

INTERNATIONAL CRANE FOUNDATION

*The*  
**Bugle**

*Saving cranes and the places where cranes dance!*

Volume 46, Number 1

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SAVING THE  
**SACRED BIRD  
OF THE PLATEAU**

*By Rich Beilfuss, President & CEO*



*Photo of Black-necked Cranes nesting at Yanchiwan with melting glacier in the background by Se Yongjun*



"Fengshan's contribution to China's cranes is remarkable. The Cao Hai project is truly a landmark initiative. In China, if people mention the International Crane Foundation, they know Cao Hai. The Black-necked Crane Network he established is a tremendous legacy to conservation."

—Yu Qian, China Program Director



*In the 40 years since Li Fengshan began his conservation career in China, so much has changed. China has grown from a closed, impoverished country to a global economic superpower with 1.4 billion people. Literacy and life expectancy have skyrocketed; poverty and hunger have declined. Skyscraper cities have sprouted up everywhere; cars have displaced bicycles, and fancy shopping malls have crowded out street vendors.*



China's rapid economic growth and industrialization has dazzled the world, but it has come at a cost. More than a million people die from air pollution each year, and water pollution is worse. Desertification, leading to eroded agricultural soils and blinding dust storms, is driven by widespread degradation and loss of natural vegetation.

Many species of wildlife have also suffered in the rapidly modernizing China. Endangered Red-crowned Cranes and Vulnerable White-naped Cranes have steeply declined in China as suitable habitats shrink. Critically Endangered Siberian Crane numbers are growing, but their migratory stop-over and wintering grounds in China are under intensive development pressure.

Yet through all of this change, the Black-necked Crane has been a remarkable success story. They are growing in numbers, expanding in distribution, and inspiring new protected areas – securing vast wetland areas in western China. And no

one deserves more credit for this success than Li Fengshan, who retired this year after dedicating his entire career to the conservation of this sacred bird of China.

Black-necked Cranes breed on the “roof of the world”— the remote and inaccessible landscape of the Qinghai-Tibet Plateau. Twice each year, they cross the Himalayan mountains to winter in lower-lying agricultural fields of China, Bhutan, and northeast India, before returning to breed after the spring snowmelt. Due to their conspicuous size, striking beauty, fascinating behaviors, spectacular mountain passage, and their tight co-existence with the deeply spiritual Buddhist communities that occupy this region, Black-necked Cranes are considered one of the most sacred of birds.

Before Fengshan began his studies in the 1980s, Black-necked Cranes were the least understood of the world's cranes. They had declined across much of their range for the previous 40 years, and only 300

were known in the wild. Today, Black-necked Cranes number more than 12,000, and their key breeding grounds, seasonal movements, and wintering requirements are well-understood. New national laws and strong religious beliefs prevent crane hunting and egg collection. And Chinese reverence for this species has been leveraged into a remarkable 27 national or provincial-level protected areas established in western China.

Fengshan first connected with the International Crane Foundation in 1987, when he met George Archibald, Jim Harris, and Su Liying at the first international crane meeting held in Qiqihar, China. Fengshan was a graduate student studying the ecology of Black-necked Cranes. With our support, he went on to conduct his Ph.D. research on Black-necked Cranes at the University of Wisconsin and spearheaded our field conservation efforts in western China for the next three decades.

*Continued on page 3*

Fengshan's Ph.D. thesis, *Developing a land management system for Cao Hai and its watershed to safeguard resources needed by Black-necked Crane and people*, helped lay the foundation for one of the first and most successful community-based conservation programs in China. When we first began working at Cao Hai Nature Reserve, Chinese villagers were in open conflict with the reserve and felt their livelihoods were in jeopardy by conserving this productive wetland. What followed was truly remarkable.

Fengshan helped Cao Hai become a national and international model for linking economic development with wetland conservation. We helped establish 74 community trust funds – small loans managed by the farmers to improve family incomes and reduce farming pressure on the wetlands. We installed numerous drinking wells for local communities where safe water was in short supply during the dry season. We helped local schools develop an environmental education curriculum unique to the area and its charismatic cranes. Our *One Helps One* program made it possible for girls to finish primary and secondary school. We established the

Farmers Conservation and Development Association that now runs the community work and serves as a liaison between the local communities and the reserve. All of these efforts combined – addressing farmers' basic needs, increasing environmental awareness, improving children's education, opening dialogue between community members and reserve staff – built trust and engagement at a critical time, when the Chinese economy, and this rural landscape, was developing very rapidly.

Fengshan also launched and coordinated the Black-necked Crane Network, which pulls together more than 100 researchers, protected area managers, decision-makers, and others concerned with the future of Black-necked Cranes and their breeding grounds. "The goal of our Black-necked Crane Network is to go out and do!" proclaims Fengshan. "We promote field research, wetland management, summer camps, school programs, or anything that benefits the Black-necked Crane."

The late Jim Harris told me that a key reason why we were one of the first foreign NGOs to register in China successfully is because of our stellar reputation thanks

to Fengshan's long-term conservation commitment to the Black-necked Crane. In recent years, Fengshan worked very closely with ICF Board Director and IBEX Puppetry visionary Heather Henson and her team to promote conservation education on the high plateau where Black-necked Cranes breed through the playful exploration of the connections between people, cranes, and the natural environment. This work is at the center of our educational efforts across China, scaling up from individual sites to the entire flyway.

Black-necked Cranes are one of the great success stories among the world's cranes. Although their numbers are steadily increasing, Black-necked Cranes remain vulnerable to habitat loss in their wintering range as wetlands are drained and converted to agriculture, and to the loss of the wetland breeding grounds that are fed by meltwater from glaciers that are rapidly retreating due to climate change. Thanks to Fengshan's Black-necked Crane Network and legacy of community-based conservation, we are confident that we can solve these challenges and ensure that these sacred birds continue to thrive.



Photo by Ciming Mei

# Crane Festivals Raise Awareness in China and Beyond

By Nancy Merrill, ICF Board of Directors

Poyang Lake, located in the Jiangxi Province near the city of Nanchang, is the largest freshwater lake in China and is an important wintering area for four species of cranes, including almost the entire flock of the *critically endangered* Siberian Crane. The International Crane Foundation has worked for decades at Poyang Lake National Nature Reserve to promote community engagement and nature education to minimize threats to cranes and the vast wetland.



In January 2019, I first visited Poyang Lake on a trip led by Co-Founder George Archibald. We met with Mr. Qiu Shuiwen, Director of Jiangxi Provincial Forestry and Grassland Department. As a board member and also the organizer of the Yampa Valley Crane Festival in Colorado, I participated in that meeting and pitched the idea of bird festivals as a way of bringing people together to raise awareness and encourage conservation action.

In September 2019, I was thrilled to receive an invitation to attend the first International Poyang Lake Birdwatching Week, co-organized by the International Crane Foundation. Of course, I accepted. I was asked to give a talk about the Yampa Valley Crane Festival and to teach a crane dance to the students at the International Nature School following the festival.

The festival turned out to be a spectacular event. Over 800 scientists, citizens, academics, officials, and representatives of many international conservation organizations attended. Highlights of the festival included a formal reception with the top government officials of Jiangxi Province, an Opening Ceremony with singers, crane dancers, and a stadium-sized screen with magnificent images of cranes projected onto it, and many birdwatching activities around Poyang Lake. Important sessions included the International Forum on Poyang Lake Wetland Migratory Bird Protection, the

International Siberian Crane Forum where I delivered my talk, and the Nature Education and Engagement Session. The most exciting aspect of the festival to me was that it represented the Chinese government's commitment to the protection of the Poyang Lake area.

Following the festival, I participated in the International Nature School also near Poyang. The school is an environmental education project for children living around the wetland areas in crane flyways. It helps children understand, experience, and appreciate

the ecology of their area and inspires the value of wetlands. I helped with the birdwatching group and was gratified to see how excited the students were to use the binoculars and the spotting scopes to view some of the beautiful birds of the area, especially the Siberian Cranes! For most of the students, it was the first time they had ever used binoculars and it reinforced the notion of appreciating wildlife from afar.

I was asked to create a crane dance and teach it to the students. I chose the song, "Do the Bird," a popular American dance song from the 1960s. The students wore crane hats and quickly caught on to the dance moves. They learned to flap their "wings," jump, hop, pirouette, bow, and shake their "tail feathers" just like real cranes. I thoroughly enjoyed working with the students to celebrate cranes and learn about crane behavior.

At the end of a very full and productive day of learning and fun, each student received a certificate from the International Nature School. I saw firsthand that the learning activities inspired a love of nature and especially a sense of pride in their hometown area and rare cranes. I am optimistic that these young people will become the conservation leaders of tomorrow. Cranes truly do unite us to care for some of the most amazing places on earth.



# Cranes Unite Us!



The kids at the International Nature School were absolutely charming. They were eager to practice their English with me and immersed themselves in learning the crane dance I taught them. During another activity, the students made crane pendants. One girl brought her pendant over to show me and then gave it to me as a gift. Another girl quickly followed suit. I will always treasure them as symbols of the meaningful ways cranes bring us together.

– Nancy Merrill

Photo of Siberian Cranes  
by Ciming Mei



*You can help us bring people together to save cranes  
and the places where cranes dance!*

Bringing people together is one of our core strategies for saving the cranes of the world. The threats to cranes are enormous, and it takes all of us coming together to meet the need.

## WAYS TO GIVE

Call 608-356-9462 ext. 807  
Donate at [www.savingcranes.org](http://www.savingcranes.org)  
or return the envelope in this issue!

**Please enclose your contribution in the envelope provided and be a part of this global movement!**



## Bird-a-thon 2020

**B**ird-a-thon is on! For the second year in a row, there will be a competition between Craniac Team Asia, led by our fearless Co-Founder, Dr. George Archibald, and Craniac Team Africa, guided by our dauntless CEO and President, Dr. Rich Beilfuss to see who can spot the most species of birds in one day. Last year, Team Asia won the species count by a close margin, but Team Africa is determined not to let it happen again!

With your help, all cranes win! Pledge a specific dollar amount per species or make a fixed gift before the teams head out in May. All proceeds support our far-reaching conservation efforts. Questions? Please contact Jennifer Fiene at 608-356-9462 ext. 151 or email [info@savingcranes.org](mailto:info@savingcranes.org).

To donate, visit [www.savingcranes.org/bird-a-thon/](http://www.savingcranes.org/bird-a-thon/) or mail a check using the enclosed envelope with a notation: Bird-a-thon.

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The Bugle is the triannual 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?  
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# Year of the Cranes 2020

East Asia is home to eight beloved and culturally significant crane species. Five of the eight are either critically endangered, endangered, or vulnerable to extinction. Nearly all are migratory – depending on a series of nesting, stopover, and wintering sites from Arctic Russia to southern Japan. This network of sites is called a Flyway, and saving these birds requires international cooperation between the six countries of the East Asia Flyway to safeguard the journey.



By promoting the **Year of the Cranes 2020**, we want more people to understand the challenges the cranes face migrating across the rapidly-developing landscapes of the region. During this special year, we will ramp up our protection of critical wetlands and develop conservation curricula in schools. To ensure the cranes continued survival, we will strengthen links among the critical countries and draw attention to the amazing, yet perilous, journeys that these cranes undertake each year.

*Our thoughts are with our staff and everyone affected by the Covid-19 virus. Our staff in Asia is safe and working from home. Their health and well-being is our top priority.*

[www.CRANESHOP.org](http://www.CRANESHOP.org)



We can't help but smile when we see these adorable felted White-naped Cranes from Mongolia. White-naped Cranes live side-by-side with people in the expansive, austere, and beautiful landscape of Mongolia's Khurk Valley. The women of the Khurk Valley use felted wool to create these adorable cranes. They measure 6.25 inches tall and include a thread for hanging. **\$25.00**

Warm your body and soul with this exclusive cotton blend crane shirt. Spring is coming, and it's the perfect time to spruce up your wardrobe with this season-spanning embroidered tee featuring three-quarter length sleeves. A graceful crane is embroidered in silver below the scooped neck. S-XXL | **\$29.95**



To order these items visit [www.craneshop.org](http://www.craneshop.org) or call 608 356-9462 ext. 171.

# Your Gateway to the CRANES OF THE WORLD

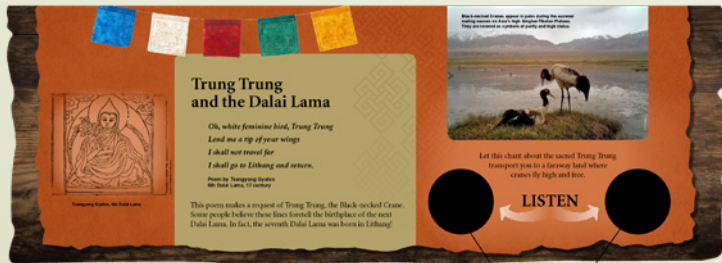
*You made this amazing renovation possible, and we can't wait to share it with you!*

Our new visitor experience and crane exhibits are nearing completion. We are so grateful to everyone involved in making it happen. A special thank you to the Walbridge Fund, Ltd., the Dohmen Family Foundation, and the Derse Foundation for making the dream of a George Archibald Welcome Center a reality. Please share in our joy by visiting us anytime during this inaugural year from June 27 through October 31, 2020.



At the new **George Archibald Welcome Center**, you'll be introduced to the cranes of the world and our work to save them. The spectacular indoor Sandhill Crane viewing window and exhibit showcases cranes in a natural wetland and tells the amazing comeback story of this resilient bird. Next, you'll step outside and begin your journey around the world on the wings of cranes!

As you explore over ten acres of new exhibits, you'll encounter our Cranes and Culture Plaza with a Zen rock garden, crane fountain, wonderful interactive displays, hand-painted murals, and naturalistic new homes for the cranes.



Designs by ECOS Communications

Step into George Archibald's original shack where he lived while working with Tex, a genetically rare and valuable Whooping Crane.

Copper prayer wheels were made by fifth generation Nepali artisans. Family members expertly crafted each metal sheet with flying, dancing, and calling cranes. Spin the wheels and lift your prayers.



*See you soon!*

SAVE  
the  
DATE

*A very special*  
**EVENING WITH THE CRANES**

will be held on **Saturday, September 19, 2020.**

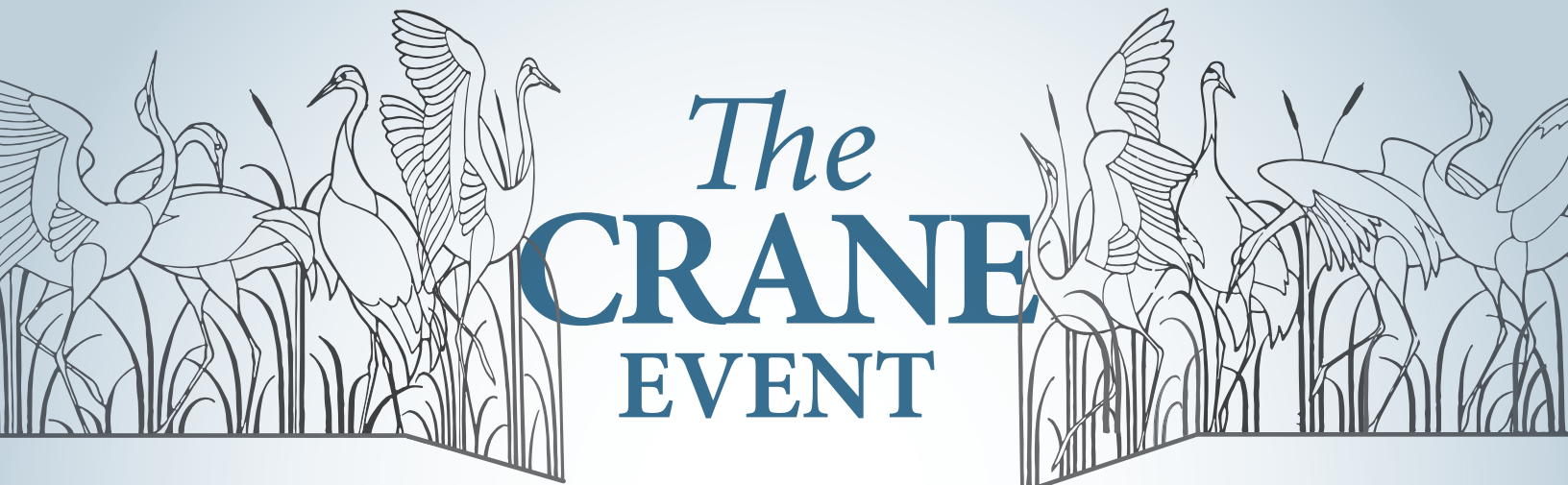
Information about ticket sales will be forthcoming on our website. If you wish to sponsor our events this year, please call 608-356-9462 ext. 101 or email [events@savingcranes.org](mailto:events@savingcranes.org).



## International Crane Foundation

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[www.savingcranes.org](http://www.savingcranes.org)

*Address Service Requested*



# The CRANE EVENT

## We're Opening the Gates on Saturday, June 27, 2020!

**O**ur visitor experience has been closed for construction since November 2018, so you can imagine how excited we are to share the unveiling with you. We will celebrate the public Grand Opening of our new **Cranes of the World** exhibits with festivities that will begin at 9 a.m. on June 27, 2020. Please join us.

But wait, there's more! As a member, you are invited to a special **Grand Opening Member Preview** on Friday, June 26, from 2 to 5 p.m. You'll be among the first to

see our completed renovations during this exclusive event. You won't want to miss the special behind-the-scenes tours for members only. Be sure to bring your current membership card.

Not a member? No problem, you can join when you arrive. Memberships are vitally important to sustain our conservation work and to keep cranes dancing. Please consider joining, renewing, or upgrading. Call 608-356-9462 ext. 807 or visit our website [www.savingcranes.org/membership/](http://www.savingcranes.org/membership/)