

# The Bugle

Saving cranes and the places where cranes dance

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## Tung-tung

### BLACK-NECKED CRANES IN THE LAND OF HIGH PASSES

By K.S. Gopi Sundar, Director, Program SarusScape and  
Swati Kittur, Research Associate, Program SarusScape

**S**tark is the first word that comes to mind. Seemingly bare mountains in all shades of brown and red rise high into the deep blue sky dotted with fluffy clouds. Peaks sprinkled with fresh snowfall break the palette in the distance. We are in Ladakh – the Land of the High Passes and the southernmost breeding area of the Black-necked Crane!

We cross the second-highest motorable pass in the world at just over 17,000 feet, driving by prayer flags fluttering in the cold wind, and then descend into a verdant valley at about 14,000 feet. Horses, yaks, goats, and sheep graze peacefully amid marmots, voles, pikas, and the Kiang – a wild ass

adapted to the high altitudes. In the distance, still waters reflect the lone *Tung-tung* sitting on a nest containing two new eggs.

A small bit of the extensive Tibetan plateau juts into the eastern portion of the Indian state of Jammu and Kashmir. Bordering China, this area adds tremendous natural and cultural diversity to the country, with a past as rich and sweeping as the plateau itself. Ancient customs live on in the harsh mountains even as the present races to catch up. We cover over *Continued on page 2*



*Above: The Puga Valley has a few unfrozen months when an incredible diversity of wildlife, livestock, and the Tung-tung are all sustained. Right: A few Tung-tung pairs nest amid breathtaking scenery and large Kiang herds. Photos by Swati Kittur and K.S. Gopi Sundar*



Heated water and steam create surreal sulphur springs at Puga.



Continued from page 1

450 miles driving across Ladakh, peeking into wetlands and lakes, looking for the *Tung-tung*. Mounds of stones on the roadside with prayers carved on each are signs of modern travelers praying for safety and good weather in the unpredictable mountains. Carvings on the cliff faces of hunting scenes and animal herds are much older – reminders that Neolithic people walked these high Himalayas before Buddhism arrived. Smiles light up deeply wrinkled faces of the incredibly hospitable people, as they call out a friendly “Juley!” everywhere we go (Juley is a gorgeous word that stands for anything from hello to thank you – a feel-good reference that is exceedingly Ladakhi). As we sip hot tea, tasty with salt and butter, we do not feel like visitors, but are home. The *Tung-tung* is a great conversation starter. Graziers, both nomadic and resident, know the bird and its habits. They wonder where the bird comes from, and how high it flies. Songs are sung for the *Tung-tung*. The crane is a part of the mountains as inseparable as the summer flowers, and its sonorous call is known to all.

Unique to the Tibetan plateau, the Kiang is believed to be the inspiration for the mythical unicorn.



We pass a bubbling, steaming opening in the ground and the smell of sulphur fills our noses. The warm, acidic waters are teeming with flies. A geyser splutters – constantly throwing water into the air. As the water flows into a marsh, amid the sulphur, two cranes dig for aquatic plants. Two Kiang cross the road ahead of us, warily trotting, and then dashing off in a gallop. Nine chicks of the Ruddy Shelduck jump into the clear blue-green waters of the Indus River as we approach, and are quickly joined by their anxiously honking parents. We veer away from the river to a large lake perched between the mountains. Some areas of the lakeshore are white, reflecting the harsh afternoon sun. Salt crystals accumulate each year after the frozen waters melt. Previously mined for salt, the lake now stands largely undisturbed. Nests of Great Crested Grebe line the banks, as families of Bar-headed Geese swim on the clear waters.

At one end of the salt lake, a crane takes off and flies straight to a nest. Incubation shift completed, its partner stands up and flies off to feed. The new incubator settles into the nest as a gust of wind briefly disperses a swarm of mosquitoes. And so it has been for millennia. We count six nests, two families with young of the previous year, several pairs that had not yet nested, and a few singletons catching fish in a roadside wetland. All this between the altitudes of 13,500 and 16,000 feet!

Many wetlands, marshes, and lakes remain unvisited. Reluctantly, we start back trying to ignore the nesting buzzards and the Himalayan Agamas displaying beside ancient rock-carvings. This small visit has raised many questions. How will the *Tung-tung* fare as warming climates melt snow faster? As habits of the graziers change, will the wetlands still support cranes? We need to learn more about these important issues. We know we will be back.

*Our colleagues at the Nature Conservation Foundation generously organized the trip. For the knowledge and sights they shared so freely, we are grateful to Saloni, Ranjini, Stanzin, Karma, and Dorje.*

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The 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

### Communities Safeguard Cranes and Wetlands in East Africa



**Drink Crane Coffee! Get Your Crane ATM Card! We Support the Cranes!** The street signs and slogans loudly proclaim that few places on earth are as welcoming to Craniacs as Uganda.

The majestic Grey Crowned Crane, Uganda's national bird, is at the center of their national flag, coat of arms, currency, and is the namesake of the national soccer team as well as banks, hotels, and restaurants across the country. But, the Grey Crowned Cranes of Uganda, and all across East Africa, are in serious trouble. Widespread loss and degradation of their wetland breeding grounds, coupled with intensive capture for domestication, have resulted in an 80% (or worse) population decrease over the past few decades. Once abundant, Grey Crowned Cranes are now classified as Endangered on the global IUCN *Red List of Threatened Species*. In a decline that feels

hauntingly familiar, their close cousin, the Black Crowned Crane, vanished from the wild in Nigeria although they too were once abundant, and exalted as the national bird. Fortunately, important strongholds still remain where we can make a difference for Grey Crowned Cranes. The future of Grey Crowned Cranes, like so many species of endangered cranes around the world, now rests with the people who share their lands with cranes.

This past May, I led a group of supporters across Uganda and Rwanda, to meet the local communities that have dedicated their lives and livelihoods to sustain the most important breeding grounds for Endangered Grey Crowned Cranes. In Rwanda, we visited Rugezi Marsh, a vast peatland that provides a range of important goods and services to the surrounding community.

In Uganda, we focused on the communities around Kabale and Kaku Kiyanje wetlands of southwest Uganda where large numbers of cranes still breed. Nakateete Secondary School, Kilumba women's group, Kanyogoga farmer's group, Nyakabungo Community Group, Kasheregyenyi Friends Group – we came to honor these crane custodians and many others. But in the spirit that is so warmly and

genuinely African, they celebrated us! We were humbled by their generosity. Joyful songs, dances, and drumming erupted in every community we visited, from the youngest school kids to the most senior civic leaders, all celebrating cranes and wetlands and the commitment to save them. Waves of well-wishers brought forth ice-cold Cokes and Fantas and freshly grilled chicken (a meal that they themselves could afford no more than a few times each year) to express gratitude for our long-term support of their activities. We shared stories of their successes in protecting eggs and chicks, while reducing pressure on wetland resources through alternative livelihoods such as beekeeping, low-impact livestock, and agro-forestry that have improved their incomes.

Individual conservation heroes abound in this region too, and we met many remarkable people



Celebrating the efforts of local communities to save the Kabale wetlands and cranes of southwest Uganda.

along the way. Jimmy Muheebwa, a school teacher and natural leader born and raised in southwest Uganda, has been a force for conservation here for more than 20 years – organizing scores of community groups to promote the interconnections between people, land, water, and wildlife in diverse and meaningful ways. Paul Mafabi,

working at the highest levels of government, is a lifelong craniac who developed Uganda's national wetland policy – the strongest in Africa. Mr. Jean Berkimans Ayubusa tirelessly, often thanklessly, patrols Rugezi Marsh to prevent the theft of chicks and eggs, and to reduce damaging fires and other impacts to the wetland, while Dr. Olivier Nsengimana, a skilled veterinarian who served many years as a Mountain Gorilla doctor, has emerged as a dynamic new leader for crane conservation in Rwanda.

There is no easy way forward for cranes in East Africa, but these communities and their leaders give me great hope. They strengthen our long-term commitment to finding innovative solutions for land, water, and livelihoods, and empower new generations of conservation heroes and community organizers who will fight for the future of their lands and cranes.

# Texas Whooping Crane Program

By Liz Smith, Texas Program Director

A research grant provided by the Texas State Aquarium in Corpus Christie (an accredited member of the Association of Zoos and Aquariums –AZA), funds our work with the San Antonio Bay Partnership on a monitoring program at restored and created freshwater ponds for our wintering Whooping Cranes. The Aquarium highlighted the Whooping Crane at this year's Endangered Species Day event as one of the species identified in the AZA **Saving Animals From Extinction** (SAFE) program. Our Project Leader and Master Naturalist, Ray Kirkwood, participated in a distance learning class for schoolchildren. Ray and Nikki Davis (our graduate student working on wintering habitat expansion needs at Texas State University) also provided project information and interactive learning experiences for visitors at the Aquarium as part of the celebration. Our wading bird identification cards were a big hit with the kids and they encouraged their parents to sign our "I Give a Whoop!" pledge cards. Through these wonderful collaborations, we are expanding awareness of Whooping Cranes in Texas, what they need from us to recover, and how we can each make a difference. Thank you, partners and volunteers!

*Evelyn Mercedes James learns how to help Whooping Cranes at Endangered Species Day at the Texas State Aquarium*



Photo by Suraida Nanez-James

## Celebrate Colorado Cranes!

YAMPA VALLEY CRANE FESTIVAL IN STEAMBOAT SPRINGS AND HAYDEN, COLORADO, SEPTEMBER 8-11, 2016



**S**andhill Cranes are an iconic species of the Yampa Valley and

Northwest Colorado. Returning in the spring from wintering grounds in New Mexico and Arizona, cranes nest and raise their young in wetland areas throughout the valley. At the Yampa Valley Crane Festival, you will witness hundreds of Sandhill Cranes dancing and feeding in the fields, and enjoy four event-filled days of guided crane viewings, bird walks, expert speakers, films, art exhibit, children's activities, and more. The International Crane Foundation's research associate Nyamba Batbayar, Director of Wildlife Science and Conservation Center of Mongolia will be the keynote speaker, and Dr. Barry Hartup, ICF Director of Conservation Medicine will share an update on endangered Whooping Crane recovery. For more information about the festival visit [www.coloradocranes.org](http://www.coloradocranes.org)



Photo by Abby Jensen

# Looking Ahead!

Dear Friends,

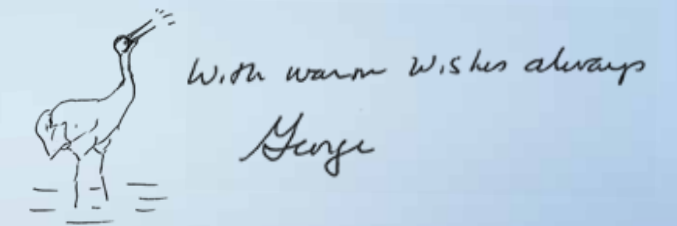
My life with cranes has been immeasurably enriched by the people who share my passion and vision for a world where cranes will forever dance. I am deeply moved by the kind words and gifts showered upon the International Crane Foundation in honor of my 70th birthday. From the bottom of my heart I thank you.

It's hard to believe that more than 40 years have passed since Ron Sauy and I started this project fresh out of graduate school. Throughout those years, I have been privileged to meet so many of you, and have been lifted on the wings of your hope and faith in our shared vision. Much has changed in that time. The digital age has made the world smaller, with increasing development in remote regions of the world, and new demands for water, food, energy, and land. These challenges threaten people and cranes alike. But our commitment to implementing science-based solutions to the threats on cranes remains the same. We believe that the best solutions for cranes can also be the best solutions for people.

As I celebrate my birthday, it is natural to spend some time in reflection. Yet I am more earnest now than ever in my desire to continue looking to the future. Work is still needed to secure all of the world's crane species. Together you and I have engaged a network of specialists in over 50 countries on five continents in the work of saving cranes and the ecosystems, watersheds, and flyways on which they depend. In this rapidly changing world our work is more pertinent than ever!

The famed anthropologist, Margaret Mead so beautifully reflected that we should, "Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world – indeed, it's the only thing that ever has." My goal has always been to find those special people in areas where cranes are threatened. As I enter my Golden Years, I am working to build an endowment fund for conservation leadership that will empower committed people to express their potential.

In this time of celebration, I wish to celebrate your support, and to ask that you continue to share your passion for cranes with your own network of influence. You can be proud of the difference you make for cranes and for the verdant planet we each call home.



George Archibald  
Co-Founder and Senior Conservationist

As George Archibald celebrates his 70th birthday, he is as busy as ever – traveling to remote corners of the world to continue his life's work. You can help continue George's legacy by investing in the next generation of conservation leaders who will carry his work forward. Your gift will support the conservation work of tomorrow!

### WAYS TO GIVE

Call: 608-356-9462  
Donate at: [savingcranes.org](http://savingcranes.org), or  
Return the envelope in this issue!

Photo by David Koehler

# Millennia

By Jim Harris, Senior Vice President



The iconic and critically endangered Siberian Crane was one of ten focus species chosen for significant support by the Disney Conservation Fund's Reverse the Decline, Increase the Time. ICF is working with the National Bird Banding Center of China and other partners in China and Russia to manage conservation planning and implementation along the 3,000-mile long flyway. Photos by Zheng Zhongjie, ICF Contributing Photographer.

Up close, cranes make us feel we have escaped time, that nothing has changed – except the circling of sun, the sweep of seasons, the coming of ice millennia ago, the ice melting into shallow waters with deep, sucking mud, and where long beaks find tubers buried in darkness. The faces of the critically endangered Siberian Cranes look especially timeless – red foreheads, white hoods, and yellow eyes. More often, we see these tall birds lost in landscapes fading into mist and sunlight. The thirty years since ICF met Siberian Cranes at Poyang Lake is a long time in the lives of people. Every spring and fall since 1985, as always, the white flocks pass up and down the 3,000-mile long flyway. Yet the landscapes below them across eastern China have transformed into towered cities, freeways leaping over rivers, and miles of chimneys and smoke. China's extraordinary growth has left space and solitude enough for unchanging birds to make their way. China has more Siberian Cranes now than thirty years ago, when there were three widely separated flocks, one each in West, Central, and East Asia. In recent winters, we can find



only one Siberian Crane in all West and Central Asia. Even after decades of study, the scale of these migrations is difficult to grasp, yet China's open spaces continue to close.

We are very grateful that Disney Conservation Fund chose to honor its 20th anniversary through a new philanthropic strategy, **Reverse the Decline, Increase the Time**. Disney aims to reverse the decline of ten threatened animals through scientific research, strategic action, and community engagement. During the same period, Disney aims to increase the time kids spend in nature to inspire them to care for the planet. Disney chose one migratory bird as one of the ten focus animals for **Reverse the Decline** – the Siberian Crane. The International Crane Foundation is privileged to manage this work, through planning, action on the ground, evaluation of results, and adaptation of our strategies to improve the next steps. As part of this work we began using the Open Standards for the Practice of Conservation, and use of Miradi software to guide this process. The Open Standards was developed by the Conservation Measures Partnership, a consortium

of leading conservation organizations and agencies to distill and apply the best in conservation practice – for more information visit [www.conservationmeasures.org](http://www.conservationmeasures.org). The International Crane Foundation is the newest member.

As we gain experience with the Open Standards for Siberian Crane conservation, we have begun to apply these same tools to other programs in Africa and North America. In the first year of Disney's support for this effort, we developed a ten-year conservation plan for the Siberian Crane, through careful consideration of the conservation targets – the crane itself and its wetland habitats through all parts of the annual journeys. We brought together leading experts from Russia, China, and the United States to assess threats and develop strategies and actions in response. Wetland habitats at the only winter grounds, Poyang Lake, and wetlands important as migratory staging and stopovers along the flyway in northeast and eastern China face the most intense and immediate threats. Thus, we will devote the most effort and resources to these crucial territories.



Now in 2016, we have begun implementation. At Poyang, we have focused on sub lakes that form as the main lake's waters subside in winter, and that serve as home to fishermen, as well as cranes. Our work will integrate wetland management beneficial to cranes with local livelihoods. In northeast China, we are strengthening

wetland management and restoration in the semi-arid places where cranes rest at the mid-point of their long journeys. We are testing ways to ensure that water is well managed so there is adequate food and safe resting places for cranes in this rapidly developing area. Experts working on wetlands of the semi-arid regions of western United States visited key sites in China and in return, hosted a dynamic six-week exchange visit by staff from two of China's nature reserves to refuges

in the U.S. providing valuable ideas to guide research, strengthen management, and engage local people. Chinese and American counterparts compared histories of conservation in their countries, and the Chinese were interested in what we learned from our experiences responding to the crisis for wildlife and wild resources a century ago. Ancient white cranes remind us of the eons of time where ten years is less than the blink of an eye, but looking forward, ten years can make possible the crane millennia ahead.



The greatest threats to Siberian Cranes are destruction or degradation of their wetland habitats at staging places in northeast China and on the wintering grounds at Poyang Lake (shown here). Disney's Reverse the Decline is helping the International Crane Foundation and partners strengthen our program planning and evaluation to help ensure conservation success for this species across rapidly developing landscapes.



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# Let's Celebrate!

## Member Appreciation Day

SATURDAY, OCTOBER 8, 2016 FROM 9:00 A.M. TO 5:00 P.M.  
International Crane Foundation Headquarters in Baraboo, WI

**T**his year's **Member Appreciation Day** will be our best ever as Co-founder Dr. George Archibald celebrates his 70th birthday with the heart and soul of the International Crane Foundation – YOU!

Sign up in the morning for behind-the-scenes tours of Crane City and our other crane care facilities, which are **first-come, first-served** the day of the event. Don't miss this once-a-year opportunity to see a "cranedominium" up close. Other special activities include "tent time" with George Archibald, a guided prairie walk on our restored prairie, radio-tracking demonstrations, and special talks by our expert staff. Keep an eye out for photo opportunities with Hope, our new Whooping Crane mascot created by Jim Henson's Creature Shop. Watch for her red head, white body, and black wingtips as she gives away high fives and hugs around our site!

Don't forget your membership card! Not a member? No problem. Join our flock today by visiting [www.savingcranes.org/membership](http://www.savingcranes.org/membership) or call 608-356-9462 ext. 103, or email, [membership@savingcranes.org](mailto:membership@savingcranes.org).

Memberships may also be purchased or renewed at the Visitor Center the day of the event. Lunch will be available for purchase. Visit our website as Member Appreciation Day approaches for a more detailed timeline of events!



*Debbie Johnson*