

The ICF *Bugle*
Inspiring a Global Community

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Should I Stay or Should I Go?

By Anne Lacy, Crane Research Coordinator- North America



Since ancient times, the distinctive bugling of migrating cranes overhead signaled the change of seasons. We listen for it, we expect it. Unfortunately, ancient poets and historians did not mention what happens to our natural signals during years of unusual weather events. Who knew that water temperatures in the tropical Pacific could influence crane behavior in Wisconsin! In *El Niño* years like the one we are experiencing, warm ocean water influences weather

worldwide, often causing warmer temperatures and southerly winds to dominate in the Upper Midwest. If you are a migratory bird, this can create a confusing situation – should I stay, or should I go? The “corn-ucopia” of plentiful waste grain from recently harvested fields may signal to a crane that it is time to fatten up for the long journey. Then again, the warm weather and southerly winds might suggest that there is no need to hurry south just yet, *Continued on page 2*



Large congregations of Sandhill Cranes provided a wildlife spectacle near our headquarters in December 2015. *Photos by Ted Thousand*



Read about
prairie restoration
on page 6.

there is plenty of food here and the weather is quite nice!

Recently, near our headquarters in Baraboo, Wisconsin, the staging areas of harvested cornfields were filled with thousands of Sandhill Cranes foraging for food in preparation for their long journeys. But this year, the birds congregated in unusually high numbers, and remained much longer, due to the favorable conditions. A not-yet-frozen stretch of the Wisconsin River with its wide, shallow, sandy bottom provided open water for safe roosting at night. The smorgasbord of agricultural fields in close proximity to these favorite sections of the river guaranteed good eating. Add to this, the confluence of uncommonly high temperatures and south winds during November and December, and the result was cranes staging for an extended period of time.

We know that Sandhills are adaptable and can tolerate colder conditions, allowing them to store food energy while waiting for that perfect migration day. But with each day that the cranes stayed, enthusiasts lining the rural county roads to view the profusion of cranes at a time when they are traditionally long gone, grew more and more puzzled. Were they

staying because of the warm weather, or was there more to it? *Would the cranes stay through the winter?*

As it turns out, *El Niño* also brought an abundance of rain to the Wisconsin winter landscape – instead of the typical snowfall. This caused a rare December flooding event on the Wisconsin River, making the water much too deep for roosting. Luckily, the heavy rain flooded the fields as well, giving thousands of Sandhills a place to sleep safe from predators, but only temporarily. Strangely, this flooding event in December turned out to be the cue for the multitudes finally to leave on migration. There was still plenty of food available, and the temperatures were tolerable, but with a lack of safe roosting areas, the birds departed during the third week of December. These winter observations were fascinating for scientists and bird watchers alike. The cranes' behavior showed the importance of having safe roosting spots, a reliable food source, and tolerable temperatures in the same place, at the same time. Or perhaps, as this folktale at right suggests, they really did lose an epic ball game with the animals!

Photos by Ted Thousand



Why Crane Leads Birds South in Winter

There are Creek, Muskogee, Ojibwe, and Cherokee versions of this "How and Why" folktale which attempts to explain the great mystery of why many birds fly south every winter. In this tale, Crane is portrayed as the king of the birds.

In order to resolve an argument about strength and courage, the leader of the animals, Bear, and the leader of the birds, Crane, decided to play a ball game to determine the winner. The animals and birds divided up into their respective teams, but Bat was left out because she didn't walk upon the earth like animals, nor did she lay eggs like the birds. Finally, because she had teeth, she was accepted as an animal and quickly joined their team. The animals and birds played their ball game all day long, but alas, there was no clear winner by the end of the day. Finally night fell, and as soon as it was dark, Bat proved her tremendous advantage with her superior night-flying abilities. She easily won the game for the animals. As the victorious player, Bat chose the birds' punishment. She decreed that the birds would have to leave the area for half of every year. This is why still today, Bat is an animal and why Crane leads the other birds south every year.

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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

By Rich Beilfuss

Saving Cranes and the Amazing Places They Need to Survive



Cranes depend on some of the most amazing places on earth. But what does it mean to "save" a place? Some might imagine putting up a fence and locking the gate. But at the International Crane Foundation, we believe that the most lasting conservation solutions include, not exclude, the people who share their landscapes with cranes. Two recent success stories demonstrate our creative approach to saving places.

When I first visited the Zambezi River Delta of Mozambique in 1995, it had just emerged from a decade of brutal civil war, and almost nothing was known about the remaining wildlife. In search of the endangered Wattled Cranes that once flourished in this remote area, we conducted an aerial survey of the delta. We discovered a treasure worth saving – an immense mosaic of grasslands, savannas, and mangroves with African elephants and buffalo hiding deep in the floodplain swamps, and 58 breeding pairs of Wattled Cranes. We also observed tens of thousands of people whose livelihoods depended on the fisheries, forests, and other resources of the delta. Recognizing that this area represented one of the last opportunities on Earth to save a naturally-functioning river-delta for wildlife and people, we launched a now 20-year effort to save it. We conducted research on cranes, buffalo, and other species, explored ways for local inhabitants to sustainably use the delta's resources for a better life, and implemented measures to restore natural flooding patterns. Over time, our efforts brought national and international awareness to the delta, culminating with the 2005 designation of 1.7 million acres of the Zambezi Delta's south bank as Mozambique's first *Wetland of International Importance* under the Ramsar Convention. Last December brought more great news – the government of Mozambique agreed to add the Zambezi Delta's north bank to the Ramsar designation, increasing the conservation area to nearly 5 million acres – **the largest protected coastal delta in the world!**

Across the Indian Ocean, another conservation success story was unfolding at the same time. Tran Triet, our Southeast Asia Program Director, was conducting his dissertation research on the remnant wetlands of the Mekong River Delta of Vietnam when he discovered the natural wetlands of Phu My and a small population of vulnerable Sarus Cranes. Because most of the delta's 10 million acres of wetlands were drained to grow rice, we sought to secure the few remaining wetlands for Sarus Cranes and other rare waterbirds. We approached Kien Giang Province to protect the Phu My wetlands, but provincial leaders – under national pressure to increase agricultural production – refused. After learning that local Khmer people were weaving intricate handicrafts



Sarus crane habitat research at Phu My, Vietnam. Photo by Bao Hoa

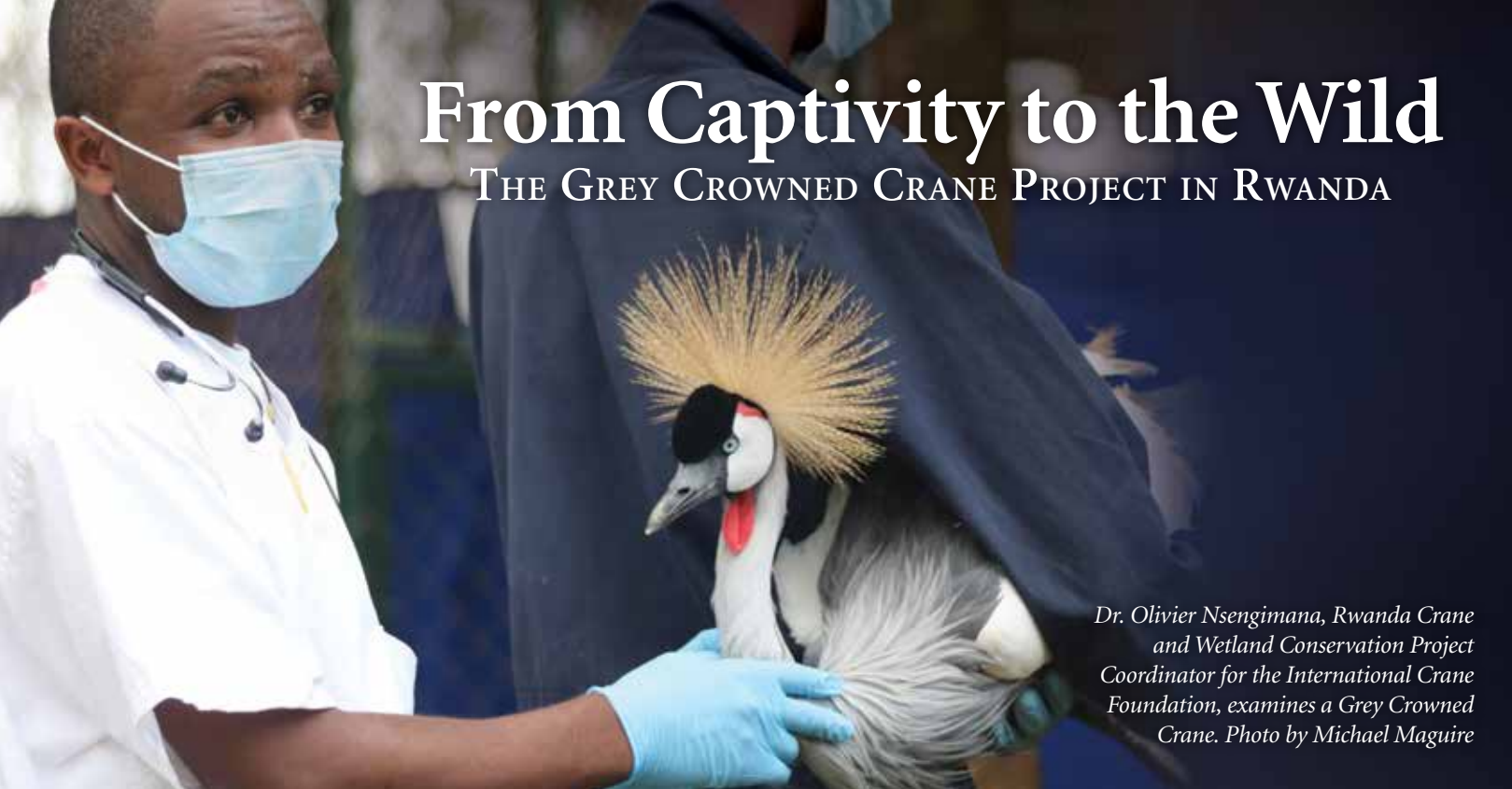
from the wetland sedge *Lepironia* found at Phu My, we approached the province with a different proposal. We wanted to link biodiversity conservation with livelihood improvement for the people who share this wetland – through the sustainable harvest, production, and sale of *Lepironia* handicrafts. They gave us two years to demonstrate success, or

they would convert the area to rice agriculture. Our proposal was awarded a World Bank Development Marketplace Award, and the Phu My *Lepironia* Wetland Conservation Project was created in 2004. A two-year project has now continued for more than a decade. We delivered on our promises: local families now earn a much higher income, Sarus Crane numbers are increasing, rare *Lepironia* wetlands are protected from development, and we helped preserve Khmer traditional handicrafts. We are also providing environmental education for school children and offering intensive training and research opportunities. Our project has won four international awards for its innovative approach and achievements, but most notably, we just received word that Kien Giang Province declared **Phu My Species and Habitat Conservation Area** Vietnam's newest protected area! These stories give me great hope for saving more of the amazing places on which cranes, and all of us, depend.



From Captivity to the Wild

THE GREY CROWNED CRANE PROJECT IN RWANDA



Dr. Olivier Nsengimana, Rwanda Crane and Wetland Conservation Project Coordinator for the International Crane Foundation, examines a Grey Crowned Crane. Photo by Michael Maguire

By Dr. Barry Hartup, Director of Conservation Medicine

Grey Crowned Cranes are endangered for a host of reasons, ranging from habitat loss to power line collisions and poisonings. In Rwanda, where there are less than 500 remaining in the wild, the main threat is live trade. Cranes are taken out of marshes as eggs or chicks, and sold to wealthy individuals or businesses because they are believed to be symbols of good fortune. The people who keep cranes in captivity, usually unaware of the cranes' protected status, often cut their feathers, or worse, break their wings to prevent escape. In 2014, Rwandan veterinarian Olivier Nsengimana, a Rolex Young Laureate award winner, began a groundbreaking public awareness and amnesty campaign to tackle the problem. (See February 2015 Bugle article for background on Olivier's pioneering work.) His extensive public outreach program, supported by the Rwandan government, has led to voluntary registrations of illegally held Grey Crowned Cranes, with the plan to surrender cranes for restoration to the wild.



Dr. Barry Hartup consults with Rwandan colleagues on common parasites of birds. Photo by Olivier Nsengimana

To date, more than 190 captive cranes have been registered and removed from mostly sub-standard conditions. Each registered bird is evaluated for its potential to be safely reintroduced into the wild. The goal is for the birds to fly free at Akagera National Park in eastern Rwanda and to bolster wild crane populations there. Of course, reintroduction of these fragile cranes is gradual, as most have little experience as free-ranging birds. The prolonged reintroduction occurs in close proximity to park headquarters where protection is provided and threats from predators are minimal. Most birds molt their damaged feathers during that time and re-grow healthy ones, while exercising their previously little-used

flight muscles. The well-trained team is doing extraordinary work to return as many birds as possible to the wild.

In December, I was honored to travel to Rwanda to lend equipment and assistance to this effort. Upon arrival, I led a workshop on crane medicine and avian laboratory diagnostic techniques for 16 young Rwandan veterinarians and biologists at the Gorilla Doctors

headquarters near Volcanoes National Park. I spent the remaining days of my visit assisting Dr. Nsengimana's team at the quarantine facility in Kigali to evaluate the health of 36 confiscated cranes. Some of the problems were significant, such as wing and leg fractures, both old and new, along with complications from damaged feather follicles, likely caused by the pulling of feathers, and foot problems stemming from walking on hard surfaces while in captivity.

The next phase of the project focuses on the cranes left behind due to their poor prospects for a successful life in the wild. The International Crane Foundation is working with Dr. Nsengimana, who

is proposing a sanctuary where many of the non-releasable cranes will be viewed by the public to raise awareness and support for crane conservation measures throughout Rwanda, and may provide offspring for re-stocking depleted wild populations. The sanctuary will also tackle the difficult problem of illegal trade and promote the health and resiliency of wild populations. On behalf of the International Crane Foundation, I want to extend my deepest gratitude to the dedicated team of veterinarians and volunteers who are working to protect the endangered Grey Crowned Cranes of Rwanda, as well as to Suzanne Hall Johnson for her generous support of conservation medicine at the International Crane Foundation.

Where Do Our Cranes Go in the Winter?

Updates are underway to our on-site crane accommodations and you can help!



This bonded Whooping Crane pair, Chip and Crockett, had not laid an egg in 7 years. After moving into newly remodeled quarters, Chip quickly laid an egg!

The nearly 115 cranes that live at our headquarters are important to our mission. They help educate thousands of people every year about conservation and many are also part of a critical genetic bank of the world's most endangered cranes. Since these captive cranes are not able to migrate as they would in the wild, we are often asked where they go when the weather turns cold here in Baraboo, Wisconsin. The cranes live, usually as pairs, in houses made especially for them with large landscaped yards. The houses line several roads in an area we affectionately call, Crane City. These little "cranedominiums" are designed to keep our cranes safe from the elements. With grass underfoot and sky above, their outdoor space allows them to stretch their wings, forage for food, and interact with their companions. Many even have waterfront property in the form of small ponds.

While we can assure you that our cranes are safe and happy, their accommodations need continuous updating. We are working to remodel crane houses, providing new insulation, enhanced fencing and top netting, and improving opportunities to create lasting pair bonds. These upgrades reduce our overall maintenance costs for repairs and provide improved conditions for our breeding birds. In addition, improvements ensure that our husbandry staff won't have to work so hard to access unfrozen water for the cranes during our polar winters.

We have raised just over half of the funds needed for this important remodeling project. **We hope you will use the enclosed envelope to help us reach our goal. Your donation will ensure that all of our cranes get the accommodations they deserve. We – and the cranes – can't thank you enough for your support!**

New and remodeled cranedominiums line the streets of Crane City. Your donation will help us continue this work.



WAYS TO GIVE

Call: 608-356-9462
Donate at: savingcranes.org, or
Return the envelope in this issue!

LEAVE A LEGACY FOR CRANE CONSERVATION

By naming the International Crane Foundation in your estate plan

A planned gift to the International Crane Foundation allows your legacy to soar on the wings of the world's most ancient birds. We will use your special gift to advance crane conservation worldwide for future generations.

"My personal legacy gift to the International Crane Foundation helps ensure that cranes will always have places to dance. I invite you to join me in the Crane Heritage Society."

—Dr. George Archibald

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Twelve Million Seeds

By Michael Hockey, Field Ecology Intern

What more delightful avocation than to take a piece of land and by cautious experimentation to prove how it works? What more substantial service to conservation than to practice it on one's own land? —Aldo Leopold

I arrived at the International Crane Foundation for my internship with the Field Ecology Department in late February 2015, after graduating from the University of Southampton (UK) in the previous year. I was committed to a career in conservation and wanted to gain experience internationally. Once I saw the setting for my new workplace, I knew I would be happy – the headquarters site in Wisconsin is set in a sprawling and beautiful landscape of woodland, wetland, and prairie. Previously farmland, most of the land has been restored to a natural state as part of the Ecosystem Restoration Program that was initiated in 1979. Various experimental plantings have also provided valuable information on restoration techniques, and the site now serves as a model for future restoration efforts. On my first exploration of the grounds, my roommate pointed out the prairie plants poking up through the snow. I was intrigued...



In addition to regular duties, interns at the International Crane Foundation conduct an independent project during their tenure. This allows for personal development and exploration of particular interests. I was seeking new skills in applied ecology and project management, so when a prairie restoration project was suggested, I eagerly took on the challenge. A great many factors must be considered when conducting a restoration. How big is the site? How should it be prepared for planting? How much seed? Which species should be planted? When do tasks need to be completed? To answer some of these questions, I looked to the findings from the Ecosystem Restoration Program. For the 3-acre site, I determined that I would need approximately 12 million seeds totalling about 66 lbs! I would need to collect seed for 75 different

species, including 11 grasses and 64 forbs (forbs are flowering plants that are not grass or sedge) from June to November, which would then need to be cleaned, sorted, and weighed. The project site would need to be cleared of trees and debris, burned in the spring, herbicide applied, and a cover crop planted to stabilize the soil. In the fall, it would then need to be sprayed and burned again, dragged to create a good seedbed, and then finally planted. How would I coordinate this much work and make key decisions as a newcomer to this field? I worked extensively with the expert staff, and their assistance was invaluable. They allowed me the authority I needed to build confidence and skills as a project manager, while lending their advice and expertise. I also had help with seed collection from many volunteers. Roaming the prairie in their company and sharing the arduous tasks, made the whole process much more enjoyable.



“success” of this project can only be judged over time, but I am sincere when I write that, so far, the project has been a resounding triumph. This experience has given me so much more than just highly beneficial skills for my future career in conservation. The professional contacts and the friends I made will be treasured forever. The beauty of this landscape etched itself into my memory, with the detail and depth of Aldo Leopold’s prose. Internship over, I headed back across the pond for home. Just as I left a lasting impression in Baraboo with my twelve millions seeds, so too, the International Crane Foundation has left its mark on me. We are grateful for the support for this project from Kettle Moraine Garden Club and from Half-Aker Designs.



Conservation Clubs in Kenya

During recent visits to schools in Kipsaina in western Kenya, Maurice Wanjala, Kenya Crane and Wetland Conservation Program Manager, shared the story of *How the Crane Got Its Crown* with Conservation Club students. The students performed the roles of the different animals in the story and one wore the golden crown. The exercise was the result of a teacher-training workshop attended by club leaders who learned new approaches to environmental education. Many cultural stories about cranes were exchanged during the workshop. Visiting educator and former International Crane Foundation intern, Monique Picon (pictured above), explained that the crown helps camouflage the cranes in tall grass. To the delight of her audience, and to explain the biological reasons for various crane adaptations, she dressed a student with feathers, a bill, and gular sac. The students learned that Grey Crowned Cranes are rapidly declining in East Africa due to habitat loss, poisoning, and illegal trade. These school visits are important, as they encourage club leaders and school principals to take steps to strengthen environmental education programs.

Each school will be adopting a nearby wetland, where they will monitor cranes and threats to the wetland regularly, and one principal announced plans to fence off the wetlands behind his school to prevent livestock grazing on wetland vegetation.

Over the course of the next year, Maurice will continue visiting these schools to monitor progress and collect information about the adopted wetlands and their cranes.



Maurice Wanjala shares the story of "How the Crane Got Its Crown," passed down from his grandmom and granddad, with Conservation Club students.



Help The Craniacs Break Their Bird-a-thon Record

In honor of George Archibald’s 70th birthday year, we are asking for your support in helping his team break their Bird-a-thon fundraising record. *The Craniacs* will attempt to surpass last year’s record of 139 identified species, but even more importantly, they aim to make it their best year yet for fundraising. Every dollar raised will support the International Crane Foundation’s work to further crane conservation! Support this annual effort by visiting www.savingcranes.com/bird-a-thon/.



International Crane Foundation

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Baraboo, WI 53913-0447
www.savingcranes.org

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2016 Calendar of Events



Opening Day! | Friday, April 15, 2016

Visit us from 9:00 a.m. – 5:00 p.m. to learn about cranes and our global conservation programs on a guided tour with a naturalist. Enjoy exploring our nature trails, take home a memento from our unique gift shop, and discover our interactive exhibits.

Annual Midwest Crane Count | Saturday, April 16, 2016

Join over 2,000 volunteers across the upper Midwest for the Annual Midwest Crane Count. As a citizen scientist, you can help us monitor the return of Sandhill and Whooping Cranes to their northern breeding grounds. For more information, email info@savingcranes.org.

Mother's Day Event | Sunday, May 8, 2016

Moms get in FREE on Mother's Day. Treat your mom to a relaxing day in nature with guided tours, family activities and nature hikes.

Endangered Species Day | Saturday, May 21, 2016

Celebrate successes, while also learning about the threats still facing our endangered cranes. Special programs and engaging activities for all ages will focus on the crane species most in need of our help.

Cranes of the World Festival | Saturday, August 6, 2016

Bring the whole family to celebrate the 15 crane species spread across the globe. Enjoy guided nature walks, arts and crafts, and special educational programs throughout this fun day.

Good Neighbor Day | Saturday, October 15, 2016

Bring a non-perishable food item donation to the International Crane Foundation for the Baraboo Food Pantry and receive FREE admission to see the world's cranes.

Closing Day | Monday, October 31, 2016

You can stay in touch after we close for the season by signing up for our email newsletter and following us on social media.

Visit www.savingcranes.org or call 608-356-9462 to learn more about upcoming events.

Photos by Deb Johnson



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