

The Bugle

Saving cranes and the places where cranes dance

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Walking the Walk

TEN WALKS ACROSS ZHALONG MARSH

By Jim Harris, Senior Vice President

Zhalong is one of the great crane marshes of China, with the highest breeding numbers of endangered Red-crowned Cranes in the world. Zhalong was the first wild place where the International Crane Foundation worked in China. In 1983-84 Co-Founders George Archibald

and Ron Sauey organized expeditions of American volunteers to count cranes and waterbirds. Fresh out of college, Su Liying was a witty junior biologist at Zhalong, and so excited to learn about field research. She helped guide George and Ron. *Continued on page 2*



Although people said the vast Zhalong Marsh in northeast China could never be crossed on foot, biologist Su Liying devised a transect route across the widest and most crane-rich portion. Every year since 2007, Liying has led a team for three arduous days of walking across Zhalong Marsh. Ten years of data trace the results of wetland restoration and recovery.



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Eighteen years later, the 520,000-acre wetland was drying out. After 2000, fires burned through the marsh every year, eating deep into its peat soils. For Liying, now a Research Associate with ICF, the problem was more serious than drought. A network of canals and dikes, gradually constructed piece by piece, now blocked almost all water inflows. Evaporation in this arid region is intense. The once watery landscapes thirsted for water. Liying and others from ICF worked with Chinese counterparts to document the problem and develop potential solutions. Fortunately, the canal system already had gates that could release water into the upper parts of the marsh, restoring habitat for Red-crowned Cranes and other waterbirds. In 2008, the Provincial Government set up a special fund to pay for water releases.

Liyong knew that successful wetland restoration depended on monitoring the results, then evaluating and adjusting the water flows. Liying devised a plan to record birds, plants, and water at set locations year after year. During her years working for the nature reserve, Liying had walked far and wide. Although people said the vast Zhalong Marsh could never be crossed on foot, she devised a route for hiking entirely across the widest and most crane-rich portion. Liying had no difficulty recruiting students

– and others – to join her annual treks. From the early years, she had friends who lived on islands in Zhalong. The team would stay with a family on one island the first night, and on another island the second night, walking out of the marsh late the third day. She led the first walk in May 2007, encountering a treacherous channel where her small group had to navigate over dangerous floating sedge mat. Liying was 51 when she began. She could outwalk many of the students. Yet they encouraged each other as they walked, knowing that teamwork is what conservation needs to succeed. Trudging for hours through monotonous reeds, the trek became their commitment to conservation – and for some, a commitment that would last a very long time.

Once they came upon a broad nest platform, a crane nest. The group could hear the chick peeping inside. One man was so excited he had to call his mother. Liying loved the excitement on their faces. Ten years of memories. Once when they reached the island house, an exhausted woman sank gratefully down on the edge of a heated *kang* (traditional stove-warmed bed). When she grabbed a thick, folded blanket on the *kang*, two dozen wild duck eggs fell out on the floor. The son of the family was trying to hatch eggs he'd taken from the marsh.



Bird study at Zhalong leapt forward in 1983 with equipment and books donated by the International Crane Foundation. Su Liying is on the far right.



Liyong devised a plan to record birds, plants, and water at set locations in the marsh year after year. After trudging for hours through monotonous reeds, this group discovered a Red-crowned Crane nest with a pipping chick.

Each year Zhalong was different. Their lunch spot one year would be under water the next. For a few years, no one could sit anywhere during the entire three days because it was so wet, except on the islands where they slept. Wading through the vast marsh was physically demanding. And when reed stems from the previous year remained uncut – dense and far taller than Liying or her companions – they had to push ahead without landmarks to guide them through the endless stems. As the years passed, Liying let the young ones carry more of the gear and food. The ninth year brought tall reeds and deep, cold water – she was 60. It left her tired. But the tenth year was easier. When her group came to the first night's island, she learned that her hosts would soon be leaving. The government was removing houses and people from three islands in the marsh to reduce disturbance. She took a side trip to abandoned home sites already demolished, remembering friends over the last 25 years as she witnessed the passing of an era.

There will be no walk this year. The trek would be too difficult without the island houses. Instead, Liying and two of her students will be analyzing ten years of data, to prepare recommendations on marsh restoration. Already it's clear that vegetation has responded well and promptly to better water conditions. But the birds have lagged behind, far fewer than in the 1980s as witnessed by George and Ron. While Liying hopes conditions will improve within the marsh, much of the problem lies along the perilous flyways north and south. "I've been lucky these thirty-five years," recalls Liying "time makes for strong connections, I hope Zhalong always has deep friendships. I look to these young people for the future."

ConocoPhillips and the Fifth Age of Man Foundation have supported the Zhalong treks. We are also very grateful to Zhalong National Nature Reserve for assistance.



We Would Love to Welcome You to Our Frequent Flyer Program!

Photo by Mike Endres

Monthly donors make such a big difference. By making an automatic gift each month, you can ensure that you are consistently growing our far-reaching efforts to save cranes and the threatened places they call home – every day of the year!

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As a Frequent Flyer, you will receive all the benefits that membership offers, including invitations to exclusive travel opportunities and special events, as well as reciprocity with over 150 zoos and aquariums across the United States and Canada! You will feel good knowing that you are helping us put the full force of our talented team and conservation plans into action – whenever and wherever we are needed.

We accept two types of recurring gifts: **Credit/Debit Card** and **Direct Withdrawal** from your bank account. (Please send a voided check)

Please remember the International Crane Foundation when making your estate plans. Call 608-356-9462 ext. 115 for more information.

The International Crane Foundation consistently receives the highest marks from Charity Navigator for sound fiscal management and commitment to accountability and transparency. We will always keep your account information secure, and will never release your information. Your account will be charged on or near the first business day of each month.

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The International Crane Foundation is a qualified 501(c)(3) tax-exempt organization and donations are tax-deductible to the extent allowed by law.



ICF Board Director, Ann Hamilton, has participated in monthly giving since she first became involved with the International Crane Foundation. Ann shares, "I have always done monthly giving. When I got involved with ICF, I was retired and on a fixed income, so for me it was easier to budget that way. It brings me great satisfaction every month to support an organization like ICF, and let the staff know what a great job they are doing. I hope members will consider monthly giving because it is comforting for both the giver and the receiver. It also helps the organization with budgeting, knowing there is a consistent flow of monthly income."

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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

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

Make your voice heard for cranes, wetlands, and clean water!



Since January, we have faced a dizzying array of proposed policy changes and budget cuts at the national level. These include potential cutbacks to the Endangered Species Act, Environmental Protection Agency, Clean Water Rule, US Fish and Wildlife Service, and reduced commitments to climate change agreements and our National Wildlife Refuge system. Our members ask, *what should I do? How can I help safeguard cranes, wetlands, and freshwater?* We are urging everyone to get involved in these issues and share your views.

Here in Wisconsin, there is an important opportunity to make your voice heard. The Wisconsin Conservation Congress recently reignited a state-wide debate by including a vote on a Sandhill Crane hunting season in their annual spring hearing. As expected, the congress (which nearly always votes strongly in favor of hunting proposals) approved the Sandhill hunting season – **but this time, it was only by a very narrow margin.** The close

vote revealed what our members already know, that cranes are not just another game species – they evoke a strong emotional and spiritual connection for many people. Sandhill Crane recovery in Wisconsin has been successful because cranes and their habitats are valued and supported by hunters, wildlife enthusiasts, farmers, and other landowners alike. The vote was advisory only, but could be a first step in the process of potentially establishing a hunt in Wisconsin. The Wisconsin State Legislature will now decide whether it will pursue a Sandhill Crane hunting season and, if so, mandate the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources to develop a hunt. **Please help us urge the legislature to abandon this pursuit – here are two of the important reasons why:**

Hunting is not a solution for Sandhill Crane crop damage – but we are actively involved in solving this problem. We are very concerned about the impact of increasing numbers of Sandhill Cranes on Wisconsin farmers and corn crops (the cranes may feed on the germinating corn seed after planting). Hunting Sandhill Cranes in the fall will not solve crane crop damage that occurs in the spring. To

solve this problem, we played a key role in developing an effective non-toxic chemical deterrent (Avipel) that offers a better alternative for reducing crop damage than hunting cranes. The total acreage treated by farmers has steadily grown each year since we first received permission to deploy the technique from the EPA in 2006. Because the cranes continue to feed on other food (such as insects) in Avipel-treated crops, this approach doesn't transfer the crane crop damage elsewhere as other deterrents might.



Photo by Ted Thousand

Accidental shooting of Whooping Cranes is a big risk.

We have worked for 17 years to reintroduce the Whooping Crane to Wisconsin. The loss of any adult breeding birds in this young population would be devastating. A Sandhill Crane hunting season would increase the risk of the accidental shooting of Whooping Cranes and require extensive effort to avoid these risks. Since the establishment of the Eastern Migratory Population of Whooping Cranes in 2001, at least ten Whooping Cranes

have been shot, accounting for over 20% of the population's mortality.

Make your voice heard

With 44 years of conservation and research experience on behalf of cranes worldwide, the International Crane Foundation is a trusted source of information on Sandhill Cranes, and a strong advocate for the healthy landscapes they need. You too CAN make a difference. We urge you to speak out for Sandhill Cranes, and against any **threats to clean water, wetlands, and endangered species protections.** You can find contact information for your representatives on our website at: www.savingcranes.org/a-sandhill-crane-hunt-in-wisconsin.

Not long ago, it was a rare treat to see a Sandhill Crane in the wild. Today, Sandhills are flourishing across our state, and we delight in the congregation of thousands each fall on the Wisconsin River close to our headquarters in Baraboo. All of us – hunters, farmers, and nature lovers alike – can take pride in their spectacular recovery. With your help, this story will continue for generations to come.



Maurice Wanjala (left) and Rudolf Makhanu inspecting a spring undergoing spring protection in Kingwal Swamp area, Nandi County, Kenya.



Richard Muvunyi, Rwandan Country Coordinator



Jimmy Muheebwa (center) at Nyamuriro wetland restoration site.

Our Talented Team in EAST AFRICA

By Kerryn Morrison, Manager African Crane Conservation Program

We are excited to introduce the talented people in our East Africa Program who will be focusing on the conservation of Grey Crowned Cranes and their habitats.

KENYA

We welcome **Rudolf Makhanu** as our new Kenya Country Coordinator where we are partnering with Community Action for Nature Conservation (CANCO). Rudolf will develop and implement a strategy for our work in Kenya, build our network of partners and collaborators across the country, and provide support and guidance to community-based organizations, such as the Kipsaina Crane and Wetland Conservation Group. **Osiman Mabhachi** and I spent time in Kenya recently sharing our strategy with Rudolf and CANCO. We explored Lake Ol Bolossat with our longtime partner **Maurice Wanjala** (Kipsaina Crane and Wetland Conservation Group) as a potential new focal site in Kenya.



Osiman Mabhachi

RWANDA

In February, we welcomed **Richard Muvunyi** as our new Rwandan Country Coordinator, with our partner Kitabi College for Conservation and Environmental Management. Holding a Bachelor's degree in Veterinary Medicine and a Masters in Wildlife Health Management, Richard has worked with farmers in Rwanda and has been involved in wildlife disease monitoring and research. Richard will be overseeing our community-based conservation work and crane monitoring at Rugezi Marsh, and the Akanyaru and Nyabarongo Wetlands in Rwanda.

UGANDA

We recently finalized an agreement with Nature Uganda, resulting in **Jimmy Muheebwa** joining the team officially as our Uganda Projects Coordinator. Jimmy specializes in community-based crane and wetland conservation projects in the Grey Crowned Crane stronghold of Uganda. He will be monitoring cranes, expanding our work in the southwestern and southcentral areas of Uganda, and improving our understanding of the Grey Crowned Crane situation in and around Kampala.

Deepest thanks to the Dohmen Family Foundation, and to Jim and Yuko Brumm for making this expansion of our Africa Program possible.

Flash of yellow eye
Whooping Crane rises from marsh
Spreads white wings of peace

—Liz Pelton



Photo by Ted Thousand

Poetry in the Prairie

Share your passion for cranes with an original poem and we may make it a part of our visitor landscape this season!

We invite you to submit an original poem inspired by cranes to our *Poetry in the Prairie* competition. Poems will be judged in two categories: Haiku and Poet's Choice, each with four age categories and a "peoples' choice" prize. Each winning poem will be printed on a banner and displayed in the colorful native prairie throughout our headquarters site during the visitor season. Winners will also receive an International Crane Foundation membership and a signed copy of *The Quality of Cranes*.

All poetic forms from haiku, limerick, and free verse, to ode and fable are welcome in celebration of our favorite birds and the wild places they call home. To learn more about submitting your original poem to our poetry competition, visit www.savingcranes.org/poetry. **Submissions are due by May 31, 2017** and can be emailed to poetry@savingcranes.org. You're a poet and you know it! We can't wait to see what you send.

This project is funded in part by a grant from Sauk County UW Extension, Arts & Culture Committee, and the Wisconsin Arts Board with funds from the State of Wisconsin.

AN EVENING WITH THE CRANES

Saturday, June 17, 2017 from 5 – 8 p.m.

At the International Crane Foundation
in Baraboo, Wisconsin

The International Crane Foundation's favorite summer party is coming soon, and we want you to join us for another magical evening! Stroll through our exhibits and trails while sampling local gourmet food, craft beer, and wine. Meet our expert staff and enjoy the sweet sounds of live music and crane calls.

Tickets are on sale now!

Member price: \$50 per ticket | Non-member: \$75.
Visit our event page at www.savingcranes.org/ewtc or call 608-356-9462 ext. 807.

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This event will be held rain or shine. Photos by Ted Thousand and Christina Beam





International Crane Foundation

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**Please Visit us in
Baraboo this Season!**

Photo by D. Z. Johnson

At the International Crane Foundation we are saving more than cranes. We are saving the places where cranes dance.

Our visitors often tell us how refreshing a visit here can be. We believe it's because our beloved cranes are ambassadors for some of the most beautiful places on Earth, and they unite us with their transcendent qualities of peace and goodwill. But they are also messengers alerting us to the health of the landscapes and natural resources that benefit all life. We invite you to visit this year to enjoy the scenic beauty, but also to learn more about how we are working toward sustaining water, land, and livelihoods around the world.



Look at our special new arrival for the season!

From our fair trade partners in Nepal, these exclusive, hand-embroidered 100% cotton garments are available in adult sizes S/M and L/XL in red, black, and blue, depicting three different crane species. \$42.99.

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