



Safeguarding the SarusScape:

THE PROGRAM FOR SOUTH ASIA



Photo by KS Gopi Sundar

The Sarus Crane, the world's tallest flying bird, occurs over a range that stretches from northern India and Nepal, across the Southeast Asian countries of Myanmar, Thailand, Cambodia, and Vietnam, to northern Australia. The stronghold for the species is India, where the Sarus Crane has long been a sacred bird. Sarus Cranes are canonized in the Hindu Epic, *The Ramayan*, which dates to the 4th century B.C. Remarkably, these birds reach their highest density in northwest India and Nepal, the most densely settled rural landscape on earth. Here, Sarus Cranes breed and thrive side-by-side with farmers in traditional agricultural landscapes. We call these lands the *SarusScape*.

The SarusScape—an extensive patchwork of public and private lands that lie entirely outside of protected areas—features a remarkable diversity of wildlife. Giant Blue Bulls, the largest antelope in South Asia, roam the fields unharmed, along with Golden Jackals, other mammals, and more than 400 bird species. In fact, the biodiversity of the SarusScape rivals that of the famous elephant and tiger reserves of India. The hallmark of the SarusScape is the diversified cropping system used by farmers—a mosaic of fruit trees, cereal crops, vegetable plots, fodder grasses, and wetland watering holes. This system reflects

the development over many centuries of traditional farming practices that benefit both humans and wildlife. These diverse fields stand in sharp contrast to the monocultures of rice and corn found elsewhere in Asia, which require intensive fertilizer and pesticide applications to remain productive and provide little habitat for wildlife. Retaining this time-honored arrangement, where farming and biodiversity coexist, is key to the survival of this globally significant population of Sarus Cranes.

OUR IMPACT

The International Crane Foundation and Nature Conservation Foundation work in partnership to document and protect the SarusScape and its stunning wildlife diversity through a community-based research and monitoring program. Field associates from local villages help us monitor the status of 850 breeding pairs of Sarus Cranes in areas with disparate farming practices. We also are exploring the ways in which villagers maintain community wetlands that provide critical habitat for non-breeding Sarus Cranes (which comprise nearly half of the region's entire Sarus population). Armed with this information, we are sensitizing government decision-makers to the immense conservation value of South Asia's farmlands, and working with them to enact meaningful policies that can strengthen and sustain the coexistence of people, wetlands, and wildlife. In support of this, the International Crane Foundation recently organized and hosted, together with the State of Uttar Pradesh Forest Department, the International Sarus Crane and Wetland Conservation Workshop. Experts from all Sarus Crane range countries shared knowledge and best practices to conserve Sarus Cranes across their global range.

Over the next decade, key elements of our SarusScape program will include:

- Assessing the impact of emerging threats to Sarus Cranes across the SarusScape, including power line collisions, disturbance of nests and chicks by feral dogs, and accidental pesticide poisoning. We will develop mitigation measures to control the most serious threats.
- Expanding our long-term monitoring to new locations to advance our understanding of how to conserve Sarus Cranes in diverse farmlands outside of protected areas.
- Engaging local, state, and national governments in developing and enacting policies that support and enhance the coexistence of Sarus Cranes and agriculture. ICF staff currently serve on committees headed by the Supreme Court of India, State Wildlife Boards, and village councils, where we continually encourage leaders to value and protect farmlands as centers for livelihoods and biodiversity.
- Applying the lessons of SarusScape by developing a comparable program in Australia. Australia is home to the world's second largest global population of Sarus Cranes, and the survival of the species depends upon conservation of its several populations. Australian Sarus Cranes reside alongside the more common Brolga crane, in vast floodplains maintained by Aboriginal councils and as private pasturelands and farmlands. Climate change, invasive plants and amphibians, and extensive land-use change threaten this population of Sarus Cranes. Our work going forward will focus on enhancing climate-friendly farming; locating and securing important breeding areas; and integrating Aboriginal knowledge into long-term conservation planning.



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- Establishing a Wetland Training Center in India, where we will experiment with different cropping practices aimed at maintaining optimal Sarus Crane habitat and reducing chemical use. We will use the facility to develop a network of farmers and village councils, working in partnership with them to improve landscapes for cranes and farmers. We will also use the facility to share information about how tropical and sub-tropical wetlands function, with a special focus on how sustainable human use of wetlands and the securing of crane habitat can be achieved together. Our facility will provide hands-on training in crane and wetland conservation for a new cadre of conservationists.



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WE NEED YOUR SUPPORT

The SarusScape of South Asia embraces the global stronghold for Sarus Cranes, while supporting a surprisingly rich diversity of wildlife and the livelihoods of millions of people. Together we can ensure that the SarusScape remains a global model for the coexistence of people and wildlife, and protect the world's tallest flying bird now and into the future.

Please join us in safeguarding healthy wetlands for Sarus Cranes and the rich diversity of the SarusScape.

FOR MORE INFORMATION CONTACT:

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