

# The Bugle

*Saving cranes and the places where cranes dance*

Volume 43, Number 1

February 2017

## Black Crowned Cranes

### THREATENED JEWEL OF THE SAHEL

*By Richard Beilfuss, President & CEO and Kerry Morrison, Africa Program Leader*



**F**rom the Atlantic coast of Senegal to the Nile Valley of Ethiopia, the floodplains of the African Sahel were once an oasis for wildlife and nomadic herders. The Black Crowned Crane – the Jewel of the Sahel – was common across the region and a flagship for the most important floodplains of West and Central Africa.

In recent decades, however, the Sahel, the semi-arid zone of transition in Africa between the Sahara Desert to the north and the lush green savannas to the south, has been ravaged by climate change, warfare, and increasing competition for food, fuel, and water. Black Crowned Cranes there are in serious trouble. Now classified as “Vulnerable,” *Continued on page 2*



The Casamance Delta of Senegal is a fragile stronghold for threatened Black Crowned Cranes and many other species. From reducing local nest disturbance to abating global climate change, urgent action is needed at many levels to ensure the future of this species, and the people who share this landscape. *Photo by Kerry Morrison*



Black Crowned Cranes have disappeared from former strongholds like the Inner Niger Delta of Mali, and although the national bird of Nigeria, they are now extinct in that country. The vast Sudd of South Sudan, where tens of thousands of Black Crowned Cranes were once recorded, has suffered chronic warfare, and key breeding grounds in Cameroon and Chad are under severe threat from Islamist militant groups. The challenges are immense.

Fortunately, a few strongholds remain for Black Crowned Cranes, and two are in Senegal. Last October, we traveled to Senegal to intensify our conservation impact for this beleaguered species through renewed partnership, investment, and action in coastal West Africa. Our trip began with the 14th Pan African Ornithological Congress in Senegal, an important gathering of African bird conservationists that occurs every four years. We met conservation leaders from more than 25 African countries and held a special session for crane conservation work in Africa.

One significant conservation leader in Senegal is Idrissa Ndiaye, who has worked tirelessly for Black Crowned Cranes in Senegal for more than a decade. Idrissa is a field biologist who connects deeply with the communities who live near cranes, and has added much to our knowledge of the nesting and foraging ecology of the species, and the management challenges they face. After the conference, we travelled with Idrissa to the two Black Crowned Crane strongholds of Senegal – the Senegal River Delta on the far northern border with Mauritania, and the Casamance Delta on the far southern border with Guinea Bissau. As many as 3,000 Black Crowned Cranes may still occur across this region, giving us hope for the future.

We learned much from Idrissa and the communities we visited. We spent several days searching for crownie nests, and we were surprised to learn that their nests are more similar to the highly-aquatic Wattled Crane than their close relative the Grey Crowned Crane. The nests are a simple platform made of reeds and grasses and surrounded by deep water. The chicks must swim to higher ground – sometimes more than 50 meters – within a few days of hatching. We discovered one of only three nests ever found at Djoudj National Park, and about 15 nests at Casamance – and evidence of many more.

The floodplains where Black Crowned Cranes nest are increasingly saline. The local people attribute this to climate change – higher temperatures and increasing evaporation, coupled with decreasing rainfall across the region. Studies back this up, but the rapid impact of this change is startling. A massive die-off of wetland forest and mangrove is occurring over great distances, with stumps of trees appearing as watery tombstones.



Senegalese conservation leader Idrissa Ndiaye discovers a nest with three Black Crowned Crane eggs. Photo by Rich Beilfuss

This salinization is causing hardships for families, who must dig deeper and deeper wells each year to find fresh water to meet their needs.

As Black Crowned Crane habitat disappears, they are increasingly exposed to capture for international trade and regional domestication. Many cranes in West Africa are fully domesticated and roam about like chickens or peacocks, a status symbol for hotels, businesses, and family compounds (see *Saving Imisambi* on page 5 to learn more about how we are working to get other captive cranes back into the wild). These captive birds are usually malnourished, and have short lives, fueling the demand to take more from the wild. Presumably, because they are frequently captured in the region, wild Black Crowned Cranes are incredibly skittish around people. We struggled most of the time to get within a few hundred feet of the cranes – they were constantly on alert and flew within seconds of our car or boat stopping.

Despite these daunting challenges, we left Senegal with new hope for the species. We were especially

encouraged by the wonderful community groups organized by Idrissa, who have made the Black Crowned Crane their totem and have dedicated themselves to watching over the birds and their habitats. Efforts are underway to restore water and vegetation in these vast floodplains. Lessons from the great work of Olivier Nsengimana in Rwanda can help us return domesticated cranes safely to the wild. Our renewed efforts to protect the cranes in peaceful Senegal and coastal West Africa, as well as our ongoing efforts to save the Black Crowned Crane in Ethiopia, are of utmost importance to keep this species in the wild while we wait for a better future in much of West and Central Africa. *Many thanks to Bob Dohmen who provided support for this trip and our deeper involvement in West Africa through his campaign gift.*

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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](mailto:Bugle@savingcranes.org) or P.O. Box 447, Baraboo, WI 53913

Memberships make our work possible. Please join or give a gift membership to a friend at the following annual rates:

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# Notes from the President

By Rich Beilfuss

Now More Than Ever!



The New Year has already made one thing clear: The cranes of the world need us now more than ever.

In January, we received the devastating news that another Endangered Whooping Crane was shot, this time in Indiana. We are sad and we are angry about this loss. We will not allow this event to set the tone

for the New Year and – with your help – we are committed to ensuring that justice is served and future shootings are deterred.

Through our *I Give a Whoop* campaign, we are drawing national attention to the plight of Whooping Cranes, and the steps you can take to help safeguard them. We are advising judges and attorneys on

tough sentencing for Whooping Crane shootings that will serve as a true deterrent to these criminal acts. We are deeply committed to the future of the last remaining wild flock of Whooping Cranes that migrates between Canada and Texas, and the establishment of a separate, secure flock in the eastern U.S. and Louisiana.

Meanwhile, on the other side of the world, Critically Endangered Siberian Cranes are facing a daunting challenge. China's Poyang Lake, the winter habitat for the estimated 3,600 remaining Siberian Cranes and more than 400,000

waterbirds, is suffering from multiple threats – the impacts of dams, sand dredging, increasingly erratic rainfall patterns, and human encroachment. A proposed outlet dam could further stress the system by preventing natural water fluctuations and associated water quality that maintains the primary food source

for Siberian Cranes and many other species of conservation concern. This project, and threats to the lake, were recently highlighted in *The New York Times* and *Huffington Post*. We have been collaborating closely with our Chinese colleagues at Poyang Lake since 1985, and we continue to work urgently on the ground to safeguard this most important wetland in Asia.



Critically Endangered Siberian Cranes at Poyang Lake, China. Photo by Zheng Zhongjie

These are just two examples of why our work is so important and how we are uniquely positioned to focus on the challenges cranes face. This year, wherever there are cranes and in whatever way they need us – we will be there – now more than ever. We'll keep you informed every step of the way and may ask for your help as it's needed. We are grateful knowing that you stand at the ready.

From local shootings to large-scale habitat threats in places like China, our job is to find solutions for cranes around the world... and we are making an impact every single day. I invite you to follow our latest news by joining our social media community. Here's to a successful year of saving cranes and the places where cranes dance!



This Endangered Whooping Crane (#4-11), one of just 450 of her species left in the wild, was shot last month. With the loss of this breeding female, we mourn not only a beautiful individual, but also the future generations she was likely to produce. Photo by Bob Herndon

# SAVING CRANES

## and the Places Where Cranes Dance

In the last issue of the *Bugle*, you learned about our revitalized work in Myanmar. Just after that publication, our Myanmar Crane Team learned that a farmer in the Irrawaddy Delta took two Sarus Crane chicks from their nest to raise as pets. Our team on the ground headed directly to the village to talk to the farmer and to return the chicks back to the nest. After the dramatic rescue on Thanksgiving Day, and restoration to the nest, the crane parents arrived within a few minutes and the family was reunited.

### But our work wasn't done.

The Myanmar Crane Team continued to watch over the crane family, and took the opportunity to share information with local villagers about crane conservation. The Myanmar population of Sarus Cranes, estimated at only 500 in the wild, is the smallest and least known of the four distinct populations of the Sarus Crane, but we are learning more every day.

Your support allowed us to be there when we were needed most!



Photo by Dr. Myo Sandar Winn

**Thank you** for joining us in a mission that transcends geography and culture – a mission in which a family of magnificent, endangered birds are truly ambassadors for the welfare of wetlands, grasslands, entire watersheds, long flyways, people, and goodwill worldwide. **Please make your gift today to help us continue this important work.**

### WAYS TO GIVE

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



## 2017 BIRD-A-THON

### Support a Spring Tradition

Our Co-Founder George Archibald will be breaking out his binoculars on May 10, 2017 to see how many species he can tally this year. Please support George and his team *The Craniacs* by pledging a specific dollar amount per species or by making a fixed gift. The funds raised help us work around the world to save cranes and the places where cranes dance! Please visit our website for more information or to make your donation. Gifts of \$25 or more will receive a one-year membership to the International Crane Foundation.

[www.savingcranes.org/bird-a-thon/](http://www.savingcranes.org/bird-a-thon/)

Questions? Please contact Jennifer Fiene at 608-356-9462 ext. 151 or email [info@savingcranes.org](mailto:info@savingcranes.org).



Photos by Ted Thousand

# Saving *Imisambi*

## CRANES ARE NOT PETS!

By Darcy Love, Creative Design and Conservation Education Manager

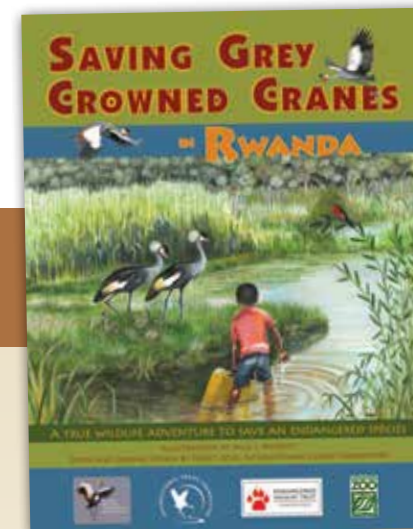
In Rwanda, the illegal trade of *Imisambi*, or Grey Crowned Cranes, is fueled by domestic demand and a lack of knowledge about the bird's precarious status in the wild. *Imisambi* are considered status symbols. Affluent citizens, hoteliers, and restaurateurs often display them in their homes and businesses. To meet the demand, poachers enlist children living near crane marshes to collect eggs and chicks from nests. Rwandan veterinarian Olivier Nsengimana recognized that he needed to educate these youngsters if he was going to save Rwanda's Grey Crowned Cranes from disappearing in the wild. The cranes were plentiful when he was a young boy filling his water bucket at the wetland, but since then, he has witnessed their dramatic decline and dealt with the health issues of captive cranes held in inadequate conditions.

The International Crane Foundation recently collaborated with Olivier to create a comic book to spread the word about the plight of the *Imisambi* to the children living near the cranes. The story along with colorful illustrations by South African artist Sally Barrett inspire young readers to respect and protect Grey Crowned Cranes. The comic book is available in English and Kinyarwanda. The first printing of *Saving Rwanda's Grey Crowned Cranes*, and perhaps the future of *Imisambi* in Rwanda, is now in their hands!



Dr. Olivier and the first recipients of *Kubungabunga Imisambi Yo Mu Rwanda*, or *Saving Grey Crowned Cranes in Rwanda*. Photo by Rwanda Wildlife Conservation Association

*We piloted the comic book with a group of children who live near Rugezi Marsh and they loved it! They were so excited to have their own copy and were really engaged. We now plan to distribute copies more widely to school environmental clubs around Rugezi Marsh. – Olivier Nsengimana*



### BUY A BOOK – GIVE A BOOK!

For each book purchased, a comic book will be donated to a child in Rwanda.

### Saving Rwanda's Grey Crowned Cranes!

A true wildlife adventure to save an endangered species. Meet Dr. Olivier, learn about his project to save Grey Crowned Cranes, and be inspired to help him. 10 color pages | English edition | Price: \$7.95. Shop online at [www.craneshop.org](http://www.craneshop.org), email: [giftshop@savingcranes.org](mailto:giftshop@savingcranes.org), or call 608-356-9462 ext. 171.

# 2017 Calendar of Events

## Annual Midwest Crane Count

Saturday, April 8, 2017

Join over 2,000 volunteers spanning the upper Midwest for the 2017 Annual Midwest Crane Count as we monitor the return of Sandhill and Whooping Cranes to their northern breeding grounds.

## Open for the Season!

Saturday, April 15, 2017

Daily from 9 a.m. – 5 p.m. Learn about cranes and our conservation work around the world on a guided tour. Explore nature trails, take home a memento from our unique gift shop, and discover our interactive exhibits.



## Mother's Day Event

Sunday, May 14, 2017

Mom gets in FREE on Mother's Day. Treat your mom to a relaxing day in nature with guided tours, family activities, and nature hikes. (\$9.50 value).

## Whooping Crane Day

Sunday, May 28, 2017

Learn about the threats that face the Whooping Crane and what we are doing to help them. Special programs by our staff will focus on the recovery of one of North America's rarest birds.

## An Evening with the Cranes

Saturday, June 17, 2017

Enjoy a magical evening sampling local gourmet food, craft beer, and wines, while enjoying live music, and of course – cranes! Check our website for updated information and ticket purchases.

## North American Cranes Festival

Saturday, July 1, 2017

A Tale of Two Cranes! Discover the contrasting stories of the Sandhill and Whooping Crane. Engage in special talks and family activities on this day celebrating the two crane species in North America.

## Cranes of the World Festival

Saturday, August 5, 2017

Don't miss this family-friendly day with guided nature walks, special programs, and presentations.

## Member Appreciation Day and Annual Member Meeting

Saturday, September 23, 2017

Join us as we celebrate YOU for making a difference for cranes!

## Good Neighbor Day

Saturday, October 28, 2017

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.

## Gates Close for the Season

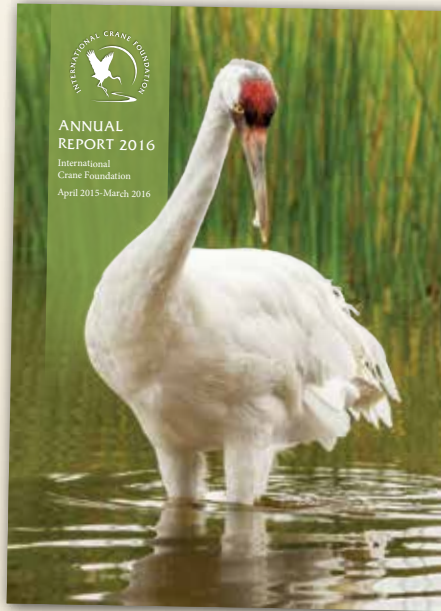
Tuesday, October 31, 2017

Stay in touch with us throughout the year. Sign up for email updates and join our social media community!

# Lasting Impact 2016 Annual Report

We are pleased to present our Annual Report 2016. During this fiscal year, we were able to make important and lasting impacts for cranes and the inspiring, beautiful places they share with people around the world. We hope you enjoy this collection of highlights from the year, but more importantly, we hope you are proud of the investment you've made. We are diligent with your investment and Charity Navigator, the leading independent charity watchdog, agrees. They have awarded the International Crane Foundation a four-star rating, recognizing us for exceeding industry standards in the areas of nonprofit financial health, accountability, and transparency.

We are committed to continuing to operate at the highest standard, so we can make the greatest difference for cranes and the places where cranes dance. The report is available to download at: [www.savingcranes.org/annual-report/](http://www.savingcranes.org/annual-report/)



# Coming Home to Roost

By Anne Lacy, Crane Research Coordinator



Since 2004, the International Crane Foundation has participated in an annual Fall Sandhill Crane Survey sponsored by the US Fish & Wildlife Service. The purpose of the count is to develop a population index for the number of Sandhill Cranes in the Eastern Migratory Population. During the second week of November, our staff and volunteers gather equipment, clipboards, and head to four sites along the Wisconsin River, and our study area near Briggsville, Wisconsin. From a good vantage point, we count birds as they float down at the end of the day to the sandbars and shallow waters they have probably used for millennia. Some area counts are sparse – only a few hundred, but others are spectacular and perhaps unbelievable if we hadn't witnessed them with our own eyes – over 10,000! Our counts are combined with others from the upper Midwest to arrive at an estimate of the number of Sandhills gracing our skies each fall, and yes, the successful comeback of this iconic species continues! Each year as we count thousands of cranes so close to Aldo Leopold's shack – it's difficult to believe there were so few, if any, on the river during his time.

# WHOOPER WHEREABOUTS 2016 Parent-reared Whooping Crane Cohort

By Hillary Thompson, North America Program – Crane Analyst



Juvenile and adult Whooping Cranes socializing at Wheeler NWR. Photo by Russ Thompson

By early December, all of the 2016 parent-reared Whooping Cranes slated for reintroduction began their migration from Wisconsin – all except one! Due to adverse weather conditions, lack of available food, and no sign of movement, male #70-16 was captured by our field team on December 12, and was relocated to a wintering hotspot for Whooping Cranes at Wheeler National Wildlife Refuge in Alabama. He made friends quickly – associating with other Whooping Cranes at the refuge, and assimilating

nically into the flock. The rest of the eight juvenile cranes migrated on their own, in pairs, or in one case, with a pair of adults.

- Two adult Whooping Cranes adopted chick #30-16 into their "family" and led him south on migration. The family made it as far south as St. Mark's National Wildlife Refuge in Florida, but they are now in Floyd County, Georgia.
- Female #69-16 migrated south with Sandhill Cranes to Wheeler National Wildlife Refuge in Alabama early in the season, where she quickly joined a "family" of Whooping Cranes and has regularly been seen with this pair, who lost their chick earlier in the summer.
- Female #33-16 made an early departure from Wisconsin and spent time in Iowa before moving to Tennessee and eventually to Florida, where she has been hanging out with a pair of Whooping Cranes from the Florida Non-migratory Population.
- Two juveniles, #29-16 and #39-16, were released together in Adams County, Wisconsin, migrated together, and are now wintering together in Dyer County, Tennessee.
- The other duo of juveniles, #31-16 and #38-16, initially migrated to Crittenden County, Kentucky, but later moved to Poinsett County, Arkansas.
- Lastly, female #71-16 migrated to Muscatatuck National Wildlife Refuge in Jackson County, Indiana, where she is spending the winter with a flock of Sandhill Cranes.

So far, all of the juveniles in this cohort have found good wintering habitat, and some have even found other Whooping Cranes. It is possible they will move again, but they are all doing well so far, and we look forward to seeing them back in Wisconsin in spring!



## International Crane Foundation

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*An Evening with the Cranes* will be held rain or shine on June 17, 2017.

Watch for updates and ticket sales on our website at [www.savingcranes.org](http://www.savingcranes.org).



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[www.travelgreenwisconsin.com](http://www.travelgreenwisconsin.com)



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Newsletter is also available in digital format.

SATURDAY, JUNE 17, 2017  
SAVE THE DATE!

AN EVENING  
WITH THE  
**CRANES**

