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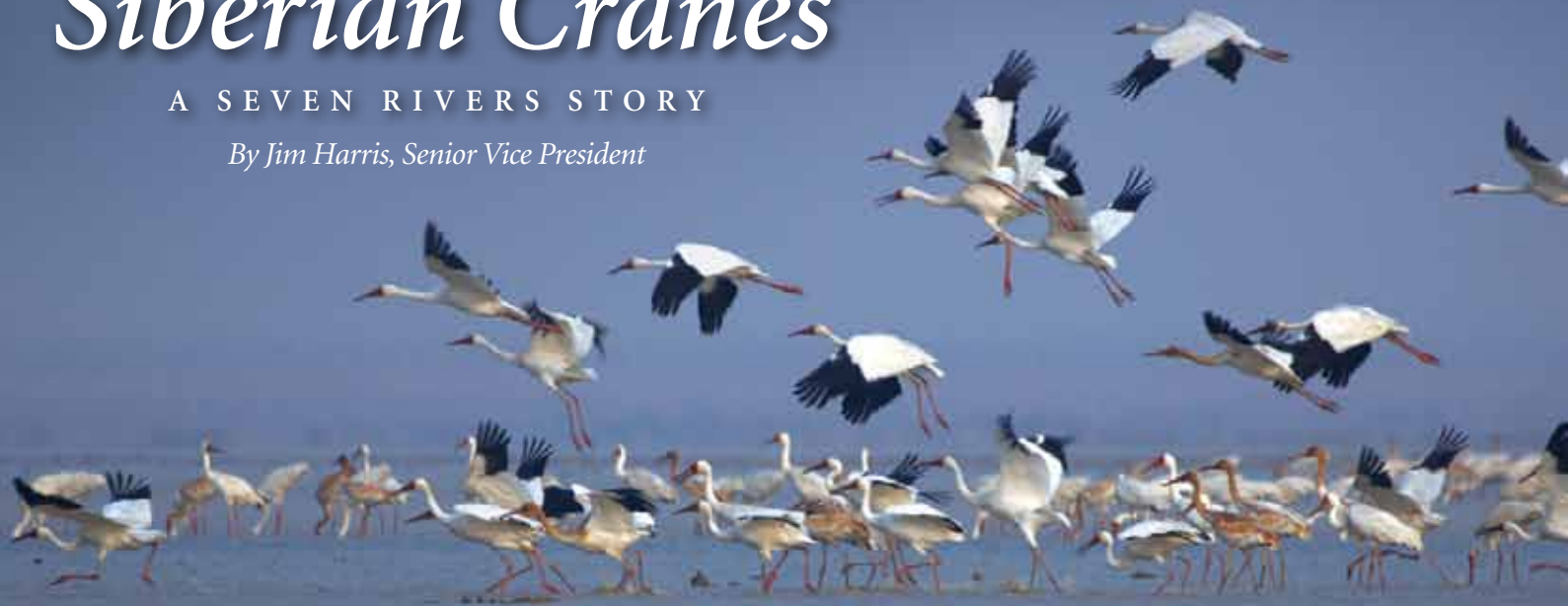
Volume 37, Number 2

May 2011

The Last Place for Siberian Cranes

A SEVEN RIVERS STORY

By Jim Harris, Senior Vice President



The flocks of Siberian Cranes glow white as snow against the muds and murky shallows of Poyang Lake. This vast wetland supports four crane species in winter, and hundreds of thousands of other waterbirds – the greatest concentration in East Asia. The other cranes – a thousand each of the threatened White-naped and Hooded Cranes, and many thousands of the rapidly increasing Eurasian Crane – have changed their behavior in the past 25 years. In those early years, when I first visited Poyang, fear of poachers was so strong that White-naped and Hoodeds would not go far from the safety of water. Now they forage widely over grasslands and fallow rice paddies.

The Siberian Cranes alone have maintained their specialized habits. Unlike other cranes, they almost never leave the shallows

and wet muds where they dig for wild celery *Vallisneria*. Their long beaks excavate tubers that store the plant's nutrients when the green stems and leaves die in autumn.

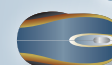
Siberian Cranes evoke the flat, seemingly endless lowlands of Poyang, where water and mud and gray sky merge. They cannot exist apart from these landscapes. ICF research and conservation efforts have long focused on the wetlands of Poyang, where almost all Siberian Cranes on earth, somewhat over 3,000 birds, spend the winter.

The wetlands are highly unusual for their dramatic fluctuations in water levels, up to 10 meters difference between summer and winter. Five rivers feed Poyang from the south and flood in May and June, the waters pouring through a *Continued on page 2*



Almost all of the critically endangered Siberian Cranes winter at Poyang Lake, where ICF has worked since 1998 on studies of the ecology of the cranes and wetlands. Poyang is the largest of many wetlands in the immense Yangtze River Basin of southern China. *Photo by Zheng Zhongjie*

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Continued from page 1 narrow outlet into the Yangtze. The Yangtze floods later in summer when the waters may flow in reverse, from the Yangtze into Poyang. Summer high water allows submerged aquatic plants like *Vallisneria* to grow in abundance while water levels dropping in autumn expose vast areas where the cranes forage in shallows less than 50 centimeters deep. Poyang's great size – 4000 km² in summer – allow cranes and other birds to wander widely in response to changing water levels, winds, and human disturbance.

The mid Yangtze Basin has hundreds of lakes that formerly suited dozens of bird species adapted to the shallows. Yet all but two of the lakes have had their free connections to the Yangtze severed. Dams hold the water too deep in winter for cranes. The other lake still linked to the Yangtze – Dongting – has severe water quality problems. Most of its *Vallisneria* has vanished. For Siberian Cranes, there is nowhere to go in winter except Poyang. Yet Poyang too is changing. The Three Gorges Dam is the largest of numerous dams upriver in the Yangtze Basin. Seasonal flows of the Yangtze have changed. Poyang itself lies downstream from over 9,000 dams on its five tributaries. Poyang is near the capital of Jiangxi, with the most fertile lands and largest share of the province's people and industry. In addition to immediate impacts of human activity, climate change has brought more variability to the system, with two severe droughts in recent years, and a catastrophic flood in summer 2010 that not only caused considerable economic loss, but destroyed most of the *Vallisneria* and other submerged aquatic plants on which the cranes depend.

ICF's goal for Poyang is to deepen our understanding of the ecology of cranes and wetlands so that the needs for these globally significant waterbird populations can be integrated with development efforts now and in the future. In 1998, we embarked on a long-term monitoring effort in cooperation with Poyang Lake National Nature Reserve. We have an expanding knowledge of the linkages among cranes, water levels, and aquatic plants. This focused study has enabled us to learn how droughts and floods affect cranes and their habitats, information urgently needed to sustain the great flocks.

Winter 2010-11 offered the opportunity to watch how Siberian Cranes respond to a lack of their preferred food. ICF's Research Associate James Burnham found behavior we have never seen – Siberian Cranes foraging in the grasslands alongside the other cranes. He has also seen Tundra Swans feeding in sedge-grass areas – in



Major floods in summer 2010 destroyed much of the aquatic vegetation at Poyang that serves as primary food for wintering Siberian Cranes. In winter 2010-11, we observed Siberian Cranes feeding on grasslands far from water, the first time we have seen this behavior in 26 years – probably a sign of food shortage and stress. Photo by Zheng Zhongjie



Intensively used by people for thousands of years, the Yangtze is the third longest river in the world. Recent decades of development have challenged efforts to conserve its extraordinary biodiversity. ICF has focused on Poyang Lake and also wetlands in the upper basin that are home to the vulnerable Black-necked Crane. Map by Green Space GIS

China, swans don't typically leave the shallows to feed. The Siberian Cranes were even aggressively displacing the smaller White-naped and Eurasian Cranes from their feeding places. We are now analyzing what food the cranes were eating and how these foods affect the health and behavior of Siberian Cranes.

The cranes have behaved like birds stressed and in trouble. This event highlights the sensitivity of the Siberian Crane and other waterbirds to changes in water levels, even in summer. A potential result from this winter will be poor reproduction in the brief, arctic summer to follow in Siberia, because the adults will lack the fat reserves – normally gained during winter – for successful breeding. Occasional bad years may not matter, and indeed have long been part of life in the fluctuating wetlands. Yet frequent bad years, such as those brought by unsustainable development, would lead to

extinction for the Siberian Crane.

Through work with government agencies and Chinese researchers, we are committed to strengthening and disseminating the scientific basis for management of Poyang Lake. We hope this knowledge will help guide decisions affecting our biological heritage and the immense benefits that wetlands bring to people.



Support for our work has come from the Windway Foundation, Terry and Mary Kohler, and other ICF members. The Disney Worldwide Conservation Fund and the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service Wildlife Without Borders have supported science-based communication about the ecology and conservation of Poyang.



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The ICF Bugle is the quarterly newsletter for members 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 write Betsy at Bugle@savingcranes.org or P.O. Box 447, Baraboo, WI 53913

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Notes from the President

Wings over the Platte

I am sitting with a group of ICF supporters and friends in an observation blind on the banks of the Platte River in central Nebraska. The air is chilly but a warm glow of anticipation has swept across us as silhouettes slowly take shape with the dim first light of day. The shadowy figures on the river are no longer a mystery – the cacophony of bugling has tipped us off– but as the sun peaks on horizon, the sheer numbers are revealed. Wave after wave, they burst into flight, and unfathomable numbers swirl overhead. We are experiencing one of the world's great wildlife spectacles – the spring stop-over of more than half a million Sandhill Cranes on the central Platte River.

As I watch the soaring Sandhills, my mind drifts from the birds to their river home. The health of the Platte – like the seven rivers around the world where ICF works most intensively – depends on the seasonal and annual fluctuations of water. Heavy snowfall in the Rocky Mountains has given rise to a deep, fast flowing river downstream this year. These abundant waters provide secure roost sites for the great congregations of migratory Sandhill Cranes, along with hundreds of thousands of geese, ducks, and shorebirds, and bode well for species of particular conservation concern – the endangered Whooping Crane, interior least tern, and pallid sturgeon, and threatened piping plover.

About 7% of the naturally-occurring Whooping Crane population stops on the central Platte River each year, and nearly all stop here at some point in their lifetimes. The proportion of Whooping Cranes that use the central Platte River and the amount of time that they spend here are increasing. The Rainwater Basin to the south remains the preferred habitat for the majority of Whoopers on migration, but those shallow, rain-fed wetlands are more susceptible to periodic drought and disease outbreaks than the flowing waters of the Platte River. Flowing waters also inhibit the expansion of dense woodland, providing the wide, open river channels preferred by roosting Sandhills and Whoopers, and the sparsely vegetated sandbars used by nesting terns and plovers.

As with many rivers of the world, maintaining



By Rich Beilfuss

Platte River flows is a serious challenge. The development of the Platte for irrigation, hydropower, and municipal water supplies has altered the natural flows in the river and led to conflicts among basin stakeholders. Decades of tension between wildlife conservation and water management needs came to a head in the 1980s when the massive Two Forks Dam was proposed on the South Platte River to store water for diversion to Denver. The U.S. EPA opposed the project, and after more than a decade of bitter debate, their veto was upheld in 1996. Water demand remains high, however, and groundwater depletion is a significant concern in many areas of the basin.



Photo by Gopi Sundar

Fortunately for the denizens of the river, the Platte has many champions, both local and national. The Iain Nicolson Audubon Center at Rowe Sanctuary in Kearney, NE is dedicated to the conservation of cranes and other migratory birds and their habitats along the Platte River,

and their staff and volunteers commit hundreds of hours each year to the control of woody vegetation to maintain wide channels and open sandbars. The Platte River Whooping Crane Trust and the Nature Conservancy protect and restore thousands of acres of wetlands and grasslands in the central Platte River basin. Regionally, the Platte River Recovery Implementation Program is a unique partnership among federal and state agencies, water users from the three basin states and local and national conservation groups, focused on improving the management of the Platte for the health of the ecosystem and the people that depend on it. And a National Research Council committee, which included ICF's Jeb Barzen, established the scientific foundation for habitat conservation for Whooping Cranes and other species that depend on the Platte. Collectively, these and other efforts bring great hope for the future of the Platte River.

I hope you have the opportunity to visit the Platte River next spring, and learn the great story of this river, its cranes, and its heroes. It is a story with local flavor and global significance in our efforts to secure healthy rivers for all.

Our Living Legacy

Dear Friends,

For many decades, spring came to the upper Midwest but the great white birds did not appear. Yet our generation has seen such change for the better. White Pelicans returned to Wisconsin on their own, after decades of protection in the states to the west. The states of Minnesota and Wisconsin brought back the Trumpeter Swan through successful reintroduction programs.

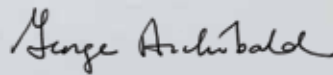
For years now, we – so many individuals and organizations who love cranes – have given our time, money or love for the greatest challenge, restoring the Whooping Crane. Nowhere in the world has a new, self-sustaining crane population been established. We are getting close. This spring, over a hundred Whooping Cranes migrated north to the Midwest, as their ancestors did for eons. Most of our white cranes flew straight to the vast wetlands of Necedah and central Wisconsin. Now the older birds are defending territories. As I write, the pairs are slipping from sight – practicing the secrecy that means nest building and eggs soon to come.

We have had setbacks. ICF and our partners are continuing an intensive research effort to better understand the problem of egg abandonment in late April. See ICF's website (www.savingcranes.org/whooping-crane-conservation.html) for the details of research we are undertaking this spring, and for background on the numerous milestones the reintroduction has already achieved. You will learn more in the letter I will send later this spring, with the season's progress. I have spent a lifetime with these birds. You shared my sorrow when five Whooping Cranes were killed this past winter, shot in Georgia and Alabama, four of them birds ICF had reared and released through the Direct Autumn Release method. We knew these birds by name, by personality.

But, these tall, ancient birds have shown remarkable resilience. We can only imagine the sheets of ice flickering across our landscapes a thousand crane generations ago, a seemingly hopeless crisis for the species. The white crane survived the Ice Ages as many wildlife species did not. Another crisis came from humans – wetlands converted to farmlands, and relentless hunting. The Whooping Cranes fell to a couple dozen birds on earth in the 1940s. With intense human help this species is making it back from the brink. But, right now, the new flock in the upper Midwest needs our special help.

These times, not just for cranes but also for ourselves, demand faith and confidence. We have good reason to hope. Already, ICF aviculture staff are preparing for Whooping Crane chicks we will release at a new site in or near Horicon in eastern Wisconsin. With your help, we continue efforts to achieve this dream for cranes. The growing flock – and their chicks that first see light in our Midwest marshes – will be our generation's legacy.

Warm wishes always,



George Archibald
Co-founder, Senior Conservationist



Photo by Mike Sloat

I invite you to make a special gift this year to help the continued recovery of the Whooping Crane. Please consider joining our *Whooper Keepers* – guardians who contribute \$1,000 or more for this vital work. As a token of our thanks, all *Whooper Keeper* donors will be recognized by a plaque bearing your special message affixed to a bench in ICF's celebrated Whooping Crane exhibit at our headquarters in Wisconsin. Please use the envelope in this issue to record your inscription and send your gift today.



Visit the Cloud Kingdom of Bhutan with Dr. George Archibald

Experience one of the earth's most beautiful places with ICF Co-founder Dr. George Archibald from **November 5-21, 2011**. A Black-necked Crane Festival will be a highlight midway through a journey across the Cloud Kingdom where every valley holds special treasures of nature and culture. If you are interested, contact Julie at (608)356-9462 ext. 156 or email julie@savingcranes.org



The Proceedings of the Eleventh North American Crane Workshop

can be ordered for \$25 from Dr. Barry Hartup. Please make checks out to North American Crane Working Group (or NACWG) and mail to Dr. Barry Hartup, International Crane Foundation, E-11376 Shady Lane Road, Baraboo, WI 53913. Sorry, no credit card orders by mail.

Whooping Crane Pair Enamel Pin or Zipper Pull

This beautiful cloisonné enamel pin was designed exclusively for ICF. To order your pin/zipper pull (\$14.95) call 608-356-9462 ext. 121.

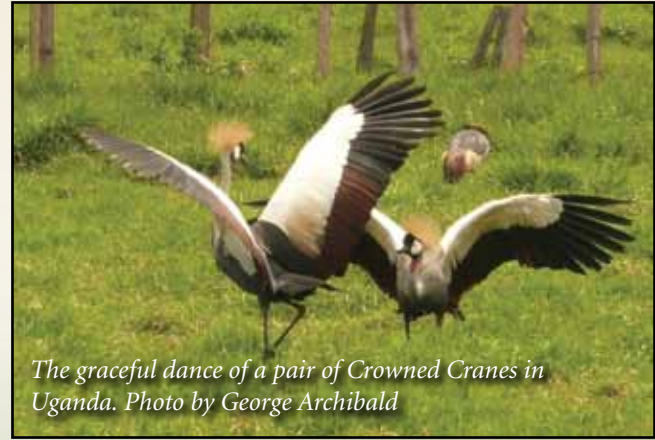


The Sight and Sound of Cranes in Africa

This short summary is adapted from George Archibald's travel diary on the ICF website. For additional photos and to read detailed accounts of George's travels in Africa visit: www.savingcranes.org/travels-with-george-winter-2011-africa.html



It was a joy to escape the cold grip of a Wisconsin winter to the sunny warmth of Africa, and a thrill to meet so many dear friends with whom we have been working for many years. It was also a pleasure to make new friends, especially with farmers that live near the cranes. I was touched by the trials they face. At the end of our month-long journey across southern and eastern Africa, I asked colleague and fellow traveler Osiman Mabhachi what had been the highlight of the trip for him. He thought for a moment and then proclaimed with a wide smile that the five pairs of Wattled Cranes, each with a fledged juvenile on the wetlands and adjacent grasslands of central Zimbabwe, gave him the greatest joy. I concurred. In a country where the instabilities and uncertainties of land redistribution less than a decade ago gave one pause, it was reassuring to know that the pioneer farmers were caring for their cranes. The grassroots efforts of Osiman and his colleagues at BirdLife Zimbabwe had instilled a set of stewardship values in the settlers. Many local people we spoke with throughout our travels enjoy the beauty and grace of cranes. Perhaps cranes are the perfect vehicle to teach us about the limitations of land and water – where humans can secure sustainable supplies of water and other gifts from nature, especially the sight and the sound of cranes.



The graceful dance of a pair of Crowned Cranes in Uganda. Photo by George Archibald

Kidnapped Crane Chicks Rescued In Uganda

By Jimmy Muheebwa, Project Coordinator, Nature Uganda

Editor's note: I received an email from Jimmy Muheebwa shortly after he read in the last ICF Bugle of the illegal shootings of three Whooping Crane chicks in Georgia. In light of the sad news – he shared with me this delightful story of two Grey Crowned Crane chicks rescued in Uganda. Thank you, Jimmy!

Uganda's Grey Crowned Crane population is estimated at about 13,000 birds (Muheebwa 2000). They inhabit most of the country except in the north where Black Crowned Cranes occur. They breed in the seasonally flooding wetlands and forage on farms showing little fear of human presence. Not only is the bird the national symbol for Uganda, but it is also interwoven into culture and beliefs. Its death, for example, if not naturally caused, is believed to attract calamity to the society that meted out the death. The Crane Conservation Project's community awareness programmes, supported by the ICF/EWT Partnership, emphasize respect and tolerance for the birds.

Despite this significance, cranes are occasionally encountered in very compromising human-initiated situations like snaring, domestication and poisoning. Young cranes are the easiest targets and worst affected. This year unfolded badly for two Grey Crowned Crane chicks at Kishanda wetland in Mitooma district where a man illegally captured and kept the chicks tethered to a tree stump in his compound. They shunned the steamed bananas he threw to them for food. The restlessness, frequent hovering and loud cries of the bereaved parents who were attempting to locate their young attracted the attention of Yorokamu Katumbura, a member of the local Wetland Management Committee. Yorokamu called me for help in the search for the young cranes.



Yorokamu Katumbura pictured at left with his grandchildren and the rescued crane chicks. Yorokamu, a member of the local Wetland Management Committee notified Jimmy of the plight of the chicks. At right, Jimmy Muheebwa of Nature Uganda. Photo by Earnest Muheebwa

My passion for cranes has never wavered and despite the approaching

nightfall and long distance to the place, I went straight away to bolster Yorokumu's efforts. The suspected culprit fled upon seeing us approach, an indicator that he indeed was the captor. In no time we located the tethered and traumatized chicks, and removed the ropes on their long legs. It was fast getting dark but we induced the chicks to make a "cry for help" sound which triggered the response of the parents. I judged that the parents had now become aware of the presence of their young. I released the chicks and bade them farewell. They disappeared into the nearby marsh, but kept vocalizing. The following morning they had reunited with their parents. I sighed in relief. They were saved!

Meanwhile, George Archibald, the Co-founder of the International Crane Foundation was already in Africa, with Uganda as part of his itinerary. I deliberately included the now rescued chicks on his travel plan. George was able to see the chicks and parents in the wild, though they had now become timid to human presence. Their survival is a tribute to the awareness programmes of the Crane Conservation Project.



Dr. George Archibald thanks crane custodian Yorokamu Katumbura while visiting Uganda in February. Photo by Osiman Mabhachi



Photo by K.S. Gopi Sundar

Ghosts of Ancestors Past: Wetland Conservation in India

By K. S. Gopi Sundar, ICF Research Associate – India

Between 1999 and 2010, over 30% of wetlands in the districts of Etawah and Mainpuri in Uttar Pradesh, in northern India, were lost. Most of these were converted to agriculture fields, and some were lost when towns and cities expanded into the countryside. A few resident Sarus Crane pairs were ousted permanently from their territories, and many more pairs experienced a

lowered quality of habitat in which to raise chicks each year.

With a population density of over 400 people per sq. km. and increasing, this loss of wetlands is not surprising. What is surprising is that there were so many wetlands to begin with. Local farming is entirely manual due to relatively small land-holdings, and this practice alone likely enabled the retaining of many small patches of wetlands for the Sarus to breed in. The larger wetlands were community lands – the

entire village owned these areas and harvested a plethora of products. The poorest people who did not own land made their entire living out of these common lands – a practice that spans centuries. The bonus to the landscape was the thriving Sarus Crane population, and many other bird species.

In recent years, the immediate need for farming land eroded traditional practices leading to the loss of wetlands that we see today. However, the beneficiaries of the converted land were a few powerful individuals. A common response in India to such injustice is filing Public Interest Litigations, and some farmers did so. The Supreme Court of India recently provided a verdict that reconnects with the past. The Court ruled that such conversions are illegal, mandated that they be stopped, and stipulated that already converted areas be restored. “Our ancestors were not fools,” stated the Bench, and cited the various benefits of common lands that led to this ancient practice in the first place.

Implementing this judgement on the ground will prove challenging, but there is now a legal basis to prevent conversions of wetlands and to ensure the restoration of many. The farmers and the Supreme Court have achieved what millions of dollars of expenditure for conservation could not – a long-term strategy that will allow farmers and cranes to continue coexisting. The unison call of the Sarus Cranes shall resonate yet amid the rice and wheat fields of Uttar Pradesh.

Migration of Demoiselle Cranes in Pakistan

By Ahmad Khan, Director Regional Programmes, Pakistan Wetlands Programme, WWF Pakistan

Wasta Lake, explored in 2001 as part of my Master’s degree research through the University of Wisconsin-Madison, is an important resting ground for thousands of Demoiselle and Eurasian cranes migrating through Pakistan. Following a survey in 2003, I visited this year to observe crane migration. Hafiz Noor Ul Haq from Mardanzai, the leader of the tribe that owns the lake, has been steadfastly present to take care of the lake and its resources. In addition to protecting birds, he offers assistance to nomads and pedestrians passing by.

This year, Wasta Lake was 2/3 full due to good rains and snow over the winter. The first flock of Demoiselle cranes passed through on March 5, with 40-50 cranes passing each day through March 21. On the morning of March 21st, 14 Demoiselle Cranes landed on the north shore of the lake, and at 3:30 in the afternoon flocks started pouring from the sky. By evening, the flock had grown to 400-500 with a large number of cranes arriving late at night. In the morning we estimated 12,000 cranes feeding on the plain north of Wasta Lake. The congregation of Demoiselle Cranes left the ground around 9:30 am

and split into many flocks to travel north. On March 22, flocks started arriving at Wasta Lake in the evening and continued until late at night. The next day, an estimated 15,000- 18,000 cranes left the lake around 6:00 am, with 12,000-13,000 still present at 9:00 am. In total 40,000 Demoiselle Cranes left the area to continue their journey to their northern breeding grounds.

Wasta Lake, a heaven for migratory birds, is a critical resting area for migratory cranes and needs attention. Although there are political and security issues in the area, it is still possible to work with the local community to conserve cranes. The tribal system and traditions are a benefit. Through our discussions spanning a decade, Hafiz Haq is deeply committed to efforts to protect Wasta Lake from illegal crane hunters, and to protect the plains from motorcyclists and herders to ensure safe resting, feeding, and passage for cranes. If not done today, this will not be achieved any time in the future. Protection of the lake, the cranes, and other biodiversity needs a well thought out programme involving all the stakeholders.

Demoiselle Cranes landing in the Wasta Lake Plain in Pakistan for feeding before they depart again. Photo by Ahmad Khan



Around the World

Light and Shadow: Preliminary Results of the Third Crane Survey in Ethiopia

By Günter Nowald, Director, Crane Information Centre and General Business Manager Kranichschutz Deutschland (NABU, WWF, Lufthansa)

After expeditions in 2007 and 2009 to the Ethiopian Crane Survey Project area, a third expedition was organized in early 2011. This project is a collaboration between Crane Protection Germany, NABU (Nature and Biodiversity Conservation Union) federal working group for AFRICA, and the Ethiopian National Wildlife and History Society (ENWHS). This year, 3 teams followed the paths of the earlier expeditions to survey crane wintering sites for crane roosts and important wetlands.

On our way to Debre Zeyt, a village located south of the Ethiopian capital Addis Ababa, we realized that the region has been undergoing massive changes. Increasing foreign investment has created many trading and manufacturing enterprises along the main road. Traffic has greatly increased. A major shift was seen at the Chelekkeleka Chefe wetland, which is one of the main roost sites for cranes. On February 4, 2009 more than 17,000 Eurasian Cranes were roosting in the shallow waters, but during the crane count on the morning of January 30, 2011 we only observed about 250 cranes. A new asphalt road to Addis Ababa now crosses the nearly dried-out wetland. Although we did not have time to investigate the reason for the absence of water, it was most likely caused by pumping for agriculture and road construction.

In 2009, Chelekkeleka Chefe wetlands were a paradise for cranes and other waterfowl. In 2011, however, shallow water areas and birds have vanished. Photo by Dr. Günter Nowald



The construction of large greenhouses near wetlands, such as the Koka reservoir and Lake Tana, also has a negative impact on crane habitats. Water is pumped to produce fresh cut flowers, significantly reducing water levels in the wetlands. The flowers are mainly destined for foreign markets.

At undisturbed roost sites, we observed minor changes in crane population numbers relative

to previous years. The situation, however, was very different at disturbed sites. Increased use of mobile water pumps for farming can cause rapid and dramatic changes in the wetlands, affecting the cranes. For example, approximately 9,150 Eurasian Cranes roosted at the shallow Akaki Pool on January 31, 2011, but during

a second observation just two weeks later, the wetland was completely pumped dry and the cranes were gone. Fortunately, we discovered Chuche wetland south of Butajira, on February 2, 2011. In addition to the 840 Eurasian Cranes present, we saw 54 vulnerable Wattled Cranes.

Vulnerable Black-crowned Cranes were seen at numerous wetlands. While 496 Crowned Cranes, an unexpectedly high number, gathered in the Chima wetland south of Lake Tana, the relatively small proportion of juveniles present raises concerns. Losses of eggs and juvenile birds likely resulted from significant disturbance due to intensive use of wetland areas.

Shimelis Aynalem, an Ethiopian biologist, is working for the conservation of cranes at Lake Tana. The project is supported by the Crane Conservation Group in Germany, Lufthansa and the NABU federal working group for AFRICA. Monitoring, education, and creating a management plan for the wetlands through the purchase and lease of property are his priorities for the cranes.



Pumps at the Koka Dam.

Sarus Reintroduction in Thailand

After many years of building a sound captive population of Eastern Sarus Cranes at three major breeding centers in Thailand, the Zoological Park Organization of Thailand is releasing three costume-reared cranes produced at Korat Zoo, at a reservoir in northeast Thailand not far from Cambodia. The cranes are being held in a pre-release pen in the wetlands from mid-January through mid-April and then will be released. Each crane will carry a satellite radio-transmitter. Sarus cranes were extirpated from Thailand many decades ago.



Photo by Nuchjaree Purchkoon



Local people are actively involved in crane surveys at every opportunity.



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Whooping Cranes Return to Louisiana!

*By Sara Zimorski, Wildlife Biologist,
Louisiana Dept. of Wildlife and Fisheries*



*Photo by Sara Zimorski,
LA Dept. of Wildlife and Fisheries*

In 1939, an aerial survey of the White Lake Wetlands Conservation Area

in southwest Louisiana revealed 13 Whooping Cranes, confirming the presence of a resident flock. This was the last year Whooping Cranes nested in Louisiana. The following year a hurricane scattered the birds and only 6

returned to White Lake. That small number of birds continued to decline until only one remained in 1947. In 1950 that last Louisiana Whooping Crane was captured and taken to Aransas National Wildlife Refuge (NWR) in Texas.

ICF, through the leadership and determination of George Archibald, began broaching reintroduction discussions as early as 1977. Eventually, George connected with Louisiana conservationist and go-getter, Sara Simmonds. Sara found wetland biologist and ornithologist, Dr. Sammy King, the Director of the Wildlife Research Cooperative Unit of the USFWS at Louisiana State University. Then things began to happen in Louisiana. In August 2009 the Louisiana Dept. of Wildlife and Fisheries (LDWF) began working

on a plan to reintroduce Whooping Cranes in Louisiana. With approval from the Whooping Crane Recovery Team (WCRT) in April 2010, a cooperative effort between numerous federal, state, and private organizations began to move forward. ICF played a critical advisory role to the project, as experiences gained from previous reintroductions were integrated into the design and implementation of the project.

The U.S.-Canadian Recovery Team allocated eggs to the project and chicks were hatched and raised at Patuxent Wildlife Research Center in Maryland. In February 2011, the experimental, non-essential rule for the Louisiana reintroduction was approved and published in the Federal Register. Because Whooping Cranes are designated as an endangered species, this is a necessary step to intervene on their behalf. On February 16, 2011, thanks to Windway Capital Corporation, 10 juvenile Whooping Cranes left the cold Patuxent winter behind and were delivered to their new home in Louisiana. The birds were placed in a top-netted pen and while a bit wobbly after their long journey, they seemed thrilled to be in water and off snow-covered frozen ground. The very next morning one bird was seen catching and eating a crawfish, a favorite food item, just like any other Louisiana resident! Each bird was marked with bands, and a GPS transmitter for identification and post-release monitoring. On March 14th they were released from the top-netted pen into the adjacent 1.5-acre open pen where they quickly learned to fly in and out. The birds are exploring the surrounding marsh but are still returning to the open pen for the food that is provided there.