

The
Bugle

Saving cranes and the places where cranes dance!

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A Bold Commitment

*By Mwape Sichilongo, Southern African Floodplains Regional Manager
and Rich Beilfuss, President and CEO*



On a recent visit to the flats:

To get an idea of where the birds were, we visited a fishing camp. The fisherfolk said, there and there and there! The Ranger helped us get there. And there and there. And behold. Congregations of water birds of global significance. In the Kafue Flats. The vision of the Kafue Flats Restoration Partnership is "A Thriving Wetland For All." —Mwape Sichilongo

Photos by Griffin Shanungu



The Kafue Flats in Zambia is the most important floodplain in Africa for Wattled Cranes. More than 3,000 of these majestic birds (a third of the total population) depend on the Kafue Flats for their breeding, feeding, and roosting needs. Local communities who share this floodplain with Wattled Cranes call them, *Nakaala*, meaning "the one who lays only one or two precious eggs." They are the most wetland-dependent of Africa's cranes and important indicators of the health and ecological functioning of this enormous floodplain.

Many other wildlife species depend on the Kafue Flats, too, including the world's only population of Kafue lechwe. This aquatic antelope feeds in the shallow waters of the flooded plains. Endangered Grey Crowned Cranes also find a home on the Kafue Flats, along with more than 470 bird species and hippos and crocodiles that chill in the deepwater pools.

Six traditional chieftaincies also call the Kafue Flats home. They depend on its abundant resources—grazing lands for cattle, river channels for fishing, reeds for building materials, and fertile plains for gardens. As this region becomes more drought-prone due to climate change, the Kafue Flats is an oasis of water in a parched landscape.

The country of Zambia has made an enormous commitment to putting lands into conservation—a remarkable 38% of the nation is designated as national parks, game management areas, and other

public-private protected areas. But Zambia, like many African nations with so many demands for health, education, and welfare, lacks the resources needed to protect and manage these natural areas. The Kafue Flats are no different.

Two national parks—Lochinvar and Blue Lagoon—and the vast Kafue Flats Game Management Areas provide considerable protection "on paper" for this floodplain. But law enforcement is poorly equipped and trained and unable to cover even a fraction of these lands. Neighboring communities are not engaged in educational outreach or awareness to build understanding and support for the parks and find no employment opportunities. The management plan and land-use zoning maps are expired, and there is no funding for research to guide the wise use of floodplain resources.



This perfect storm of decreasing government support and increasing rural demand for resources has spawned many threats to the Kafue Flats. Poaching of lechwe, buffalo, zebra, and other wildlife, feeding the demand for bushmeat from nearby cities, is driving a considerable decline in large mammal populations. Cattle outnumber Kafue Lechwe by more than five to one. Fishers are settling deep on the floodplain, disrupting wildlife movements and making it easier to hunt nests for eggs and chicks. Without clear regulations, mining and other resource extraction are advancing within the flats. Uncontrolled fires and invasive



Photos by Griffin Shanungu

species are widespread. Local communities are unable to find paid employment in the park and find themselves with few options but to heavily exploit the resources of the flats beyond levels that can be sustained in the future. None of these threats bode well for the future of cranes on the Kafue Flats.

What can we do? We can commit to a better future for the Kafue Flats!

This year, we were invited to sign a 20-year agreement with the Government of Zambia to help the Zambian Department of National Parks and Wildlife (DNPW) restore and manage Lochinvar and Blue Lagoon National Parks and the surrounding floodplain. Our agreement follows other organizations like African Parks, WWF-Zambia, and the Frankfurt Zoological Society that have made considerable investments in Zambia's protected areas. Together, we hope to make a brighter future for Zambia's wildlife and people.

The agreement comes on the strength of our successful three-year-project to hire local community members to remove more than 7,500 acres of the invasive shrub *Mimosa pigra* from vital Wattled Crane areas, creating jobs that are scarce and generating enormous goodwill towards the parks.

We will increase support and training for park management and law enforcement, which is essential. We will ensure that research and monitoring lead to better adaptive management of the natural resources of the parks, using measures of success that we can track and achieve. We will also engage with the communities that depend on the Kafue Flats for their survival, working to improve their livelihoods while reducing pressure on park resources, increasing employment opportunities as scouts and land managers, and finding more land-use practices that can be sustained by the flats for the long-term.

We are confident our bold commitment will keep the lechwe roaming the floodplains and that the *Nakaala* will continue laying its precious eggs.

Our 20-year commitment to the Kafue Flats is a dream come true for me!



I first visited the Kafue Flats in the early 1990s and have worked for the conservation of southern Africa's big floodplains ever since. But as the challenges increase over time, I have felt more strongly the need to "go big or go home." I hope we will go big together to restore the immense and magnificent Kafue Flats for Wattled Cranes, Kafue Lechwe, and so much more.

With our team in Zambia, we will restore and manage two national parks and surrounding lands, reduce invasive species, control fires, and improve water conditions. We're hiring people from surrounding communities to serve as community scouts and working with park law enforcement to reduce poaching on the flats. We're working with community leaders to find a shared vision for sustainable grazing and fisheries on the floodplain. We're helping to create better market chains to sell healthy floodplain-raised products. We're monitoring cranes, rare and threatened waterbirds, and the ecological health of the flats to make sure our efforts are working. And when we get it right on the Kafue Flats, we will take these lessons to the other floodplains that support the rest of these magnificent birds.



OUR LONG-TERM COMMITMENTS TO CRANES, PEOPLE, AND PLACES



What inspires you about crane conservation? One of the things I admire most about the International Crane Foundation is our recognition that successful conservation work takes a long-term commitment of our time, creativity, and resources to the cranes, people, and places where we are needed most.

There are many reasons why we make lasting conservation commitments. Cranes are long-lived birds, and many of the threats affect their populations slowly over long periods of time—sometimes, crane population declines are not fully revealed for years. Threats to our lands, waters, and biodiversity require us to dig deep into the root causes of problems like climate change, wetland loss, watershed degradation, invasive species, uncontrolled fires, and other challenges.

None of these offer quick fixes. It takes time and commitment to build genuine trust with local communities, to openly hear their concerns and ideas, and to work together to find conservation-friendly, mutually-beneficial pathways for people and wildlife.

When we first began working at Poyang Lake Nature Reserve in China in the 1980s, I never imagined our commitment would last for decades. But Poyang is the most important wetland in East Asia, and each winter holds almost the entire world's population of Critically Endangered Siberian Cranes, and we knew we must do whatever it takes to keep Poyang thriving.



Whooping Crane chick by Tom Lynn

The threats have been ever-evolving—from large dams to sand dredging to over-zealous photographers—and our support and leadership are no less essential today than when we started.

Likewise, when we committed to bringing back the Whooping Crane to the eastern United States, we knew it would be a step-by-step process of overcoming challenges as they arise. From teaching them to migrate safely for the winter to our major challenges today of navigating new power lines, stopping illegal shootings, and overcoming predators that take eggs and chicks. We are committed to making this effort succeed *with your help*.

Looking forward, we are making new commitments today that will resonate far into the future.

As you read about on the previous pages, I am especially excited about our new 20-year agreement with the Government of Zambia for the Kafue Flats—including the management of two national parks (Blue Lagoon and Lochinvar) and the enormous Kafue Flats Game Management Area on a 2,500 square mile floodplain.

The Kafue Flats is one of the most important wetlands in Africa for wildlife, supporting more than a third of the world's Wattled Cranes, the only population of endemic Kafue lechwe antelope, and more than 470 bird species, including Endangered Grey Crowned Cranes and several rapidly-declining vulture species. It is also a vital wetland for people, providing waters for fishing, grasslands for cattle grazing, and an oasis from drought and climate change. Our motto is "A Thriving Wetland for All," as we commit for the long haul to find common ground between law enforcement and community engagement, flourishing wildlife, and resilient communities.

I am so grateful to our supporters and members who have joined us in committing to a future with thriving crane populations in the wild and healthier communities and landscapes that support them.

Today I ask you to join us in a deepened commitment to take action for cranes. Your year-end gift will make an immediate impact through increased advocacy for cranes around Poyang Lake, management of the Kafue Flats for the benefit of cranes, wildlife, and communities, and reintroducing the iconic Whooping Crane to the wild here in North America. None of our long-term commitments are possible without you.

With gratitude,

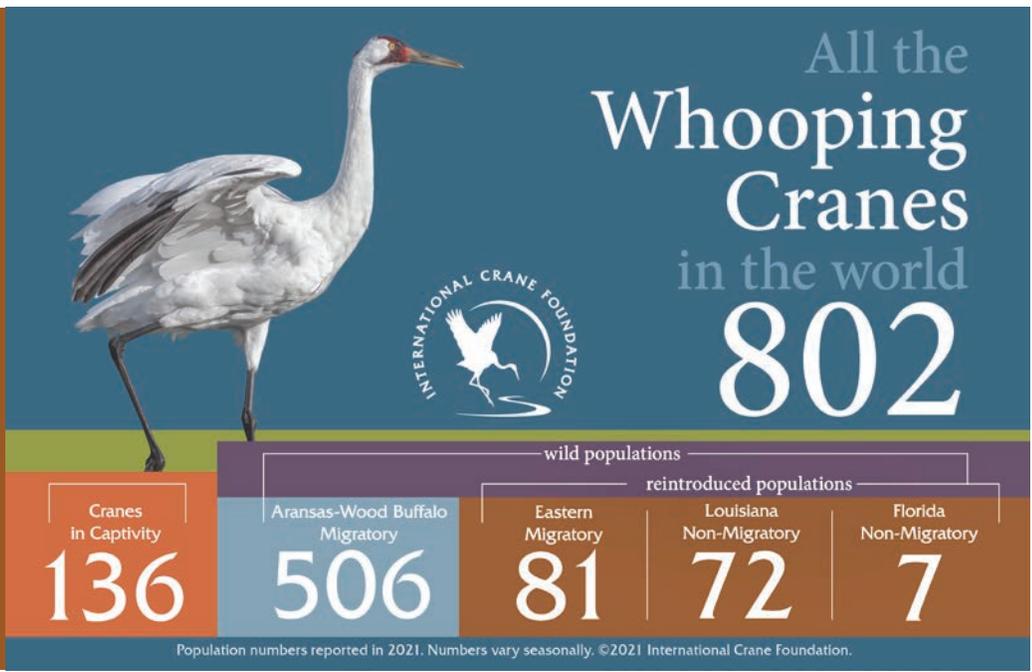
Dr. Richard Beilfuss
President and CEO



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.

This most recent update of our Whooping Crane infographic reminds us that, despite our efforts, the numbers don't always increase each year. The last update showed an overall number of 808. Since then, aging birds in captivity have died, and the global pandemic hampered reintroduction efforts. And every day, Whooping Cranes face a gauntlet of threats in the wild such as illegal shootings, power line collisions, and predation. Yet, our determination continues with our long-term commitment to Whooping Cranes. See below for inspirational photos of the reintroduction of a Whooping Crane chick this fall.



Wild Wampanoag

By Hillary Thompson, North America Program
Crane Analyst

In September, our field team released a captive-reared Whooping Crane Chick named Wampanoag (83-21) at Necedah National Wildlife Refuge in central Wisconsin. Wampanoag is named in honor of the Native American tribe in what is now Massachusetts, where he began as an egg at the Stone Zoo. He was released near W1-06 (first-ever wild-hatched chick in the Eastern Migratory Population EMP) and her mate W5-18 (first second-generation wild-hatched bird in the EMP). The pair watched as we unloaded Wampanoag. They looked at him for a while and slowly approached. They ended up unison calling and scaring him off. It's up to him now to explore the marsh and make some friends.

We released two other captive-reared chicks this fall. All three chicks were raised at the International Crane Foundation and released near other Whooping Cranes. We spent a lot of time monitoring them, hoping to see them figure out life in the wild, such as finding a safe spot to roost or catching some tasty frogs. We saw them associate with other cranes, and now as they migrate south, we look to our tracking volunteers to continue keeping an eye on them and watch them through the winter. Good luck, little ones!





Cranes of the World GRAND OPENING CELEBRATION

By Darcy Love, Cranes of the World, Managing Director

After several postponements, we celebrated the renovation of our exhibits on September 18, 2021. Co-Founder Dr. George Archibald, COO Kim Smith, and Hope the Whooping Crane mascot cut the ribbon to officially open the *Cranes of the World* visitor experience. The new site has been open to the public since May 1, 2021.

Visitors have been raving about the spacious crane enclosures, water features in every exhibit, beautiful artwork throughout the site, and engaging and informative interpretation. If you haven't had an opportunity to visit, we hope you will join us next season. If you have visited this year, we hope to see you again soon. *Cranes of the World* at the International Crane Foundation is located at our headquarters campus in Baraboo, Wisconsin. Open May 1 through October 31 each year. For more information, and to learn about our work worldwide, visit www.savingcranes.org.



Co-Founder Dr. George Archibald and Hope the Whooping Crane mascot begin the day by cutting the ribbon for our Grand Opening Celebration.

Support provided, in part, by the Wisconsin Department of Tourism. In addition, special thanks to our Crane Saver annual sponsors Bob Dohmen, Tom and Kathy Leiden, and Patti Manigault.



Conservation Hero

As a boy, Maurice Wanjala spent significant time exploring nature in western Kenya. He developed such a passion that he created a local community-based organization to protect Saiwa Swamp National Park, home to Grey Crowned cranes. Every day, without funding or transportation, Maurice walked to schools, churches, and public gatherings to teach about the importance of wetlands and inspire others to join his conservation cause.



In 1991 Dr. George Archibald, the Co-founder of the International Crane Foundation, was so inspired by meeting Maurice during a visit to Kenya that he gave Maurice his first grant of \$70 to continue his efforts. With it, Maurice bought a bicycle and began riding longer distances to monitor breeding pairs of cranes, establish environmental clubs, and expand community work.



Now an ongoing partner of the International Crane Foundation/Endangered Wildlife Trust Partnership, Maurice and the Kipsaina Crane and Wetland Conservation Group has established village birding clubs, trained community members to safeguard breeding cranes, expanded awareness campaigns to 32 schools, and initiated the planting of 1.2 million tree saplings to protect wetland areas from erosion. Maurice has dedicated his life to working with communities to protect and restore wetland habitats in western Kenya, home to threatened species like the Endangered Grey Crowned Crane.



In 2020, Maurice won the Disney Conservation Hero Award, recognizing local citizens for their commitment to save wildlife, protect habitats, and inspire their communities to participate in conservation efforts.

Congratulations, Maurice!

“The award is a great honor to me and recognition of the tireless efforts I have made to save these wetlands, home to the beautiful Grey Crowned Crane.”

—Maurice Wanjala

Crane Moon T-Shirt

Here’s a new one for the craniac on your list. The Crane Moon design is boldly portrayed on a black shirt with teal, red, orange, yellow, and green accents. The fabric is 100% soft cotton. Available in adult sizes S-2XL. Order today before they’re gone! Order at www.craneshop.org or call 608 356-9462 ext. 171.



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*Photo of Red-crowned Crane by
Ted Thousand*

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