

The ICF

Bugle

Inspiring a Global Community

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Cranes, Yaks *and* Floating Sedge Mats

By Jim Harris, Senior Vice President, and Li Fengshan, Yangtze and Black-necked Crane Programs Leader

When the International Crane Foundation began its studies of the Black-necked Crane, very little was known about the species. Thanks in large part to thirty years of effort by our own Dr. Li Fengshan together with Chinese colleagues, we now know a great deal about the numbers, distribution and status for this unique crane living in high altitudes of the Tibetan-Qinghai Plateau. Its population has more than doubled during this period, but the future for this species is highly uncertain.

We are expanding our activities in western China at Ruoergai, one of China's largest wetlands, and at the headwaters of the Yellow River on the edge of the Tibetan-Qinghai Plateau. Ruoergai supports the largest breeding population of Black-necked Cranes in the world – more than 2,000 cranes. The Tibetan people who inhabit Ruoergai revere the cranes, and call them *trung trung*, meaning lucky and propitious. *Continued on page 2*

Birds, fish and insects abound in Ruoergai Marsh, but now growing numbers of people in China also wish to experience nature. As remote wetlands become famous for their beauty, we hope that these visitors to Ruoergai Hua Hu Scenic Park will increasingly value wetlands and conservation. Yet uncontrolled tourism can also impact wildlife – such as the Black-necked Cranes that now nest close to large numbers of tourists who trek into the marsh on wooden boardwalks. Photos by Jim Harris





Continued from page 1

All waterbirds leave Ruoergai during the cold months, while the shaggy, shadowy yaks endure, moving across the frozen landscape depending on grass conditions.

The Ruoergai marsh faces growing challenges from climate change, overgrazing and economic development – especially from tourism that brings buildings, roads, and disturbance. To address the overgrazing challenge, we are working with Sichuan University and Ruoergai National Nature Reserve on studies of cranes, and the impacts of yaks and sheep on wetland habitats and the surrounding grasslands. The herds have grown dramatically in recent years. This research requires great caution. Floating sedge mats extend across dark, deep water in the wetland, where the cranes safely walk and nest, but surfaces sink and shift dangerously if human visitors venture away from solid ground. Soon we will focus on hydrological change in these fragile wetlands, and will establish a monitoring program to document population changes and their relation to both natural and human disturbances.

In July, we organized teacher training and a student summer camp to initiate an environmental education program at Ruoergai to help address these threats. Together we developed a classroom curriculum about Ruoergai marsh, Black-necked Cranes and local culture in both Tibetan and Mandarin. Three schools at Ruoergai with over 400 students now use the curriculum. Immediately after the camp, the Black-necked Crane Network met for the fourth annual exchange of research and conservation results across the range of this species. This gathering of researchers and managers was the largest network meeting and for the first time a specialist from Tibet attended.

Board Member Heather Henson presented Black-necked Crane puppet performances to teachers, children, and crane researchers at an array of events. Her three-dimensional model of the flyway, richly decorated with science and culture, had almost as much impact as her one-person toy theater, where she moved characters across a tiny stage depicting an ancient story of a crane-maiden. Heather has also provided financial support for education work at Ruoergai.

Ruoergai, a breeding ground, and Cao Hai, a wintering ground, are the two ends of this crane flyway. We organized four study exchanges for school teachers and nature reserve managers between Ruoergai and Cao Hai. People at both sites come to understand the full life cycle of the cranes, threats and challenges facing this species, and the importance of working together for conservation.



The vast landscapes of Ruoergai Plateau support large numbers of domestic yak and sheep. Grazing affects vegetation and soils. We are studying the relationship among nesting Black-necked Cranes, livestock, and rangeland management.



The Generosity of Stiftung Feuchtgebiete

Major support for Ruoergai comes this year from Germany. Stiftung Feuchtgebiete (Wetlands Foundation) was created in 2008 by Director Emeritus and former President of WWF Germany (1989-2004) Carl-Albrecht von Treuenfels. Together with his wife Maria-Anna and three friends, Christian Ratjen, Claus-Dieter Schmidt-Luprian and Michael Tintelnot, he established this private organization with capital of almost 1 million Euros. In addition, forty curators provide annual donations to the fund. We played an important role for the idea. Carl, author of several books on conservation including two about cranes, wanted to collect funds in Germany for protection of wetlands especially for cranes and waders in Germany and worldwide. From the beginning, part of the annual income was designed to support our work. The office in northern Germany near Hamburg in the heart of a Eurasian Crane breeding area is run without cost to the foundation on an honorary basis.

With the help of the Frankfurt Zoological Society serving to manage and transfer funds internationally – we have received more than \$200,000 since 2009, including our activities in seven great river basins across the world. Since Carl has travelled several times to Chinese and Siberian Crane places, he has arranged that Stiftung Feuchtgebiete give grants for projects in those regions – including our work for Ruoergai this year. Our deepest thanks!

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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

By Rich Beilfuss



George Archibald (right) proudly displays his award with Stuart D. Strahl, President & CEO of the Chicago Zoological Society, and Rich Beilfuss.

We know the hard truth. Cranes are in trouble in many places, and their homes are under increasing assault to meet the needs of the seven billion of us who share our finite planet. Tragic stories, like the mass poisoning of endangered Grey Crowned Cranes in Zambia (see page 6), provide a painful reminder about what is at stake.

What does it take to “save” a species? Our 42-year commitment to saving cranes has taught us many things. It takes a deep, long-term commitment to the places that cranes depend on, including the people who live there. It takes sound science and plenty of creativity to solve problems in those places. It takes lasting funding to keep it all going. And perhaps most of all, it takes passionate and effective leadership on the ground.

The International Crane Foundation has always been a fertile training ground for budding conservation leaders from around the world – because we have made a significant commitment to identify, cultivate, and encourage such leaders. This summer we sponsored a group of seven young Zambian ecologists for a month of intensive conservation leadership training, as part of a cooperative training program with Louisiana State University (special thanks to Dr. Sammy King of the Cooperative Fish and Wildlife Research Unit at LSU!). The Zambian team included our own Zambia Crane



and Wetland Program leader Griffin Shanungu, four ecologists working for the Zambian Wildlife Authority, each of whom is responsible for monitoring one of the major “crane floodplains” of Zambia, and two ecologists who work for organizations we closely partner with – World Wildlife Fund Zambia and BirdWatch Zambia. It was amazing to see how their energy and ideas inspired each other! Diilwe Syamunto – who returned back to Zambia to champion conservation efforts at the Kafue Flats, the most important wetland in Africa for Wattled Cranes – told me, “The experience and exposure I received from visiting and training at the International Crane Foundation is one that will shape my career and future going

forward...I have never been outside Zambia before, so seeing and experiencing how things are done here has inspired me to do more for my country for the conservation of wetlands and the many cranes and other birds therein.”

In October, we hosted Olivier Nsengimana, a remarkable young veterinarian from Rwanda who was awarded the prestigious Rolex Enterprise Award for his efforts to save Grey Crowned Cranes and Mountain Gorillas from extinction in Rwanda. Through Olivier’s leadership, Rwanda is the first country to take on the illegal capture and trade that is decimating wild populations of Grey Crowned Cranes across East Africa. Olivier now spearheads our efforts to safeguard Rugezi Marsh, one of the key breeding grounds for cranes in the Rwanda. Like so many of the leaders we train, Olivier is smart, strategic, and unbelievably dedicated.

Throughout this issue of the Bugle, you will read about important leadership development that occurred in China (our cover story) and in Myanmar (on the next page), and many inspiring leadership highlights in our newly released Annual Report

(page 7). All of the leaders in our stories are following in the footsteps of the man who started it all, George Archibald. George recently received the prestigious George B. Rabb Conservation Medal from the Chicago Zoological Society. Many of us joined together in Chicago to celebrate George Archibald’s lifelong dedication to conservation leadership on behalf of cranes and their habitats. Congratulations George for receiving this honor!

It takes all of us to save cranes, and the places they depend on. I am proud that so many great people turn to the International Crane Foundation for knowledge, leadership, and inspiration. Your support makes it happen, and together, we are making a difference.

Training the Next Generation of Wetland Conservationists in Southeast Asia

By Tran Triet, Southeast Asia Program Coordinator



Sarus Cranes face many challenges across their range in Southeast Asia, including agricultural development from shrimp and rice farming in the Mekong Delta to rubber plantations in the Northern Plain of Cambodia, that threaten the remaining wetlands in the region. As a result, wetland conservation is critical for the future of Sarus Cranes and many other species. But, how do we know if a wetland is healthy and can support cranes and other wildlife? Do we identify

the plant species that are present? Study the hydrology of a wetland? Or assess how local people are using a wetland? These are the important questions that students and their teachers discussed at the recent Wetland Training Course in Myanmar. The twelfth annual course, organized by the International Crane Foundation and the Mekong Wetland University Network, brings together college students from the Mekong River basin to learn about wetland ecology and, ultimately, to develop a network of scientists that will lead future wetland conservation in Southeast Asia. The course is unique to the region, and provides valuable hands-on experience to students.

This year, 27 students from the Mekong basin, Malaysia, and Japan traveled to Myanmar to attend the course, which included classroom lectures and field practice at wetland sites near the training venue, Yezin Agricultural University. The course culminated in a five-day field study at Inle Lake, the second largest natural freshwater lake in Myanmar. Inle Lake is a breeding area for Sarus Cranes, and is well known for its wetland biodiversity, beauty, and cultural heritage. The students were a fantastic group of young researchers and lecturers, full of energy, eager to learn, and enthusiastically engaged in all training activities. The future of the Sarus Crane in this region is closely tied to these young wetland conservation leaders, and we see a positive future in their eyes.

Students report that they learned more during the three-week course than a semester in the classroom!



The wetland course students practice their field techniques under the watchful eye of Dr. Tran Triet. Photos by Nguyen Hoai Bao and K.S. Gopi Sundar

Whooping Cranes 2015 IT'S ALL ABOUT THE NUMBERS

By Karis Ritenour, Whooping Crane Field Technician



Photo by Mike Sloat

Though the world's wild population of Whooping Cranes has grown from fewer than 20 to about 400 over the last 65 years, it's still all about the numbers! Our scientists track each year's progress towards recovery of this species by joining with partners to count nests, chicks, and migrating families. Here are some interesting stats from 2015.

This year the original wild flock of Whooping Cranes that migrates between Canada and

Texas built 68 nests producing 23 fledglings in Wood Buffalo National Park. In past years there have been more successful nests, but the lower number this year may be due to the summer drought. A more accurate population estimate will come when the cranes are surveyed on their wintering territories at Aransas National Wildlife Refuge in Texas, where we hope the population may have grown to as many as 330 cranes!

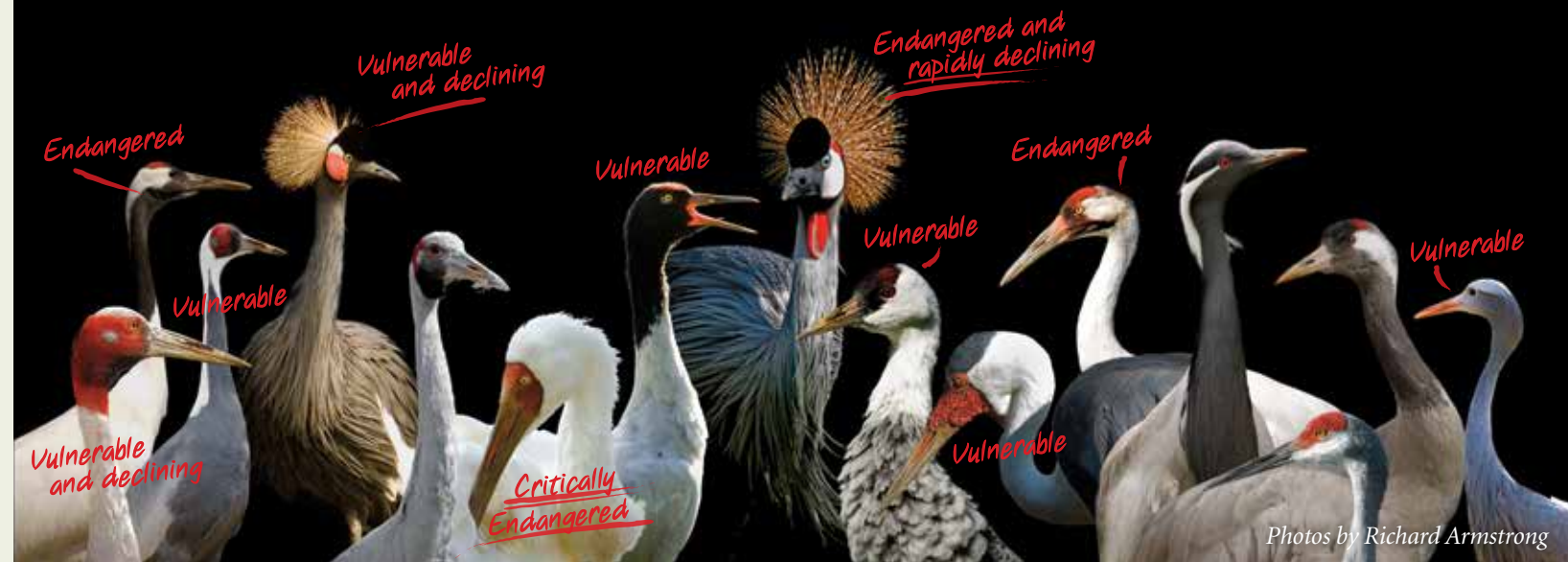
The reintroduced cranes of the Eastern Migratory Population built 37 nests in Wisconsin this year, and hatched 24 chicks, both exciting records for this 15-year-old population. Only 2 of the chicks have made it to the fall and they are now getting ready to start the migration with their parents. By the end of 2015, this population will exceed 100 cranes, including 3 groups of chicks reared this summer using costumes and puppets. Two chicks were raised by their parents at Patuxent Wildlife Research Center in Maryland and were released at Necedah National Wildlife Refuge in Wisconsin, in hopes they will be adopted by wild Whooping Cranes. A group of six chicks learned to fly with Operation Migration's ultra-light aircraft. The piloted aircraft are now leading the chicks south to their wintering area in Florida. And a group of eight Whooping Cranes reared in our isolation facility are now learning how to be "wild" at Horicon National Wildlife Refuge in eastern Wisconsin, including meeting adult cranes with whom they will migrate south.

The newest wild Whooping Crane population, the reintroduced non-migratory population in Louisiana, now includes about 37 cranes. This year, 4 pairs nested; 3 of these were couples nesting for the first time. Though none of the eggs hatched, these nesting attempts by such young birds are a big step in the right direction.

What do these 2015 Whooping Crane numbers add up to? Step-by-step progress toward the recovery goal of over 1,000 Whooping Cranes sharing our wetland landscapes from the swamps of Louisiana to the salt marshes of the Texas coast to the freshwater wetlands of Canada and Wisconsin!

11 of the 15 Crane Species Face Extinction

We have a plan to save them, but we need your help.



Photos by Richard Armstrong

Here's the hard truth: 11 of the world's 15 magnificent crane species face extinction.

Help get the red out of the crane family photo!

Threats to cranes from human activity – degradation and loss of habitat, wildlife trafficking, illegal shootings, power line collisions, poisoning, and lack of fresh water – are daunting. That's the bad news. The good news is that humans can also be the solution. And with your help, we will be!

Right now, the International Crane Foundation is on the ground in remote places across the world implementing the science-based solutions needed to save cranes. We are working to:

- Improve the livelihoods of people who share their homes with cranes
- Protect the fresh water that sustains healthy wetlands for cranes
- Restore the lands that cranes – and many other species – depend on
- Ensure safe passage for cranes on their long migrations

We are so grateful to you for supporting this important work. Thank you.

The cranes aren't out of the woods yet.

The International Crane Foundation is committed to a future where all 15 of the world's crane species are secure. While the threats are severe and the timeline is urgent, we are confident in our plan for success. But we need your help.

Please consider making a donation to the International Crane Foundation today. Your donation ensures that we are able to do what it takes to protect the world's cranes. We simply can't do it without you.

Thank you!

WAYS TO GIVE

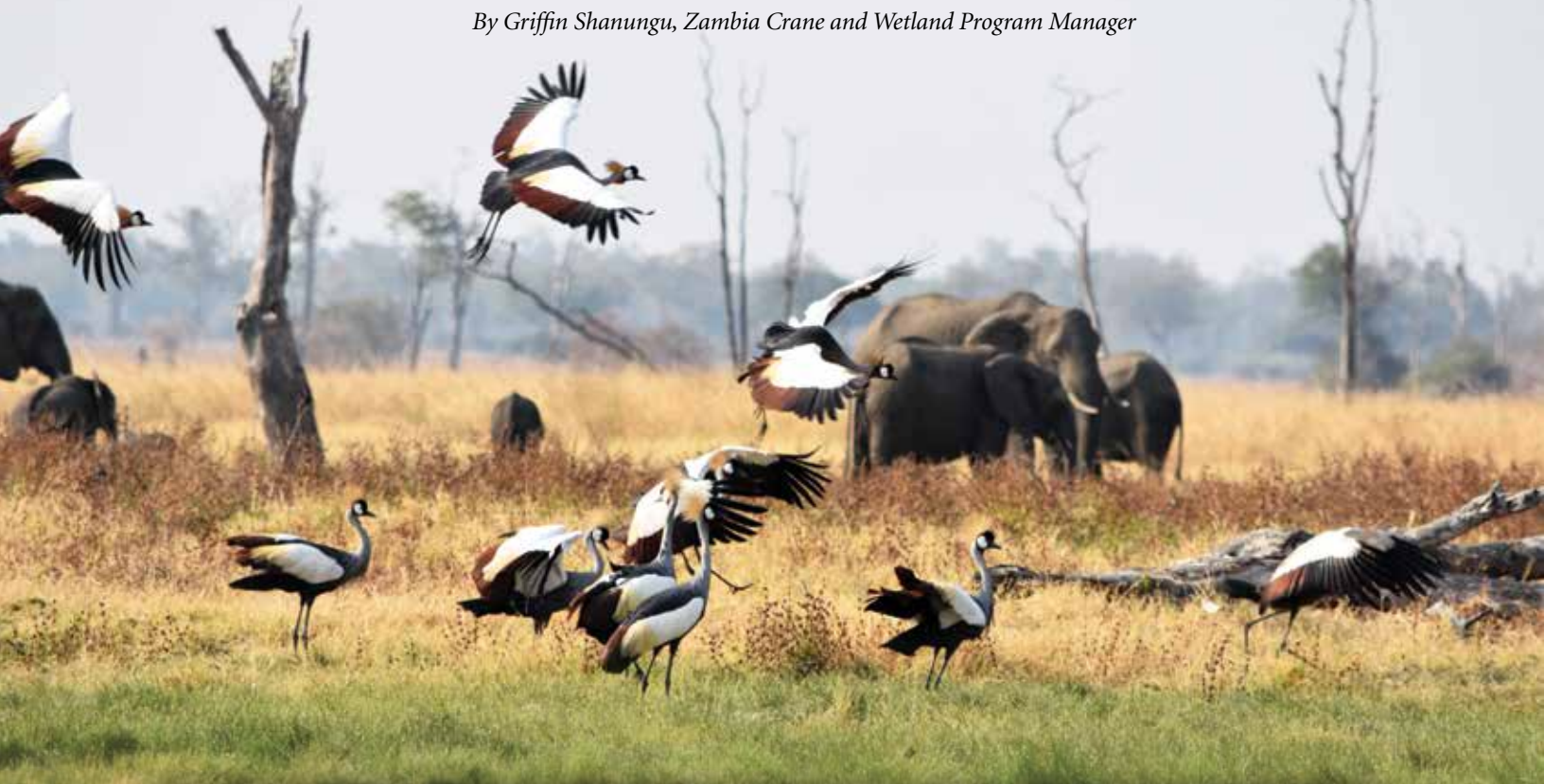
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 Donate at: savingcranes.org, or
 Return the envelope in this issue!



Photo by Zheng Zhongjie

Grey Crowned Crane Poisoning in South Luangwa

By Griffin Shanungu, Zambia Crane and Wetland Program Manager



South Luangwa National Park is Zambia's premier national park, and hosts hundreds of Grey Crowned Cranes. The cranes are easily seen here feeding, dancing and doing what cranes do – often in the company of other wildlife like these elephants. Photo by Griffin Shanungu.

The Luangwa Valley in Zambia is one of the strongholds for the iconic Grey Crowned Crane, and on my recent visit there, I was shocked by news of a massive die-off of these endangered cranes. A flock of 43 cranes was found along the banks of the Luangwa River, with 35 individuals already dead, and 8 still alive but too weak to fly. Analysis at the University of Zambia confirmed our worst fear: poison was the most likely cause of death.

Previously, we thought that Grey Crowned Cranes in Zambia were mostly confined within protected areas and that they rarely ventured into croplands. But we found grain in the crops of the 35 dead cranes, suggesting that they are foraging in maize fields outside protected areas. We do not know if this suspected poisoning incident was unintentional – through the misuse of a pesticide – or if the cranes were specifically targeted.

The International Crane Foundation is committed to preventing



Dead Grey Crowned Cranes on the Luangwa River. Photo by Mwamba Sichande

future crane poisonings. Our work here is urgent! Thanks to the generous outpouring of support in response to this tragedy, we are taking immediate action. We hired an ecologist working with the Zambian Wildlife Authority to learn how Grey Crowned Cranes are using the surrounding agricultural landscape, how they are perceived by local farmers, and what we can do to ensure that poisonings like this never happen again. Our efforts here will build on our global experience in solving crane conservation challenges in agricultural landscapes – like our success in reducing the impact of Sandhill Crane feeding on Wisconsin croplands. We identified how cranes damage corn, tested a safe, affordable substance that is distasteful to cranes, and

teamed up with a private company (Arkion) to provide this deterrent to thousands of farmers. Together, we will find another win-win solution, for cranes and farmers. This time, in Zambia.

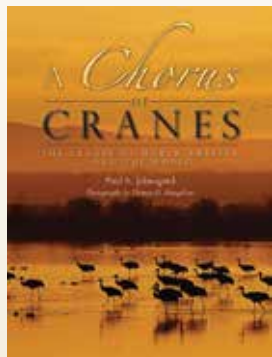


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Crane Outline Pendant and Chain

Our new bestseller! Sterling silver “Unison Call” crane pendant with 20” sterling silver chain. Price: \$54.99.



A Chorus of Cranes

Accompanied by the stunning photography of Thomas D. Mangelsen, *A Chorus of Cranes* (dedicated to George Archibald) details the natural history, biology, and conservation issues surrounding the abundant sandhill crane and the endangered whooping crane in North America. Paperback | 9” x 12” | 208 pages | 38 color photographs, 41 figures, \$29.99.

In this glorious book, Paul Johnsgard and Tom Mangelsen have captured the very essence of these ancient birds – their beauty, grace of movement, and fascinating lives. It is a must for crane lovers, birders, and all who love the natural world. —Jane Goodall



Holiday Card Packages

Festive crane drawings created especially for the International Crane Foundation by artist, Kim Russell are depicted on these unique and whimsical cards. Price: \$30.00 for a package of eight 5” x 7” cards.

Shop online at www.craneshop.org, email: giftshop@savingcranes.org, or call 608-356-9462 ext. 135.

Just Released: Annual Report for April 2014-March 2015

It was a busy and successful year for crane conservation. The latest annual report will take you through all of the highlights – from increased crane counts in South Africa to the discovery of a new threat to Sarus cranes in India and all points in between. The annual report also provides a complete financial summary, so you can continue to be confident in your investment in the International Crane Foundation. Check it out and feel great about the incredible conservation work you make possible at www.savingcranes.org/annual-report/. Please call 608-356-9462 if you would like to receive a print copy.



Members Love Behind-the-Scenes Tours at our Headquarters!

During our recent Member Appreciation Day, members enjoyed exclusive opportunities to attend popular talks, activities, and workshops. Here, members get an up-close look at new equipment in our Crane Care Unit, while little mascot “Archie” demonstrates the top-notch care provided by our veterinary staff. Photos by Deb Johnson





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At the close of another year, we gratefully pause to
wish you a warm and happy holiday season.

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