



THE ICF BUGLE

Volume 23, Number 4

November 1997

World Center for the Study and Preservation of Cranes

Restoring the Flood: *A Vision for the Zambezi Delta*

By Rich Beilfuss,
Africa Program Coordinator

Over the millennia, human and ecological communities evolved in response to the cyclical ebb and flow of the great Zambezi River of southern Africa. Annual floodwaters spilled over into the vast Zambezi floodplains, irrigating agricultural crops, rejuvenating grasslands where livestock and wildlife grazed, depositing nutrient-rich sediments that sustained coastal mangroves, and triggering the breeding cycles of countless species of plants and animals, including Wattled Cranes. Low dry-season flows enabled the successful harvest of riverine fishes and the sustained productivity of coastal prawn fisheries. But today, these same life-giving waters must also generate electricity for distant cities, transport produce and minerals to the oceans, and supply water for grand irrigation schemes.

Over the past forty years, the many demands upon the Zambezi's waters have resulted in the construction of dams. Throughout the world, large dams have been hailed as the solution to our water resource problems. By harnessing and eliminating the ebb and flow of rivers, large dams create vast reservoirs and promise thousands of megawatts of electricity for spurring regional economic development. But such benefits come at great cost to the marginalized people and wildlife of river basins, whose homes, habitats, and livelihoods are destroyed by the regulation of rivers. These communities rarely reap the benefits of urban economic growth. Is it possible to help these forgotten communities, to manage large dams to meet local as well as national interests? Upon our response to this question rests the fate of the great Zambezi Delta of Mozambique.

Building a team

At the 1993 African Crane and Wetland Workshop in Botswana, Mozambican conservationist Paulo Singini described the recent

discovery of more than 2,500 Wattled Cranes—one of the largest known populations of these globally endangered birds. To our dismay, however, we learned that the grandeur of their remarkable wetland home, the Zambezi Delta, had faded to a shadow. He described a wetland where tremendous herds of Cape buffalo, elephant, and waterbuck once roamed, where tens of thousands of villagers had subsisted by farming and grazing fertile soils and fishing productive waters, where impenetrable stands of mangrove had blanketed a coastal border. Decades of civil war, prolonged drought, and especially the enormous upstream dam, Cahora Bassa, on the Zambezi River had caused serious degradation to the wetland. Since its completion in 1975, the dam has been managed to release a constant outflow of water, eliminating downstream flood season flows and increasing dry season flows. The social and ecological consequences have been immense.

Through ensuing discussions with Singini, ecologist Paul Dutton, and others who understood the importance of this magnificent area, we came to realize that the only real hope for the people and wildlife of the Zambezi Delta was to rethink the management practices of the Cahora Bassa dam—could the Zambezi's vital waters be released back to its downstream floodplain? To help make this dream a reality, we needed a broad-based coalition of scientists, resource managers, and policy-makers who shared our vision for a reinvigorated lower Zambezi.

After preliminary survey flights in 1995 (see ICF Bugle, August, 1995), ICF organized return trips to the delta in 1996 and 1997 with a team of hydrologists, ecologists, social scientists, and resource managers. South African freshwater ecologist Bryan Davies provided a historical perspective on the changes to the river since he first conducted Zambezi research prior to the construction of the dam. Luis Covane,



Wattled Cranes breed during peak flood conditions, feeding their chicks on the pulse of plant and insect life that follows receding floodwaters. Although present in large numbers, Wattled Cranes may no longer be breeding in the degraded floodplains below the Cahora Bassa Dam. Their status is indicative of the challenges facing the people and ecosystems that depend on the flood cycles of the Zambezi River. Photo by Eleanor Briggs.

Director General of Arquivo do Patrimônio Cultural (ARPAC) for social research in Mozambique, and Ted Scudder, renowned expert on the impacts of large dams on resettled peoples, assessed the impact of the dam on the villagers and their means of livelihood. With Roberto Zolho, warden for protected areas in the Zambezi Delta, and South African ornithologist David Allan, I assessed the effects of hydrological changes on the birds, mammals, and ecological communities of the Delta. Despite the degradation that had occurred, we felt encouraged by the potential of what remained.

Together, we discussed the opportunity for a unique workshop, a workshop that would draw together the many people with a stake in the management of the Zambezi and its power, fishing, agriculture, and wildlife. The Ford Foundation's Ken Wilson, excited by the prospects for such a meeting, offered their full support. Little more than one year later, this workshop would take us an enormous step closer to achieving our dream.

Finding common ground

From September 29 to October 2, 1997, we gathered in Songo, Mozambique for the Workshop on the Sustainable Use of the Cahora Bassa Dam and the Zambezi Valley. The workshop was organized under the auspices of the Zambezi Valley Development Authority (GPZ) and ARPAC, and drew more

than fifty scientists, managers, and decision-makers from Mozambique, southern Africa, and abroad. Through invited papers, working groups, and discussions, we sought consensus on the impacts of Cahora Bassa Dam on the hydrology of the Zambezi River, and the consequences of these hydrological changes for the livelihood of human communities and for the flora and fauna of the Zambezi basin.

Baldeu Chande of the IUCN Zambezi Wetlands Project described the dramatic decline in Cape buffalo and elephant resulting from the drying of the floodplain grasslands and the subsequent intensification of hunting. Researcher Antonio Hogueane showed that the release of large dry season water flows from the dam had led to a dramatic decline in coastal prawn fisheries, resulting in millions of dollars of lost revenue. Other papers at the workshop described lessons learned from artificial flood releases in the Phongolo floodplain in South Africa, experiences with the Tchuma Tchata ("our wealth") program of community-based natural resource management in Mozambique, and various approaches to integrated river basin planning in southern Africa.

One of my roles at the workshop was to nurture a vision of hope. Despite more than two decades of degradation, the Zambezi Delta remains a wetland complex of tremendous international importance. Within its rich mosaic of wetland communities, including extensive mangroves, seasonally inundated floodplain, papyrus swamps, and wet forests, we have documented the largest breeding colony of White Pelicans in southern Africa, great numbers of Open-billed, Yellow-billed, and Saddle-billed Storks, and highly threatened species such as the African Skimmer. Wattled Cranes still flock in large numbers on the flooded grasslands. If such a wetland could be restored, it would reclaim its status as one of the most important wetlands in tropical Africa.

As the workshop gained momentum, we gathered for a tour of Cahora Bassa dam. How massive and important this 558-foot high engineering marvel seemed in contrast to a Wattled Crane or a struggling farmer! We came to realize how easily modern technology could obstruct our view downstream.

We returned to Songo to form five working groups to tackle questions of what to do next. How could Cahora

Bassa Dam be managed to optimize use of Zambezi water for local development and conservation in addition to other national interests? What could be done immediately to improve water management and build consensus among Zambezi users?

The workshop culminated in a closing ceremony. In a room buzzing with Mozambican media, Dr. Covane presented the recommendations of the workshop participants, urging that the Cahora Bassa dam be operated to simulate natural river flows, and that the Zambezi Basin be managed in an integrated manner for the benefit of all stakeholders. Simao Muhai, Director General of the GPZ, promised to strive towards implementing the ideas and spirit of the workshop. The Governor of Tete Province, Virgilio Ferrao, praised the workshop process and recommendations for the sustainable management of the dam and basin. And the Minister of Public Works, Roberto White, concluded the workshop by thanking the participants for seeking positive transformations in Mozambican society and for struggling to find a balance between environmental concerns and the economic growth of the nation. It seemed unimaginable that in a few short years our dream for the Zambezi had gained so much attention and acceptance at national, regional, and local levels.

A view to the future

The full realization of the ideas and recommendations of the Workshop on the Sustainable Use of Cahora Bassa Dam and the Zambezi Valley will require the on-going commitment of many individuals and institutions. ICF will work with Mozambican colleagues to study changes in the ecological communities of the Zambezi Delta over the forty-year period since dams were first constructed on the Zambezi. Researcher Carlos Bento will assess the population structure and ecological requirements of Wattled Cranes and other key species in the delta. Our studies will be used to predict and monitor the ecological response of the Zambezi Delta to improved water management practices at the dam. We will also work with Mozambican officials to gain designation of the Zambezi Delta as a Wetland of International Importance under the Ramsar Convention. Parallel research by other colleagues will address social and economic development related to Zambezi flooding, hydrological management of the dam, and other critical issues. Communities upstream and downstream of the dam will be consulted for their ideas, needs, and leadership. Collectively, we will produce a fully inclusive master plan to guide the future of the Zambezi Basin.

In Mozambique, we have learned once again that the fate of people, ecosystems, and cranes are intimately and intricately linked. If the great Zambezi River is allowed to flood once again, it will be through the conviction that conservation and development are two banks of the same river. ■



The Zambezi River below the Cahora Bassa Dam flows through a rugged granite escarpment before branching out across the low-lying floodplains of the Zambezi Delta. The Zambezi basin covers a quarter of the area of Mozambique, and plays a vital role in the nation's economy and in the lives of local people. Photo by Rich Beilfuss.

A Crane Hunt for Wisconsin?

by Jeb Barzen,
Director of Field Ecology

In late July, the Chair of the Natural Resources Committee in the Wisconsin State Assembly requested that the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources (DNR) consider establishing a crane hunting season. Since that time, three primary reasons have been offered in support of such a season: 1) to alleviate damage to crops that cranes are causing, 2) to keep crane populations from growing too large, and 3) to provide hunting opportunities for those who want to hunt cranes. ICF's charter prevents it from lobbying on political issues but our 22 years of crane count data and seven-year study of cranes on Wisconsin farmlands provide information relevant to issues that mingle cranes, crops, and hunting. In recent months, ICF staff have been active in sharing these results with members of the DNR, public, State Assembly, and media.

Is crane hunting the way to stop crane damage to crops?

Cranes in Wisconsin can cause significant damage to individual fields, particularly to corn seedlings in spring. While such damage is relatively minor on a state-wide basis, some farmers suffer large losses. Since 1991, ICF has been marking and studying Sandhill Cranes near Briggsville in an effort to better understand the problem and to develop solutions (ICF Bugle; August, 1996). Our research has shown that unless crane populations in Wisconsin are lowered substantially, a crane hunting season in fall would have little or no influence on crane behavior that leads to crop damage in spring. This leads to the question: is there a better way to solve the crop damage problem?

One solution that shows great promise is the use of chemicals on seed corn that deter cranes from eating the kernels. During 1997, 732 acres of seed corn on four different farms were treated with these substances. None of the treated fields received significant damage from cranes. Some nearby untreated fields, however, were damaged. Ben Brancel, farming just east of Briggsville, lost about 10 acres of corn to cranes feeding on the young sprouts. As is often the case, the cranes responsible for this damage were members of a non-breeding flock.

This year, two of the birds in this non-breeding flock had radio transmitters attached to bands on their legs. Both birds were caught as chicks in 1996. This summer these two birds associated with a flock of 10-70 birds. We watched them feed for several days

on Jason Linder's treated corn fields without causing any damage. Suddenly, the birds switched feeding patterns and began to use Ben Brancel's corn field where the damage occurred. As soon as they entered this field, they began feeding along the rows, pulling up the kernels attached to the newly germinated corn. The damage accrued over a period of 2-3 days.

Since treating corn seems to deter cranes well, we will now try to find a more environmentally benign and less costly substance than the pesticide we are currently testing. In addition to tasting bad, any substitute must work in the highly engineered agricultural systems used today. Lime, for example, is gritty and would likely plug corn planters. For this reason, we did not use lime this year. Clearly, close cooperation with the agricultural industry is needed. To test alternative substances, we will be working with engineers at the Delmonte Corporation over the winter.

Given the large home ranges of cranes, finding low-cost deterrent substances is critical. For example, the home range of two radio-marked cranes during the time that corn fields in the Briggsville area were vulnerable (late May to early July) was 19.1 square miles and 12.5 square miles. The acreage of corn within these home ranges is substantial, and damage prevention measures must be cost effective.

Is hunting cranes required to control their population?

For 22 years, ICF's annual crane count has provided an index to change in regional crane populations. During 1997, 55% of Wisconsin's cranes were recorded in 8 of the state's 72 counties (Columbia, Dane, Dodge, Green Lake, Jefferson, Marquette, Waushara, and Winnebago). In these eight counties, crane populations are now at a historic high and appear to have saturated available nesting habitat.

Growth rates, the proportion by which a population increases from one year to the next, have been declining among cranes in seven of these eight densely-populated counties since the mid-80's. Crane populations are no longer growing in the core breeding area of Wisconsin and this plateau in crane numbers is likely to continue. Only in Dane County have growth rates remained steady over this period, indicating a still-growing population.

It is possible that crane numbers are ultimately limited by habitat constraints such as available wetland habitat or the juxtaposition of wetlands with uplands that are hayed or grazed. Hunting, in this case, would

not be required to control crane populations.

Certainly, our crane counts of the future will be critical in testing this prediction.

Do we want to hunt cranes?

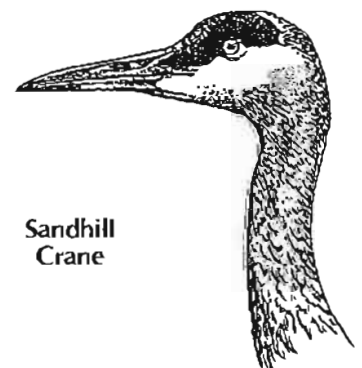
Our 2,906 volunteer crane counters collectively estimated 12,125 cranes in Wisconsin during 1997. A 1995 estimate of the eastern population of Greater Sandhill Cranes (to which Wisconsin's cranes belong) totals 33,774. A sustainable harvest of birds from a population of this size is biologically feasible.

Biological sustainability, however, is not the only factor involved in deciding whether a species is hunted. This decision has as much to do with our cultural values and traditions as with biology. North Americans, for example, are not interested in hunting species like the American Robin, though similar songbird species are hunted in other parts of the world. A decision to hunt cranes, birds that are highly visible and that evoke strong human responses wherever they occur, could be an emotional and highly divisive issue.

Because hunting in fall is unlikely to solve the crop damage problem in spring, and because hunting is probably not required to limit crane numbers, linking these issues and hunting is a distraction. The discussion should focus on whether we want to hunt cranes or not. ICF will continue its intensive studies of cranes on farmlands and provide research results to help resolve conflicts between cranes and crops. Our results will be available for public evaluation.

As ICF members, your role is critical—make your views about hunting and cranes known to decision-makers, friends, and the media.

Since 1996, funding for our Briggsville work has come from ICF members, Milwaukee Zoological Society, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources, Wisconsin Society for Ornithology, and the World Wildlife Fund—U.S. ■



Sandhill
Crane

Around the World in the Windway Jet

by George Archibald, Director

For over 20 years, ICF has worked with Russian colleagues on Siberian Cranes. We often met in Moscow, in Baraboo, and at conferences to discuss the next steps in helping the "Sibes." Through the auspices of the US-USSR Environmental Exchange Agreement signed by Nixon and Brezhnev in 1972, collaboration has been possible through the guidance of the Office of International Affairs of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and their counterparts in Moscow. A flourishing captive population of Sibes was established in the USA, Europe and the USSR. But throughout that period it was unthinkable for Americans to visit the remote breeding areas of the Sibes. Northern areas of the USSR were tightly closed to outsiders.

There are three populations of Siberian Cranes in northern Russia: the western group that winters in Iran, the central group that winters in India, and the eastern group that winters in China. The breeding grounds of the western group were discovered by Dr. Alexander Sorokin and Dr. Yuri Markin only in June of 1996 in a wilderness wetland area about 1000 miles south of the breeding area of the central group that breed near the Arctic Circle. The eastern

group nests on the tundra in the far north of Yakutia.

Last winter 7 to 10 Sibes were counted in Iran, 3 in India, and between 2500-3000 in China. Hunting and loss of wetlands have led to the near demise of the western and central populations. The eastern group is threatened by rapid development in China.

Remarkable changes have taken place during the past decade. The USSR vanished, the Cold War melted away, and today's Russia is open to foreigners. Earlier this decade, American and Indian colleagues joined Russian colleagues on the breeding grounds of the central flock. Several captive-reared cranes joined the wild Sibes and migrated. Other captive-produced Sibe eggs were substituted into the nests of the abundant Eurasian Crane that nested near the wild Sibes.

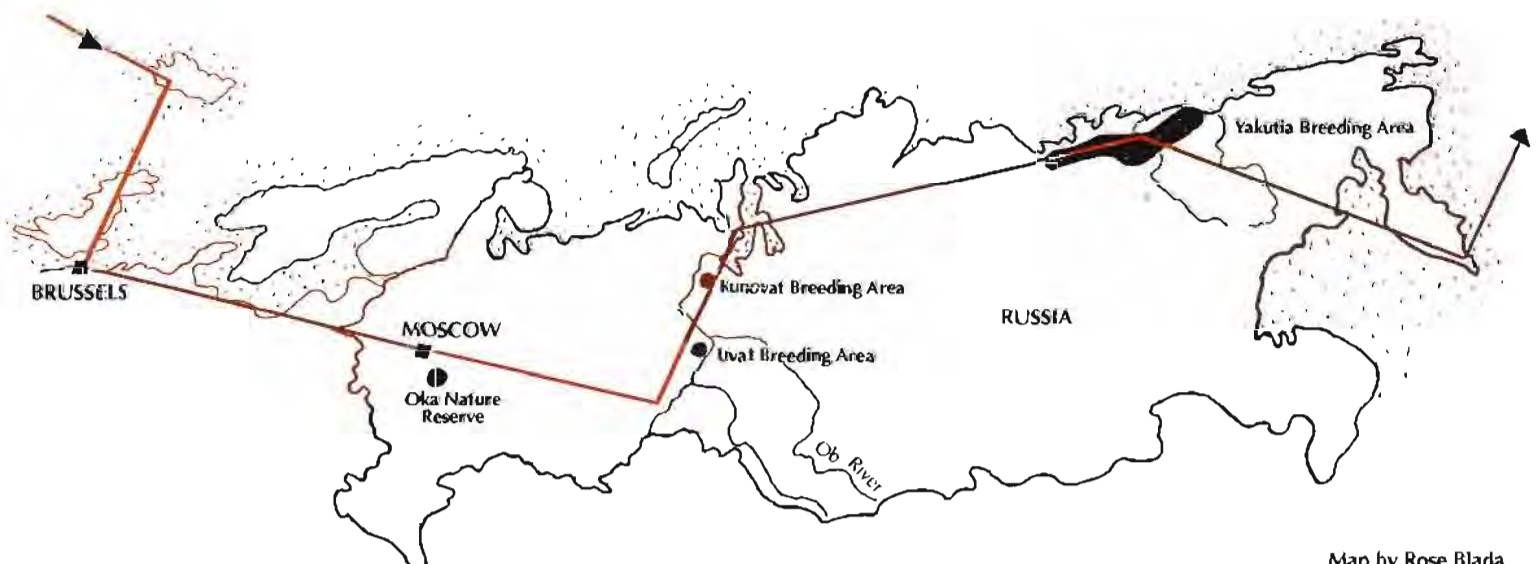
This May, through the generosity of Terry and Mary Kohler, my wife, Kyoko and I, in company with the Kohlers were able to visit the three breeding areas of the Sibes using Kohler's Windway Capital jet. Our mission was to transport six hatching Sibe eggs from ICF to Russia. The oldest of ICF's eggs hatched at the captive breeding center for cranes at the Oka Nature Reserve not far from Moscow. We

transported the remaining five eggs plus three eggs from Oka east in the Windway jet to the breeding grounds of the western and central groups of Sibes.

Our goal was to substitute the captive-produced Sibe eggs into the nests of Eurasian Cranes nesting near the last few pairs of wild Sibes of the western and central groups. We hope the captive-bred Sibes will learn to migrate along safer routes as well as feed in upland areas with the Eurasians.

The engineers at Windway Capital designed an electronically controlled incubator that provided just the right temperature for our precious cargo. Every few hours we manually turned the eggs and sprayed them with warm water. At the end of their journey, we floated the eggs to determine if the embryos were alive. Sure enough, they had survived!

Helicopters transported us into the wilderness to find nests of the Eurasian Cranes. One Sibe egg was planted in each of eight nests of Eurasian Cranes and the displaced eggs of the foster-parents were taken back to the Oka Reserve. With all Sibe eggs safely planted in Eurasian nests, we continued east in the Windway jet to Yakutia-the breeding grounds of the eastern Sibes.



Map by Rose Blada



May 28, 1997—At 59° N latitude, the breeding grounds of the western group of Sibes rests in a wilderness of forests, lakes and wetlands transected by long waving lines of dwarf birch.

Although it was late May, the tundra was still frozen and buried in snow. We saw grass. Only on the southern exposure of low hills had the snow melted.

Terry Kohler spotted a pair of Sibes from the porthole of the helicopter that carried us from the airport in Chokurdakh to the heart of the new Kytalyk Resource-Reserve. They were the only Sibes seen. But to our surprise and delight, from a grassy hill, we heard the familiar calls of

Sandhill Cranes. Yes, the North American Sandhill Cranes are expanding their range in eastern Russia.

After 11 days and 14,000 miles we were back in Wisconsin via Alaska. Eight captive-produced Sibe eggs were under wild Eurasians, six Sibes were being costumed-reared at Oka for release in August, we had outlined next steps for Sibes through meetings with colleagues and officials, and we had experienced the breed-

ing grounds of the three groups of Sibes.

On the last leg of our journey across the plains of North America, my thoughts turned to the Whooping Cranes. In 1941, there were only 15 birds in the flock that migrated from breeding grounds in northern Canada. Now there are about 180 in that group. Could the western and central groups of Sibes make a similar recovery?

During the past decade Terry and Mary Kohler, and their planes and pilots, have helped the Whoopers through complimentary transport of eggs and birds in North America. But while the Whoopers have slowly increased during the past half-century, in Asia the western and central groups of Sibes have plummeted.

But there is hope. Since 1995, the Bonn Convention for Migratory Species (CMS) has developed a Memorandum of Understanding on the conservation of the Siberian Crane. Every year CMS brings together conservationists and officials from the range states of the Sibes in Western Asia. A plan for the recovery of the western and central groups has been developed. Through the help of the Kohlers and many others there is renewed hope for the "Lily of Birds." ■



Eurasian Crane



Siberian Crane



May 31, 1997—At 71° N latitude, tundra including lakes, and wetlands interspersed by low grass-covered hills, is the breeding ground of the eastern group of Sibes .

Contributions

Received July to September, 1997



Lufthansa
ICF's Official Airline

Grants & Awards: Robert W. Baird & Co., Inc.; William & Karen Boyd; Robert & Kathy Brumder; Mary Griggs Burke; Dellwood Foundation, Inc.; Derse Foundation; Gaylord & Dorothy Donnelley Foundation; Sam Evans; Firstar Milwaukee Foundation, Inc.; Foley & Lardner; The Ford Foundation; William Fitzhugh Fox; Mrs. H.B. Griswold; Hagge Foundation, Inc.; Evan & Marion Helfaer Foundation; Hufcor, Inc.; S.C. Johnson Wax Fund Inc.; Johnson Worldwide Associates, Inc.; Lovejoy Industries; The John D. & Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation; The Marcus Corp. Foundation, Inc.; Marshall & Ilsley Foundation; Oscar G. & Elsa S. Mayer Family Foundation; Miller Brewing Co.; National Fish & Wildlife Foundation; John & Ruth Nugent; Oshkosh B'Gosh Foundation, Inc.; Frederick Ott; Phillip Morris Companies, Inc.; Mr. & Mrs. Verne Read; The Christopher Reynolds Foundation; Walter Schroeder Foundation, Inc.; Mr. & Mrs. Jeffrey Short, Jr.; Willis G. & Irene Sullivan, Jr.; John Wachs; Wicor, Inc.; Wisconsin Energy Corp. Foundation; The Margaret Cullinan Wray Charitable Trust.

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.

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Good Eggs

Honoring their outstanding contribution to conservation, ICF presented Dr. Fran Hamerstrom and Samuel and Gene Johnson with the "Good Egg Award" at a banquet in Milwaukee September 5.



George Archibald presents Fran Hamerstrom with her "Good Egg Award."
Photo by Casey Martin

Sam and Gene Johnson visit Gee Whiz and Oobleck at ICF's Amoco Whooping Crane Exhibit.
ICF photo

1997 Bird-A-Thon

by Bob Hallam,
Development Coordinator

ICF's annual Bird-a-thon raised over \$21,000 for the Ron Sauey Conservation Fund and ICF operations—a new record! Income from the Sauey Fund supports the Ron Sauey Memorial Library for Bird Conservation. Over \$151,000 has been raised since 1988. We wish to thank all who participated this year.

First place and grand prize went to Lark Paulson. Lark won a handmade Amish quilt worth \$1,000, donated by Lands' End of Dodgeville, Wisconsin. Second place went to Judy Bautch, with Becky Garrison taking third. All top three finishers received a framed print by Brian Jarvi titled "Sojourn."

The other top-scoring teams were Viola White (4th), Tom Schmidt (5th), Michael John Jaegar (6th), Mike Putnam (7th), Cathryn Steuer (8th), David & Geri Vander Leest (9th), and William Ebbott (10th). Each team also received the print "Sojourn." All who watched birds and raised money also received a poster by Owen Gromme titled, "Salute to the Dawn."

We wish to thank Chuck Brei of Meuer Art of Madison, Wisconsin for donating the "Sojourn" prints and framing.

Helping Hands



ICF thanks the John Turner Family for all of their help and support over the years. The past four summers, the Turners have donated the use of their farm equipment for the annual Crane City Cleanout. They also help ICF by taking our old shavings and using them on their farm. We very much appreciate the fine friends and neighbors we are fortunate to have.



A Beautiful Memory

ICF's newest structure, Becky's Picnic Shelter, stands amidst the oaks near the visitor's entrance. Kathleen D. Ryan (in photo) and Bernard J. James donated the shelter in memory of their daughter, Rebecca James Lesnikowski.

A Trip to the Platte

By Alice Sturm,
ICF member

When my mother and I arrived in the airport of Omaha on the first day of spring, we got a rental car that smelled unpleasant. Next, we drove through endless corn fields that were bare. As we approached Kearney we began to see Sandhill Cranes in the fields.

When we got into Kearney, we raced to the blind. We were there to see the cranes coming back to the Platte River for the night. Every year, half a million Sandhills stop along the 50 mile stretch of the Platte to stock up on fat before flying to their breeding grounds in Alaska. The sky was vermillion, blue and mauve, and the golden halo of the sun was speckled with cranes. They trilled beautifully, and it sounded wonderful.

The next morning at 5 a.m., it was cold and dark. Very cold. We walked across a meadow and quietly approached the blind. It was like a house with two floors and lots of little windows to look out of. Since I am nine, I had to look through one of the lower windows. When we looked out of the windows, the birds were just dark shapes. Upon waking, the birds began to dance, and pretty soon everyone (except the late risers) was dancing.

Next, we went to Funk Lagoon. All the ducks were migrating. A coot with amazing green toes showed us a muskrat house by walking to it. We raced around some cornfields to try to find a Whooper that had hooked-up with some Sandhills. Not surprisingly, we didn't find it.

Late in the afternoon, we went to a bridge to see birds. We saw a Phoebe, a Kingfisher and a Cedar Waxwing, a bird dear to my mother's heart. We saw millions of cranes overhead. I lay for a while on the smooth planking of the bridge and watched the green water slipping away below me. ■



In March, along the Platte River between Kearney and Grand Island, tens of thousands of Sandhill Cranes gather. It's the largest congregation of cranes on earth. ICF photo

1998 Platte River Trip

On the weekend of March 27th–March 29th, and during the week of March 30–April 2, 1998, two groups of lucky ICF members will witness the breathtaking sight of the Platte River during the spring migration. This year join the trip you have always wanted to take.

Crane conservationist Jim Rogers, addicted to the Platte since 1984, and ICF's Kate Fitzwilliams will help

you experience this event under the best possible circumstances. Each group will enjoy dawn and dusk viewings of the cranes from superior river blinds. A walk along a pedestrian bridge will give a different perspective of the cranes going to roost. Packets containing thorough up-to-date orientation and information materials will be sent prior to the trip, enabling participants to "hit the ground running" on their own.

Participation will be limited to the first dozen accepted applicants for each trip. The two-night weekend trip will cost \$300 per person (add \$50 for single occupancy), and the three-night weekday trip will cost \$365 per person (add \$70 for single occupancy). Fees cover lodging in Kearney, Nebraska, full breakfasts, blind space, orientation materials, and a tax-deductible contribution to ICF.

Transportation is not included, nor are lunches and dinners. For more information please contact Kate Fitzwilliams at ICF (608) 356-9462. Or to reserve your place, send Kate a \$75 non-refundable deposit check payable to the International Crane Foundation. ■

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International Crane Foundation

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