

# The Bugle

*Saving cranes for 45 years!*

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## Saving the World's Tallest Flying Bird

INNOVATIVE SOLUTIONS FOR WETLAND PROTECTION

*By Rich Beilfuss, President & CEO  
and Tran Triet, Southeast Asia  
Program Director*



Since ancient times, Sarus Cranes, the world's tallest flying bird, have been among the most revered birds in Asia. They appear in epic poetry, Buddhist scriptures, and are engraved on the 900-year-old temple walls of Angkor Watt in Cambodia. In Vietnam, they are the holy bird that carries the souls of the departed to heaven. And yet, they are in peril of disappearing across Southeast Asia due to the loss of their wetland habitat.

For more than thirty years, we have championed the charisma of Sarus Cranes to secure and restore these wetlands – creating new protected areas, helping local communities improve their livelihoods, and training future leaders in wetland ecology and management. In the name of Sarus Cranes, we safeguard some of the most diverse and productive wetlands on earth.

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Pictured here are two of the 400 Sarus Cranes living in Myanmar. They nest and feed in large, naturally flooded rice fields interspersed with wetlands. Although revered, the Sarus are in peril of disappearing because intensified rice production is displacing traditional rice farming, which results in the loss of their wetland homes.

Our goal in Myanmar is to preserve the mosaic of deeply flooded traditional rice paddies and wetlands by demonstrating that they have higher ecological and economic value. *Photo by Darren Diserens*

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An isolated population of about 400 Sarus Cranes occurs in Myanmar, mostly in the Ayeyarwady River Delta. Until recently, most of Myanmar was closed to outsiders. We are just beginning to learn about the status and needs of this population in Myanmar. To the west, Indian Sarus Cranes live year-round on small wetlands in densely settled agricultural landscapes, while the neighboring Eastern Sarus Cranes breed in more isolated, natural wetlands in northern Cambodia and winter on the large floodplain wetlands of Cambodia and Vietnam. The Myanmar Sarus show a blend of these characteristics. They nest and feed on large, naturally flooded rice fields interspersed with wetlands that produce their favorite food.

The trend is to convert the more traditional paddies to intensified agricultural systems that produce two to three rice crops per year through irrigation, wetland drainage, and heavy application of fertilizers and pesticides. Such intensification converted much of the Mekong Delta into a global rice bowl – but at a great cost to wetlands and their inhabitants.

**Our goal in Myanmar is to preserve this mosaic of deeply flooded traditional rice paddies and wetlands by demonstrating that they have higher ecological and economic values and can provide more benefit to local farmers.**

This summer in Myanmar, we advanced our goal by bringing leaders from two major agricultural development forces into the field with us – the Livelihoods and Food Security Trust Fund (LIFT), an international fund dedicated to improving the lives of smallholder farmers and landless people in rural Myanmar, and the AWBA Corporation, Myanmar’s largest manufacturer and distributor of agricultural technology.

We delighted in watching their faces light with the joy and wonder of seeing their first Sarus Cranes towering above the green rice fields of the Ayeyarwady Delta. Binoculars aloft, cameras clicking, they began to “see” our vision for an agricultural future that doesn’t come at the expense of cranes and other wildlife.

We are taking steps now to develop a pilot program together in this area to create a market for naturally flooded rice and to promote community-based ecotourism in this beautiful and diverse landscape. We will help advance other wildlife-compatible rural development, such as fishponds that are compatible with biodiversity goals. We can help Myanmar comply with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals and Convention on Biodiversity targets. The pilot project will be part of a new Sarus Crane Action Plan for Myanmar, implemented in partnership with university colleagues, government agencies, and NGOs.

We bring a wealth of experience to make this project successful. At Phu My, we developed a handicraft business that is improving livelihoods through the sustainable production and sale of handicrafts made from the dominant wetland sedge, *Lepironia*. This award-winning project has tripled local employment in the community and increased household income by 400%, while the Sarus Crane population using these wetlands has increased from fewer than ten to more than 200. Our SarusScape project in India demonstrates how traditional farming practices that focus on a diversity of crops – fruit trees, vegetable plots, fodder grasses, as well as cereal crops – can benefit people and wildlife in one of the most densely settled landscapes on earth. We have also demonstrated how alternative livelihoods and poverty reduction can help crane species in China and several African countries.

A great project needs a great team, and we are excited to have our Myanmar colleagues Myo Sandar Winn and KoLay Tin Aung Tun. Myo teaches zoology at Yangon University, with a focus on wetlands and waterbirds, and has spent hundreds of hours in the Ayeyarwady Delta with the Sarus. Her students are monitoring nests and feeding grounds, assessing habitat requirements, and evaluating emerging threats. KoLay is an ecological consultant who has helped many conservation organizations.

Can a commitment to naturally flooded rice save the world’s tallest flying bird in Myanmar and help communities fight their way out of poverty? We think so. The future of the Sarus Crane in Myanmar and across Southeast Asia will require our continued commitment to the innovative solutions for wetland protection and biodiversity conservation that we have championed for more than 30 years – solutions that benefit people and wildlife.

Photo by KoLay Tin Aung Tun



Development in Myanmar is threatening the remaining Sarus Crane habitats. By using the lessons we’ve learned from our work in Vietnam, China, and other rapidly developing regions, we hope to preserve – and grow – this last crane stronghold in Myanmar.

## All the Whooping Cranes in the World

Our last update of this infographic in the February issue showed a total number of 757 Whooping Cranes. It’s reassuring to see the count steadily increasing each time we update it. We gather the numbers to visually convey an overall picture of Whooping Crane numbers in the wild and in captivity as they continue their fragile recovery.

# All the Whooping Cranes in the world

# 849



This photo, taken at a great distance to avoid disturbance, shows a Whooping Crane chick that made history this year. The fledgling took us one step closer to our ultimate goal of creating a self-sustaining flock of Whooping Cranes.

## Record-breaking Year for Wild-hatched Whooping Cranes!

By Hillary Thompson, Crane Analyst

**2018** has been a milestone year for wild-hatched Whooping Crane chicks in the reintroduced flock in Wisconsin. Due to some late winter weather in April, only ten chicks hatched, compared to about 20 chicks in each of the last few years. But the good news is that those ten chicks survived longer, and more of them reached fledging, than chicks in past years. Six chicks fledged this year, four at Necedah National Wildlife Refuge and two from nests on private property. Five of those chicks still survive and are preparing for their first fall migration with their parents.

We are excited to report that one of these fledglings took us another step closer to our ultimate goal of creating a self-sustaining flock. Chick W5-18 is the first wild-hatched chick to fledge from a parent who was also wild-hatched – making it second-generation wild! The mother of this chick, female W3-10, hatched two chicks last year, but neither made it to fledging. This year, she and her partner nested at Necedah National Wildlife Refuge and W5-18 hatched in late May.

Our partners at Necedah attached a small transmitter to the chick to track its movements and survival. During the summer, when the chick was about a month old, the researchers found the transmitter without the chick and just a few feathers attached. We all suspected the worst, especially when the family group wasn’t seen for more than two months. But to our great relief, the family turned up with a fully fledged chick in September. We are thrilled this new generation is joining the Eastern Migratory Population and wish all of them the best on their first southward migration.

# Celebrating Years of Achievement in Southeast Asia

It was midafternoon in 1989 when nearly 700 Sarus flew low over my head on their way to feed on leftover rice from the harvest – in an area heavily impacted by conflict during the Vietnam War. I was thrilled and understood why locals believed that such huge birds with powerful wings and voices could carry the souls of loved ones to heaven.

Over the past 30 years, it has been exciting to see how much has been achieved to help the Sarus in Cambodia and Vietnam, and by doing so, healed so many other wounds.

—George Archibald, Co-Founder



**1988**

First expedition to the Mekong Delta, Vietnam, following the rediscovery of Sarus Cranes. Began wetland restoration at Tram Chim.



**1992**

Established Cambodia Program with comprehensive surveys of northern Cambodia and Tonle Sap Lake Basin.



**1998**

Designation of Tram Chim National Park (22,000 acres), the largest protected wetland in the Mekong Delta.



**1999**

ICF spearheaded establishment of Ang Trapeang Thmaw Sarus Crane Sanctuary (25,328 acres) in Cambodia.



**2002**

Established the Mekong Wetland University Network that now consists of 24 universities from 7 countries and has provided training for more than 300 university lecturers, researchers, and wetland managers.



**2004**

Established Phu My Lepironia Wetland Conservation Project in Vietnam introducing a new model of protected area management that combines biodiversity conservation with poverty alleviation.



**2006**

Dr. Tran Triet wins United Nations Dubai Award and the Equator Prize for impact, sustainability, partnership, and community empowerment.



**2012**

Completed research on persistent organic pollutants in over 400 wetlands of the Mekong Basin, with more than 80 scientists from 10 universities.



**2015**

Established Myanmar Program and began regular population and habitat monitoring in the Ayeyarwady Delta.



**2016**

Phu My became a provincial nature reserve, protecting one of the most important Sarus Crane sites in the Mekong Delta. By 2016, ICF helped establish 6 nature reserves and national parks in Cambodia and Vietnam.



**2018**

Partnered with IUCN to train wetland managers from 4 Mekong countries in climate change adaptation.

Photo by Pau Tang

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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.

### 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

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Dear Friend,

### With your help, we can solve the problems that cause crane numbers to decline.

As a six-year-old boy in Uganda, Adalbert Aine-omucunguzi was charged by his father to wake each morning at 6 o'clock in order to rouse his older brothers. They needed to bring in the cows for milking before school, an important daily chore. Adalbert worried how he would rise so early without an alarm clock. Then he remembered that the nearby Grey Crowned Cranes began calling at that time in the morning.

*"I learned to wake to the call of the cranes, and they never failed me."*

Adalbert promised the cranes that one day he would find a way to repay them for their service. And that time has come. Adalbert is now our East Africa Regional Manager, and the cranes need him as he once needed them. They are declining rapidly across the region. **They need you too.**

With your help, we can solve the problems that cause crane numbers to decline. Adalbert will be able to continue working to stop the poaching, illegal trade, and wetland disturbance that have led to such steep declines. These problems are solvable, but not without you. **Please use the enclosed envelope to make a donation in support of cranes and conservation.**

When I was a six-year-old visiting my grandparents' house, I always dragged out the heavy Volume B of the World Book Encyclopedia and turned to the bird pages. Gazing at the colorful images, my heart stirred at the thought of seeing such birds in the wild. As I learned to read the captions and descriptions, I was troubled by the word *extinct*. Great Auk - *extinct*. Passenger Pigeon - *extinct*. "What can be done to save the birds?" I thought. As I turned the page and saw a Whooping Crane, I wondered,

*"Will I ever get to see a Whooping Crane in the wild?"*

Today, thanks to your support, Whooping Cranes are making a fragile comeback. We used your past gifts wisely and together we are making a difference. I am overjoyed to see the tangible impact of your support when I am birding in the wetlands of Wisconsin. The last remaining wild flock of Whooping Cranes now numbers over 500 and there are 100 birds in the reintroduced population – ***and yes, they still need your help!***

Perhaps you are one of the fortunate few who has seen all 15 crane species in the wild. Or perhaps you dream, like I do, of the chance to see them in your lifetime. But we can't wait until the future to take action. If we are to keep up with the intense threats worldwide, we must **double our annual investment in conservation action.**

Thank you for being part of this mission. We couldn't have made it this far without you! Please consider a gift to make the bright future we envision for cranes, habitats, and people, a reality.

Warm regards,

Kari Stauffer  
 Director of Development

**P.S. The Grey Crowned Cranes of Africa are issuing a wakeup call for action. Please use the enclosed envelope so that we can solve universal problems that cranes are facing around the world.**

In spite of recent tax law changes, there are still ways to reduce your tax burden while saving cranes. Gifts of appreciated stock, contributions from donor-advised funds, or Qualified Charitable Distributions from a qualified IRA will make a big difference for conservation and may benefit you as well. Please talk with your tax accountant or financial advisor to learn which option is best for your situation. For more information, visit [savingcranes.org/support](http://savingcranes.org/support) or call 608-356-9462 ext. 807.



*Once abundant, Grey Crowned Cranes are declining rapidly across Africa. They need your help.*

# A Change is in the Air

*Thanks to our generous donors for making this dream a reality.*

In 1995, our Whooping Cranes moved into a new wetland exhibit – lovely and serene – and a favorite oasis for our visitors. A reimagining of the exhibits for our African cranes followed in 2009 and told the stories of the challenges they face in the wild. This month, we begin construction on one of the most exciting and ambitious transformations to take place at the International Crane Foundation as we create expanded natural exhibits for our remaining crane species. Our vision includes enclosures that are more natural for the birds, engaging

interpretative experiences for visitors, and a new visitor center with an indoor viewing area of Sandhill Cranes. We are excited to create a fun and immersive environment to learn about cranes and our work around the world. Watch for news of our grand re-opening in the spring of 2020. To receive updates about our progress, visit our website at [www.savingcranes.org](http://www.savingcranes.org) and subscribe to our e-newsletter. Along with all the other important news from our organization, we will share updates about construction, special upcoming events, and maybe even a surprise or two!



## Lasting Impact 2018 Annual Report

We are pleased to present our Annual Report 2018. During this fiscal year, we were able to make lasting impacts for cranes and the amazing places they share with people around the world. We hope you enjoy reading about our accomplishments, 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, has 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.

The annual report is available to download at [www.savingcranes.org/annual-report](http://www.savingcranes.org/annual-report)



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To order these items, visit [www.craneshop.org](http://www.craneshop.org) or call 608-356-9462 ext. 135.

## Snow Cranes Beanie

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## International Crane Foundation

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**I**n partnership with the Al. Ringling Theater, we are proud to present ***Ajijaak on Turtle Island***. Heather Henson, International Crane Foundation Board Director, IBEX Puppetry Founder, and Ajijaak Co-Director, invites you to this transformative spectacle that follows a young Whooping Crane separated from her parents and forced to experience her first migration alone. You will not want to miss this amazing and inspirational show. Look for information about tickets and sponsorships on our website at [www.savingcranes.org](http://www.savingcranes.org)



*Photo by Theo Cote*