two decades, tiny remnant populations of Siberian Cranes have been reported on wintering grounds in Iran and India. The Iran flock has remained between 9-11 birds. This winter there are 10, including three juveniles and the adult male crane to which a satellite radio was attached last winter. The India flock has declined from about 200 birds in the mid-sixties to just four cranes last winter, including a pair with one juvenile and a lone adult male. This winter, there are just three cranes at the traditional wintering area in India, a pair and a lone adult male. This same pair is believed to have reared a juvenile on the breeding grounds in western Siberia last summer: The chick must have perished during migration. The only known breeding area of the Iran population is about 400 km south of the breeding area of the Indian population, which is east of the Ural Mountains in the basin of the Ob River.

## Crane Count Set for April 26

That time-honored harbinger of spring, the Midwest Sandhill Crane Count, will take place this year on Saturday, April 26. Last year, 3,002 volunteer observers went out in the field before dawn (a remarkable feat in itself!) to count 10,399 cranes at various sites in five states. Want to join the fun and action? To participate in the count, please contact Bryant Tarr at ICF.

## Cranes—Their Biology, Husbandry, and Conservation

After several years of intensive writing and editing, we are proud to announce the publication of "Cranes: Their Biology, Husbandry, and Conservation." This compendium summarizes the current state-of-the-art in crane husbandry including topics such as chick rearing, health care, artificial insemination, and reintroduction. ICF and the Patuxent Wildlife Research Center collaborated to produce this 336-page hard-bound volume which includes 30 authors. Copies can be ordered for \$49.95 plus shipping and handling by contacting: Hancock Wildlife Research Center, 1431 Harrison Avenue, Blaine, WA at 800-938-1114 (phone) or 800-983-2262 (fax) in the US.



Andy Stark (left,) veteran volunteer tour leader, helped ICF reach a record attendance year in 1996. Andy is in the 100 tours/year category, starting each new season by dedicating his time, talent, and enthusiasm to April school groups. Photo by Debbie Carley.

# Grumman Goose Delivers ICF Whooping Cranes to Florida

by Marshal Case, Deputy Director

Thanks to the dedicated efforts of Terry J Kohler, pilot, Jeff Kohler (Terry's cousin), and Windway Aviation pilot, Paul Jumes, ten ICF reared Whooping Cranes were transported Thanksgiving week to Cesium, Florida.

Built for the U.S. Government to serve World War II anti-submarine operations, the Grumman Aleutian Goose has been modified extensively and, due to its range of 1600 nautical miles without refueling, was the perfect aircraft to transport the whoopers.

Last report from Florida Game and Fish Commission staff had all ten birds doing well with the non-migratory flock of Florida Whooping Cranes.

Above: ICF staff and pilots work together preparing the Golden Goose for the trip to Florida. Photo by Marshal Case

Left: Jeff Kohler of Windway Aviation receives birds from ICF aviculturists. Photo by Marshal Case

Right: Whooping Crane adult with 1996 chick reared for Florida non-migratory flock. ICF photo



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