

The **Bugle**

Saving cranes for 45 years!

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ANGOLA!

*Wattled Cranes, Wetlands,
and Water Towers*

The highlands of eastern Angola are the most important water source in southern Africa, sustaining millions of people and abundant wildlife, including most of the world's Wattled Cranes.

What lies ahead for this vital region?

Our new discoveries strengthen the case for creating a new *Wetland of International Importance* linking Cameia and Liuwa Plains National Parks as a transboundary conservation area. Read on!





ANGOLA!

Wattled Cranes, Wetlands, and Water Towers

By Rich Beilfuss, President and CEO

Wetlands, wetlands as far as the eye can see! As wave upon wave of lush green marshes streamed past the window of our small Cessna plane, I imagined David Attenborough narrating our expedition, “What will our intrepid explorers discover in this watery wilderness? New breeding grounds for the Wattled Crane, that rarest of Africa’s cranes? A wildebeest migration to rival the Serengeti? The greatest ‘water tower’ of Africa?”

In April, I had the opportunity to conduct the first-ever aerial survey of Cameia National Park and surrounding Buluzi Plain of Angola – a massive floodplain that ranks among the largest freshwater wetlands in Africa. Cut off from the developing world by a 27-year civil war that followed 400 years of colonial neglect, this is a forgotten land of few roads and isolated fishing camps where few rarely venture.

Our survey was organized by Ecologist John Mendelsohn from Namibia, a true champion for the people and landscapes of Angola. We were joined by two Angolan Biologists David Elizade and Sara Fernandes and supporter Tom Leiden. Our bush pilot Brent Mudde, accustomed to helping doctors reach the most remote corners of Angola, readily adapted to our slow, low-flying survey plan. Our mission was to map the occurrence of threatened Wattled Cranes and other large birds and mammals across this vast, undocumented region and to look for new conservation opportunities. Searching ever-hopefully across thousands of square miles of



Millions of termite mounds cover huge expanses of the Buluzi Plain of Angola – these small “hills” rise just enough above the flooded soils to allow trees, palms, and other vegetation to establish on the low-lying floodplain.

floodplain, we strained our eyes to glimpse the long white necks of Wattled Cranes poking out from the marshes below.

Wattled Cranes are among the tallest, rarest, and most wetland-dependent of Africa’s birds, with a population of perhaps 9,200 individuals spanning from Ethiopia to South Africa. Most of the world’s Wattled Cranes occur on the five biggest floodplains of Zambia, Botswana, and Mozambique. The seasonal flux of floodwaters protects their nests from predators and fires and stimulates the production of nutritious tubers of the spike rush *Eleocharis*, their most important food source. In each of these floodplains, Wattled Cranes feed among hungry antelope that graze and trample the rank grasslands, providing the cranes access to the tubers that lie beneath. Find a dense green bed of spike rush on a naturally flooded plain with a herd of big grazers, and you may also find an elusive Wattled Crane.

And we did!

We discovered three new breeding grounds for Wattled Cranes – each sporting families with a chick. Close by, we spotted Saddle-billed Storks and Spurwing Geese, which are often found on other Wattled Crane breeding grounds. These breeding sites are located across the border from Liuwa Plains National



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The Bugle is the quarterly newsletter of the International Crane Foundation. ICF was founded in 1973 by Ronald Sauey, Ph.D. (1948 - 1987) and George Archibald, Ph.D.

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Bugle comments or questions? Please write Betsy at Bugle@savingcranes.org or P.O. Box 447, Baraboo, WI 53913

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This newly discovered breeding ground for Wattled Cranes has enormous potential for wildlife recovery and water conservation in cooperation with neighboring countries and can help sustain Angola’s recovery from prolonged civil war in recent decades.



Park of Zambia, one of the five vital floodplains for Wattled Cranes. At Liuwa, we work with the African Parks Foundation to study and secure Wattled Cranes and other waterbirds on wetlands they share with fishing communities and vast herds of wildebeest and zebra.

We were encouraged to see that the Angolan floodplains have a much lower human density than the Liuwa Plains, and are seemingly more pristine. Sadly, however, we did not find these plains “teeming with wildebeest, roan, waterbuck, eland, lion, and other large mammal species” as reported in the 1960s.* We found small numbers of red lechwe and reedbuck antelope, but far too few to maintain the grazing lawns where Wattled Cranes feed at Liuwa. We hope to find more mammals, and Wattled Cranes, with a follow-up survey in the dry season when water levels are lower, but the big herds once seen here are likely a spectacle of the past.

Perhaps our most exciting discovery was the incredible volume of rainwater stored in these vast floodplains and delivered to thirsty river basins downstream. Eastern Angola is one of the most important “water towers” on earth, a key water source for the great Zambezi River – lifeline of southern Africa, the wildlife-rich Okavango Delta and Linyanti Swamps of Botswana, the Cunene River of the northern Namib desert,

the Angolan capital Luanda, and others. These rivers, and their people and wildlife, are extremely vulnerable to climate change as the region gets hotter and rainfall patterns shift, with a projected 20 to 40% reduction in runoff across southern Africa. The severe water shortage in Cape Town this year – the first major modern city to nearly run out of fresh water – is an ominous warning. Perhaps Angola’s abundant waters can help stave off a drier future downstream.

What lies ahead for this vital region? Our discovery strengthens the case for creating a new *Wetland of International Importance* linking Cameia and Liuwa Plains National Parks as a transboundary conservation area. These immense wetlands could support one of the biggest wildlife migrations in Africa. Recent successful efforts to reintroduce wildlife to areas impacted by colonialism and civil war, such as the Gorongosa Restoration Project in Mozambique, give us hope. But as Angolans move to develop their country, converting wetlands for intensive crop production and harnessing the abundant water resources for hydropower, agriculture, and industry, the future of the people and wildlife who depend on these wetlands – and their waters across eight downstream countries – hangs in the balance. We hope these rare Wattled Cranes can serve as an important flagship for a balanced future for this region.

*Wildlife at War in Angola: The Rise and Fall of an African Eden by Brian J. Huntley (2017).



The Teton Regional Land Trust presents its inaugural **Greater Yellowstone Crane Festival** on September 15, 2018, in Driggs, Idaho.

Dr. George Archibald will be the keynote speaker for an event that will feature activities for all ages. Celebrate the migration of Sandhill Cranes through Teton Valley with activities on the plaza including live music, arts and crafts, poetry readings, and traditional crane dances. For more information, visit www.tetonlandtrust.org for details and to register for a workshop.



Forging a Bond

By Anne Lacy, Crane Research Coordinator

For an endangered species like the Whooping Crane, every individual – and their ability to reproduce – is critical to the survival of the species. That’s why we go the extra mile to help with their fragile recovery. With few female Whooping Cranes on the landscape in 2016, a male Whooping Crane named Grasshopper erroneously paired with a female Sandhill Crane. To help perpetuate his valuable genetic line, we transported him to White Oak Conservation, an accredited captive rearing facility in Florida. We also sent a female Whooping Crane named Hemlock, who was costume-reared at our facility, but not released as a chick for health reasons. The plan was to give them the space in a safe setting to see if they would become a couple. If they were successful as a breeding pair, it would be one more step forward in bolstering the wild population.

Cranes are famous for being very particular in choosing a mate. So with fingers crossed, we introduced our fledgling lovebirds. Thankfully, it didn’t take long for them to exhibit friendly behaviors. Within the year they were unison calling together and flying circles around their large enclosure. Just as cranes are fussy when it comes to their partners – they are renowned for their mate fidelity once they have forged that bond.

This spring, we hoped that their bond would be strong enough for Hemlock to lay eggs. Our expectations were met and then some. Not only did Hemlock lay two eggs, they were both fertile! Thirty days later, the first two Whooping Crane chicks of 2018 hatched. Observations by White Oak staff revealed that Grasshopper and Hemlock are devoted parents and both lavished care on their chicks immediately.

What is the next step in their journey? The plan is for the family to return to Wisconsin this summer and be released into the wild near other reintroduced Whooping Cranes. We hope their next chicks will hatch in the wild!



We’re Spreading Our Wings

Forty-five years ago, Co-Founders George Archibald and Ron Sauey saw the need for more ambassadors to help secure a future for cranes. They understood that cranes as ambassadors for global conservation would offer important opportunities to engage people in protecting critical habitats around the world – habitats that support the rich diversity of life and human livelihoods. This continues to be a key component of our plan to save cranes, because we believe that a future with cranes means a future with a healthier and livable planet for all.

Today, we are preparing to renovate our crane exhibits and build a new visitor center, giving the birds and our guests the room to spread their wings too. Each new exhibit will have water features, natural landscaping, and a message that will take flight beyond our headquarters. The visitor center and walkways will immerse guests in the stories of the cranes and their neighbors in the wild. We are grateful to our capital campaign donors for helping our crane ambassadors thrive.

Just as the exhibits and visitor experience will be expanding in the next year, our work on five continents is expanding to ensure cranes survive and thrive in the wild. In this issue, you read about new discoveries in Angola that will enable us all to make a difference for a healthier planet. Post Hurricane Harvey, we are positioned on the gulf coast of Texas to study the effects of climate change on critical Whooping Crane habitat and to show residents how to be ambassadors for their iconic neighbors. You make this all possible!

Thank you for being ambassadors and benefactors for the cranes. Your donation is an investment in creative solutions that make the world better for both cranes and people. New landscapes of cranes in need and undiscovered threats remain part of our future. The challenge is daunting, but we are ready to face it with your help.



Cheers to everyone who made our recent groundbreaking possible.



Please send a gift today to the International Crane Foundation to help us soar to even greater heights. Every dollar makes a difference!

Please use the enclosed envelope or donate online by visiting our website at www.savingcranes.org.

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

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This handcrafted ornament by Nestled Pines Woodworking is a lovely decoration all year long. \$9.95.

To order visit www.craneshop.org, or call 608 356-9462 ext. 171.

Mongolia

Land of Can-Do People



By George Archibald, Co-Founder and Senior Conservationist

This crane celebration is backed by the creative energy and financial support from our Board Director Heather Henson.

The Khurkh River Valley in Mongolia with its vast grasslands and wetlands has lots to celebrate. It is home to the largest known breeding population of threatened White-naped Cranes, nesting pairs of Eurasian and Demoiselle Cranes, and flocks of non-breeding Hooded and Siberian Cranes. For the past four years, Dr. Nyamba Batbayar and his team from the Wildlife Science and Conservation Center of Mongolia (WSCCM) have staged a most impressive crane festival. On a remote plateau beside a lake with only one generator and their characteristic can-do attitude, the local people dedicate the day to crane dancing, singing, horseracing, archery, wrestling, and art. Towering nearby are two enormous sculptures of White-naped Cranes. After enjoying the festivities, supporters Jennifer Speers, Marian Phelps Pawlick, and I joined the WSCCM team to capture and band wild cranes. Now, it was time to show our can-do attitude!

Capturing wild cranes is difficult. But our Mongolian colleagues are master crane catchers. Placing color leg bands and telemetry devices on cranes helps researchers map their life history. When we have a good understanding of how cranes are using the landscape, we can prioritize our conservation strategies.

It was mid-morning when we approached a mixed flock of about 100 cranes standing on the other side of a wetland. When we stopped our vehicles, they flew away except for 12 molting, flightless cranes that ran at an amazing speed across the grassland. Nyamba made the quick decision to direct two of his colleagues on motorbike across the shallow end of the wetland and with one person running and the other on wheels, to herd the cranes away from the wetlands where catching them would be difficult.

I walked across the grassland to help direct the cranes while our two vehicles headed in opposite directions around the wetlands to do the same.

Through my binoculars, I could see that the little troop of running cranes was coming straight at me. They changed direction when I waved my arms and soon they were surrounded. The agile Mongolians jumped from their vehicles and expertly caught eight of the cranes.

Unprepared for so many birds, they quickly removed their own t-shirts to wrap around the wings and legs. Their socks became hoods to help the birds relax. The speed and precision of the capture and subsequent attachment of color bands and telemetry devices was remarkable. Soon the cranes were safely released with their new hardware. Nyamba said that usually only one or two cranes are captured with each attempt. This was a new record. Now each marked crane will be tracked as they migrate from breeding grounds in Mongolia to wintering areas in China, and we will learn more about how to help keep them on this amazing landscape.



A Magical Evening!

We would like to extend a heartfelt thank you to our sponsors and everyone who attended or volunteered at yet another fantastic *Evening with the Cranes!* Next year, our exhibits will be under construction, but that won't stop us from celebrating cranes. Stay tuned for forthcoming details for next year's event.



Platinum level sponsors Tom and Kathy Leiden.



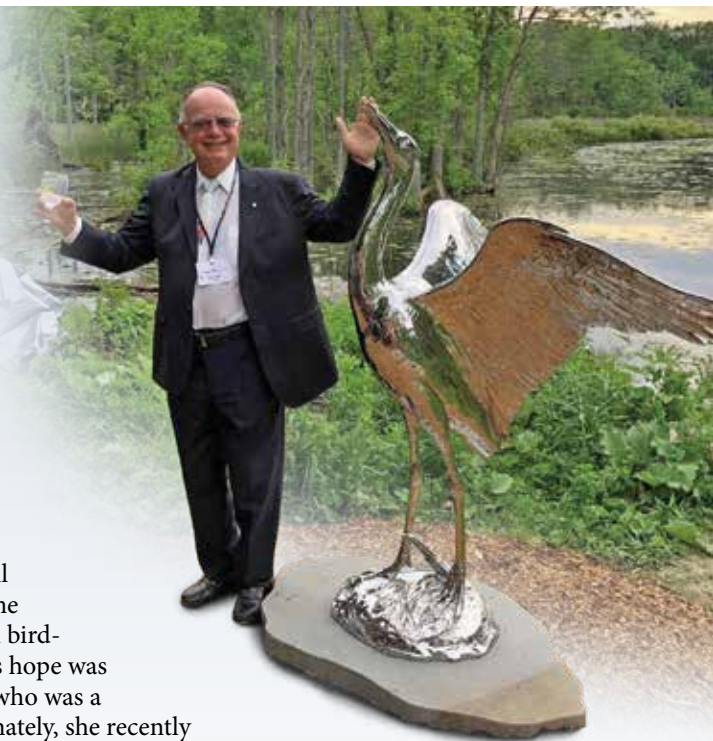
The Cornell Cranium

By Karen Becker, Executive Assistant

Every few years, a luminary in the ornithological world is honored by Cornell University Laboratory of Ornithology. In May, the prestigious Arthur A. Allen Award was presented to Dr. George Archibald, Co-Founder of the International Crane Foundation. As a graduate student at Cornell, George studied the vocal and visual communications of nearly 60 cranes of eight species on loan from zoos around the world. Through a comparative analysis of genetically controlled behaviors, he projected a model for the evolutionary relationships of one of oldest families of birds. He and fellow Cornell grad student, Ron Sauey, went on to establish the International Crane Foundation on a vacant horse farm in Wisconsin.

Fifty years later, George gazed at the familiar ponds outside his long-gone Cornell Cranium cobbled together from old mink cages – now the site of the new Imogene Powers Johnson Center for Birds and Biodiversity. During a special banquet with bird-lovers, scientists, and supporters, he was awarded the Arthur A. Allen Medal. His hope was to share the evening with his friend from Racine, Wisconsin, Imogene Johnson, who was a benefactor of both the International Crane Foundation and the Lab, but unfortunately, she recently passed away. One of her final gifts to the Lab was a sculpture she commissioned to honor George's life work, a dancing Whooping Crane by famed artist, Kent Ullberg. The brilliant stainless steel life-size crane with wings expanded now stands beside the pond as a reminder of a part of ornithological history that hatched there.

The award, named for Cornell Lab founder Arthur Allen, was established in 1967 to honor those who have made significant contributions to ornithology by making it accessible to the public. The story of George's adventures as a graduate student at the Lab are recounted in his book *My Life with Cranes*, available at www.craneshop.org.





International Crane Foundation

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Colorado Craniacs!

Celebrate cranes at the seventh annual Yampa Valley Crane Festival in Steamboat Springs and Hayden, Colorado, Aug. 30 to Sept. 2, 2018. Our very own crane expert Anne Lacy will give a presentation on the natural history of Sandhill Cranes. Visit www.coloradocranes.org for more information.

Member Appreciation Day

Saturday, September 22, 2018

9:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m.

International Crane Foundation Headquarters in Baraboo, Wisconsin

Mark your calendars for our annual Member Appreciation Day! Arrive early (gates open at 9:00 a.m.) and sign up for behind-the-scenes tours of Crane City, which are first-come, first-served the day of the event. Other special activities include a guided prairie walk, radio-tracking demonstrations, photo opportunity with Hope our Whooping Crane mascot, and special talks by our expert staff. Don't miss this last opportunity to experience a special day before we begin construction on our new visitor experience that will debut in 2020.

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EMAIL: membership@savingcranes.org

Memberships may also be purchased or renewed at our Visitor Center the day of the event. Visit our website as Member Appreciation Day approaches for a detailed timeline of activities.

