

The Bugle

Saving cranes and the places where cranes dance!

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Problem Solving for Cranes and Wetlands

*By Adalbert Aine-omucunguzi,
East Africa Regional Manager*



Everywhere we work, cranes inspire people with their cultural significance and extraordinary beauty. But often, the most threatened cranes occur in some of the poorest and most densely populated places on earth — places where poverty puts enormous pressure on their wetland homes. Wetlands are often converted to farmland, drained and ditched, over-grazed with livestock, or unsustainably harvested for vegetation, soils, and wildlife.

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Because we believe that a future with cranes and wetlands means a healthier and more liveable planet for all, we are focused on innovative ways to improve livelihoods for those who share their lands with cranes and wetlands.

Photo by Magnus Lundborg





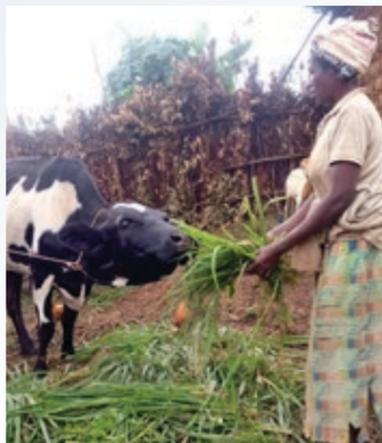
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One of these places is the beautiful Rugezi Marsh in northern Rwanda. The nearly 17,000-acre marsh's catchment is almost completely converted from tropical forest to small-scale agricultural plots in an incredibly steep landscape. The marsh is home to a growing Grey Crowned Crane population that coexists with a likewise growing human population.

Rwanda has a zero-grazing policy around Rugezi Marsh, and yet almost every household has a cow that needs to eat. To feed their cows, people enter the marsh illegally to harvest plant material. It is time-consuming, laborious, and results in disturbance to nesting cranes, overharvesting, and conflict with the authorities. When people and cattle enter the marsh, they expose and sometimes trample the nests and eggs of the Grey Crowned Cranes that live there. To help solve this problem, the International Crane Foundation/Endangered Wildlife Trust Partnership embarked on a mission to promote Napier Grass production as an alternative to harvesting from the marsh. Napier Grass, a local non-invasive variety, is a perennial tropical grass that can be fed directly or made into hay.

We began this project by raising community awareness about Napier Grass production in all seven sectors neighboring Rugezi Marsh, with a population of over 200,000. We showed the benefits of producing hay on their farm plots instead of spending long hours harvesting vegetation from the marsh. The negative impacts of human presence and harvesting in the marsh were also highlighted in our presentations. The communities welcomed our message and agreed to begin growing Napier Grass. The number of households growing Napier Grass has increased from 429 in 2018 to currently well over 3,000. We also established a Napier Grass nursery in the project area to guarantee a sustainable source of seedlings.

Last summer, we signed conservation agreements with two farmer groups in the Burera District with over 100 members. Each group member was given Napier Grass seedlings and four hoes during the planting season. The farmers received training in fodder management and livestock



feeding. They have committed to plant Napier Grass on their land, refrain from grazing and harvesting in the marsh, and report any illegal activities in the marsh.



The success of this project is due in large part to our commitment to community-based work and strong support from our partner in Rwanda, the Integrated Polytechnic Regional College at Kitabi. Since the project's inception in 2015, the number of people harvesting vegetation has been greatly reduced, and cranes have returned to areas that they had previously abandoned because of disturbance. We now have a team working in the marsh monitoring the cranes and their nesting success.

But we have so much more to do! Due to lack of funds, most families cannot afford mattresses and resort to harvesting grass from the marsh to make sleeping mats. This is an unsustainable activity, and they are definitely not comfortable. Recently, an innovative women's group pooled a little money from members to buy one mattress per month for a member family. This is a positive initiative that we want to support and take to scale the same way we did with Napier Grass. All of these positive responses and successes directly support our goal that Rugezi Marsh supports rich biodiversity, including Endangered Grey Crowned Cranes, and supports sustainable livelihood opportunities that provide income and reduce wetland and environmental degradation.

"My children and I no longer move long distances to harvest grass from Rugezi Marsh. We are able to feed our animals using homegrown fodder, and they are healthy. They are giving more milk, some of which we sell."

— Ngendahimana Dative

Dear Fellow Craniac,



I am Eleanor Hoagland, and it is my honor to serve as the Chair of the Board of the International Crane Foundation. As a child growing up in New York City, I was more familiar with cranes in art and literature than in the wild. Even then, cranes caught the imagination and inspired wonder as they do around the world. Once I had the opportunity to see cranes in the wild and to understand their unique role across cultures, I was captivated. I have come to understand the breadth of challenges cranes face globally and the implications of those challenges for people, the environment, and so many other species that share their landscapes. Our strong, dedicated global staff, great leadership, and solution-oriented approach have inspired me with great confidence that we will continue to have a meaningful impact in North America, Africa, and Asia.

Our focus on cranes allows us to serve much broader needs. In seeking to resolve threats to endangered cranes and their habitats, we are also helping to ensure healthy landscapes, bring people together, improve livelihoods, and empower future conservation leaders. As a relatively small organization with a global reach, our approach is focused, seeking to make effective use of our resources and designed to produce tangible results.

You just read about a great example of our win-win conservation approach on the previous pages. Instead of chastising farmers for disturbing wetlands with their cattle, we worked collaboratively to educate and find a solution that worked for everybody, including the cows!

This and all of our efforts would not be possible without the support of our members and conservation partners. We have launched into 2021 with a renewed commitment to our vital mission and global teams. We continue to bring people from diverse backgrounds together to solve problems and affect positive economic and environmental change. We are so much stronger together.

We still have urgent work to do. We need to continue work on projects in progress and pick up where we can on those that were halted or delayed by the pandemic. There are many more areas where we can make a difference.

We are so grateful for your past support, which has helped us sustain our mission during these difficult times. There is so much more we will accomplish in the future with your help. Thank you for standing with us as we seek to combat the global decline in cranes and so many other bird species and the loss of their vital habitat. Please join me in supporting our mission to save cranes and the places where they dance!

Sincerely,

Eleanor Hoagland
Board Chair, International Crane Foundation

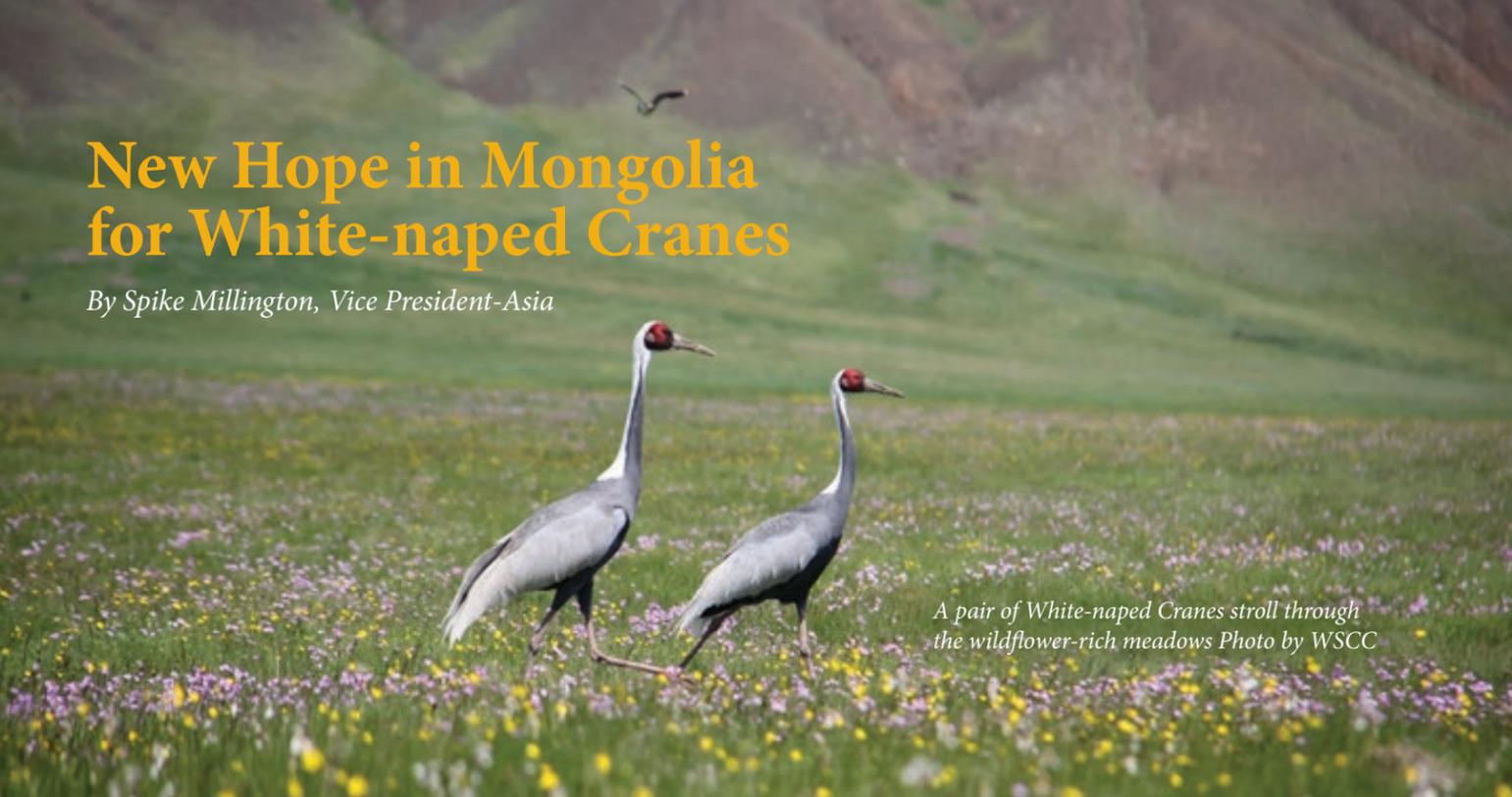
Your gift makes win-win solutions a reality for some of the most vulnerable crane and human populations.

WAYS TO GIVE

Please send your donation today using the enclosed envelope, donate online at www.savingcranes.org/support, or call 608-356-9462 ext. 807.

New Hope in Mongolia for White-naped Cranes

By Spike Millington, Vice President-Asia



A pair of White-naped Cranes stroll through the wildflower-rich meadows Photo by WSCC

Spring comes late to the rolling grasslands of northeastern Mongolia. It is the end of March, and the Demoiselle Cranes that make these grasslands their home are winging their way back over the mountains from the dry steppes of India. Meanwhile, stately White-naped Cranes rest in the crowded wetlands of northern China, waiting for frozen rivers of the Khurkh and Khuiten valleys to melt and feed the rich vegetation of the riparian marshes where they will nest. As spring turns to summer, the now-green grasslands are carpeted with colorful wildflowers, the bright white of gray-stemmed edelweiss, the deep blue of delicate larkspurs, and the shaded purple of Pasque flowers among them.



Demoiselle Cranes prefer the open grasslands to raise their chicks. Photo by Ciming Mei

The Demoiselle Cranes hunt grasshoppers in the meadows, sharing the grasslands with strutting Great Bustards and flocks of migratory Amur Falcons. The White-naped Cranes are beginning to nest in the lush riverine wetlands, where Black-tailed Godwits are displaying, and Swan Geese are chasing around their newly-established territories. This is the largest known breeding concentration of White-naped Cranes, with about 60 pairs present.



Horses are central to Mongolian life and culture. Photo by Andrew Holman

The cranes share this idyllic landscape not just with other birds but also with nomadic herding communities with thriving flocks of sheep, cows, and horses. The herders respect the cranes, but their animals need water. It is common to see groups of horses standing in lakes, cooling off in the summer heat, and trying to avoid biting flies. To get to the water, the horses pass through the marshes where the cranes nest, risking trampling their eggs. Sheepdogs accompany the flocks and can chase the cranes and eat eggs and chicks.

The Wildlife Science and Conservation Center (WSCC), a Mongolian NGO, has been working here for many years with the International Crane Foundation to carry out research on White-naped Cranes, monitor their breeding success, and study the ecology of the wetlands where they nest. We work with experts from the U.S. Forest Service, who provide valuable training on rangeland management and the complex hydrology of the valleys, including the impact of permafrost melting on the wetlands as a result of climate change.

The Khurkh-Khuiten River Valleys (KKRV) have historically had no formal protection, but in recognition of the importance of the area for biodiversity, the long-term work on cranes and other species, and the growing threats posed by overgrazing and encroaching agriculture, the government of Mongolia declared the 500,000-acre KKRV a national nature reserve in May 2020, an exciting new development and acknowledgment of the unique nature of the region. The government has invited WSCC to lead the management of the new reserve, following recent examples of co-management between NGOs and government in the country. This followed discussions between WSCC and the four local government authorities that cover KKRV. WSCC has long supported outreach programs with local governments and schools and promotes an annual Crane Festival, which is hugely popular and includes cultural events and nature education. We have committed to supporting WSCC in managing KKRV through a newly-approved Conservation Impact Fund project, and a matching donor, initially for a period of three years.



The tallest White-naped Cranes in the world—a popular visitor attraction at the festival.

The challenge for the new reserve will be developing a participatory management plan, strengthening a collaboration with local herders and crop farmers to better manage habitat and protect cranes and other wildlife within the reserve. The project will hire guides and guards from local communities, develop some basic infrastructure, such as a small visitor center and signs, and work towards improving women's livelihoods through developing markets for handicrafts sold to tourists.

Life in the KKRV seems timeless, a spectacular landscape shared by people and wildlife, but change is happening, such as climate change affecting water tables and commercial wheat production in surrounding areas threatening to divert precious water for crop irrigation. Understanding and responding to this dynamic will be

an ongoing challenge for the nature reserve management team, but it offers excellent opportunities for engagement of local people to maintain the unique character of the area for present and future generations, a character epitomized by the bugling of displaying cranes in the river valley marshes and undulating grasslands.



The cold waters of the wetlands are supported by winter-frozen soil. Photo by Spike Millington

Cranes of the World AT THE INTERNATIONAL CRANE FOUNDATION

We all need a breath of fresh air, and we have fresh air in ample supply at our new *Cranes of the World* visitor experience in Baraboo, Wisconsin. Our site has been closed for renovation since 2019, so you can imagine how excited we are to share it with you finally. Of course, your safety is our highest priority, and with that in mind, we're planning a phased reopening beginning May 1, 2021.



Siberian Crane, O'Keefe, wades in his expansive new aquatic exhibit.

We've made the reservation process as easy as pie—simply visit our website at www.savingcranes.org/plan-a-visit/ and follow the instructions. There's even a short video there with updated information about visiting. Please check our website frequently for updates to our guidelines.

Remember, members visit our site for free, so now is the time to take a moment to renew or upgrade your membership. Not a member? No problem, you can join

online at www.savingcranes.org/membership/

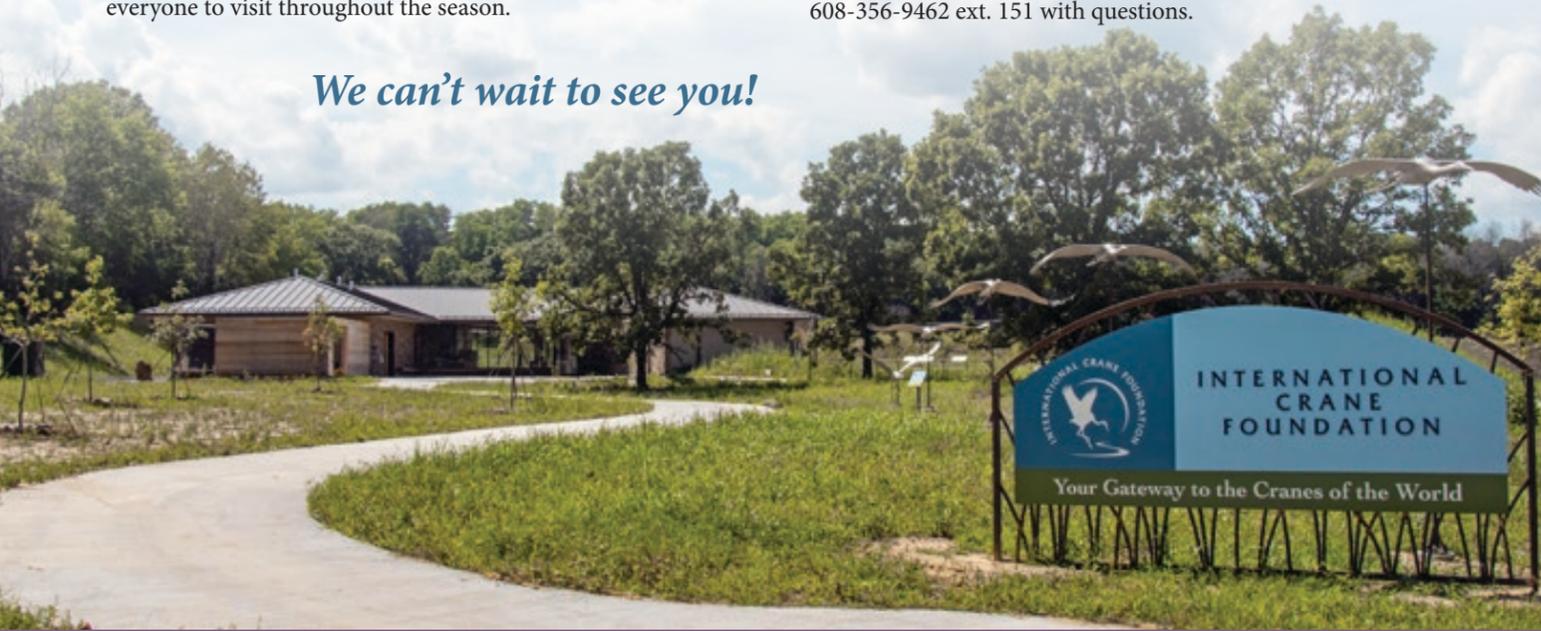
Our members are vitally important to sustain our conservation work, and as a thank you for standing with us during this challenging time, we are planning two special days for just our members to visit before May 1, 2021. Information about these member previews on April 27 and April 29 will be sent via email. Please contact membership@savingcranes.org or 608-356-9462 ext. 151 with questions.

Planning a visit?

Here's what you need to know!

Each visitor, including members, will need to reserve a timed-entry pass in advance for their self-guided tour. You will be free to explore over ten acres of new exhibits! While we are not currently conducting group tours or planning public events with large groups, we will resume these activities as soon as it is safe to do so. We'll be open daily from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. until October 31, 2021, so there will be plenty of slots available for everyone to visit throughout the season.

We can't wait to see you!



Shop for a Cause!

Our popular urban tote covered with origami cranes will bring you good fortune. The 100% polyester textured canvas withstands everyday use while looking great. Pairing it with our origami cranes lucky beanie and the matching face mask completes the set. Each piece sold separately.

To order, visit www.craneshop.org or call 608-356-9462 ext. 171.

<p>Beanie \$32.95</p>	<p>Tote \$85</p>
<p>Face Mask \$34.95</p>	

Musings on Migration

By Hillary Thompson, North America Program Crane Analyst

Whooping Cranes typically leave the breeding grounds in Wisconsin in fall when the snowflakes begin to fly. With their departure comes the end of our busy field season. I think of the winter days when I didn't wake up in the wee hours of the morning thinking of Whooping Cranes. Instead, I sat at my computer with my cat on my lap, summarizing the data we collected over the year. In a "normal" winter, I might make a few trips to check on the Whooping Cranes on their wintering grounds, collect more data, maybe replace a transmitter or two, and check-in with our very dedicated volunteers and partners. But this year, I stayed at my desk, living vicariously through our volunteers, patiently awaiting their reports of the whoopers' whereabouts.

Last year's chicks and their four family groups are all still doing well as the adults pass along the last bits of life skills to their young ones that will help ensure their survival. Their cinnamon feathers are turning white as migration north looms. The new breeding season is right around the corner, and the parents will soon shoo their nearly full-grown offspring onto their next adventure while they prepare for 2021's hatchlings. I am hopeful that our spring field season will look different this year than it did in 2020. Despite some changes in how we do fieldwork, the cranes will continue to fly north, wait for the marshes to thaw, pile up vegetation to make the perfect nest, and let their unison calls ring forth. I am excited to be there to welcome them home for a fresh new year, a new nesting season, and a chance to hatch and raise their chicks to start the cycle all over again.

Have you seen a banded Whooping Crane?

Please let us know at www.bandedcranes.org. Based on the colors of the leg bands, we can tell which crane you saw, and you can read more about their life stories online. Each season, we update individual biographies of released Whooping Cranes in the Eastern Migratory Population. Their bios include field observations such as where they spent the winter, if they nested or hatched chicks, and when they migrated. Since 2001, several hundred Whooping Cranes have been released to establish a new migratory population. By being a member, each of you has played a role in their historic recovery. www.savingcranes.org/whooping-crane-biographies/

A map of Whooper Whereabouts is available at: <https://whoopermap.savingcranes.org/>

Chick W13-20 (far left) hatched in the wild last spring at Horicon Marsh in Wisconsin. He now forages for a few more meals on the wintering grounds in Illinois before heading north with his parents, 38-17 and 63-15. Photo by Bob Bergstrom



We update these numbers each year to visually convey an overall picture of Whooping Crane numbers in the wild and captivity as they continue their fragile recovery.

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The Bugle is the triannual newsletter of the International Crane Foundation. ICF was founded in 1973 by Ronald Sauey, Ph.D. (1948-1987) and George Archibald, Ph.D.

Editor: Betsy Didrickson

Bugle comments or questions? Please email Betsy at Bugle@savingcranes.org or P.O. Box 447, Baraboo, WI 53913. To become a sponsor of this publication, please contact the editor.

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Support Team Craniac

Support our Co-Founder George Archibald and President and CEO Rich Beilfuss and their team, *The Craniacs*, as they set out with binoculars in hand to see how many bird species they can spot in 24 hours! Pledge a specific dollar amount per species or make a fixed gift before the team heads out in mid-May. All funds raised support our far-reaching efforts to save cranes and the places they dance. Pledges or fixed gifts of \$40 or more will receive a one-year membership.



Photos by Kari Stauffer

Summer Tanager and Wilson's Warbler

Questions? Please contact Jennifer Fiene at 608-356-9462 ext. 151 or email info@savingcranes.org.

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