

The Bugle

Saving cranes and the places where cranes dance!

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Silver Linings

By George Archibald, Co-Founder



In the far northwest of China near the meeting place with Mongolia and Russia, the Hui River crosses a wide plain that, in years of high rainfall, becomes a vast shallow wetland, a place for spawning fish and an important breeding area for Red-crowned Cranes. In contrast, during drought years the wetlands disappear, and the cranes cannot nest. Recognizing the importance of the area to endangered cranes,

the area was protected as a nature reserve, but the vastness of the area poses challenges for the limited number of reserve staff. Red-crowned Cranes are rare and valuable on the black market for exhibitions and crane flight shows. One of the biggest challenges to their successful reproduction is that outsiders steal their eggs to produce captive cranes for sale at a handsome profit.

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“While the pandemic continues to be a tragedy for human populations, it has proven just the opposite for the struggling Red-crowned Cranes of the Hui River, China. Their story this year is a silver lining to a dark cloud and an inspirational reminder of nature’s healing power.”

—George Archibald

Photo by Tamizo Nakamoto

International Crane Foundation researcher, Dr. Su Liying, has been working in the area for over ten years. Upon discovering the problem, she brought a group of students to the area to explain the situation to local community families and to enlist their support in deterring egg snatchers. It worked. The local people contacted the nature reserve staff when they observed suspicious activities. Criminals were arrested, and the number of chicks fledging has gradually increased in wet years due to the watchful eyes of the local people. The recovery is going in the right direction but it takes time and continuous effort to raise awareness and protect nesting cranes.



Photo by Wang Keju

But this year, something remarkable happened.

The global pandemic and the associated restriction of movements of people in China meant that poachers could not travel to the Hui River, looking to steal eggs from nesting cranes. The lack of disturbance combined with a year of high water and a profusion of wetlands resulted in an astonishing increase of chicks hatching, and more importantly, fledging. A total of 41 juveniles were counted this year! Usually, only one or two chicks fledge.

While the pandemic continues to be a tragedy for human populations, it has proven just the opposite for these struggling Red-crowned Cranes. Their story this year is a silver lining to a dark cloud and an inspirational reminder of nature's healing power. But, it is also a lesson to us. We don't want to go back to business as usual once the global pandemic is over. The success this year gives us an idea of the potential we can accomplish with our efforts and what we can aspire to achieve.

For years, we have been working to build the capacity of the reserve staff and sensitize local communities to the value of Red-crowned Cranes so that egg stealing will become more and more difficult and poachers will be held accountable. The challenge now is to redouble our efforts so that the Hui River cranes can continue to nest in peace and raise their young to reverse the recent decline of the species in China.

Photo by Susan Carnahan



Notes from the President

By Rich Beilfuss

Thank You for Standing With Us



As I reflect on our accomplishments during this challenging year, I have never been prouder of our team and how together we have become stronger, never wavering in our mission in a time of crisis. Long before the pandemic began spreading across the globe, we were combatting global crises of biodiversity loss and climate change. And as our latest Annual Report 2020 reflects, we are making a difference together while keeping our teams safe and strong.

Thanks to you, we helped upgrade 4.7 million acres of Siberian Crane breeding habitat into the new Kytalyk National Park in Russia and protect 478,000 acres of White-naped Crane breeding habitat in Mongolia through the new Khurkh and Khuiten River Valley National Nature Reserve. We created 150 seasonal jobs to remove 4,180 acres of invasive *Mimosa pigra* from the Kafue Flats in Zambia—increasing rural income and community support for floodplain conservation while restoring Africa's most important wetland for Wattled Cranes. We signed conservation agreements with 13 communities in East Africa to conserve 520,000 acres of wetlands and planted 10,000 indigenous tree seedlings, 4,000 fruit tree seedlings, and tens of thousands of Napier grass seedlings to restore hillslopes, reduce erosion, and improve livelihoods.

We helped farmers in South Africa adopt more sustainable land-use practices on more than 200,000 acres of crane habitat. We engaged 220 private landowners in developing a new land management guide to improve wintering habitat for Whooping Cranes—offering new hope for this species as they expand from protected areas to private lands. Many thousands of students across the U.S., Asia, and Africa received our hands-on *Cranes in the Classroom* program, and we trained more than 50 educators to inspire tomorrow's leaders and encourage local action through school conservation clubs and camps.



Photo by Ciming Mei

As we look to 2021, I am especially excited about the lasting impact we will make through our new Conservation Impact Fund. Through the generosity of our Crane Heritage Society members and your planned giving, we created a new fund to provide deeper support to projects where the needs are greatest.

We have new multiple-year agreements with government and local partners to support management of the new nature reserve in Mongolia, protecting important breeding grounds for White-naped Cranes and many grassland birds, and the Kafue Flats of Zambia, home to a third of the world's Wattled Cranes, is securing protection for all the world's Kafue Lechwe antelope and more than 400 bird species. In the stunning Drakensburg of South Africa, home to three endangered crane species, we are launching our first carbon-offset project to generate support for farmers to adopt sustainable land-use practices and improve their livelihoods. We are helping farmers in western Kenya adopt new wildlife-friendly crops that are resilient to climate change and help sustain Grey Crowned Cranes. And we are more nimble in addressing challenges immediately as they arise. Following record flooding at Poyang Lake this year, we are sending a research team to assess the impact on food availability for wintering Siberian and White-naped Cranes to make sure their needs are met.

We are also devoting more time to you, our members, by growing our flock of conservation partners. As our flock grows, so does our impact—we can't do any of this without you. I hope you enjoyed our Virtual Member Appreciation Day in October, which featured a guided tour of our remodeled visitor experience in Baraboo. In the coming year, we will continue to offer exclusive curated events, videos, and presentations to bring the dynamic world of conservation to your living room. If you missed the member event, you can view and share it at www.savingcranes.org/virtual-mad-2020/

As I write today, much of our attention is focused on managing the impact of the global pandemic on our teams and mission worldwide and bringing people together from diverse cultures and backgrounds to solve problems and affect positive societal change in a time of profound tension. We do so knowing that the health of people and our natural world are inextricably linked. The challenges we face are daunting, but we are learning from success and deepening our impact. Thank you for supporting our efforts to combat the global decline in cranes and many other bird species, the loss of their precious habitats, and the impacts of climate change. Thank you for standing with us through the global pandemic as we bring people together through cranes as global ambassadors for goodwill and cooperation.

Safe Passage



Photo by Zheng Zhongjie

The cranes, startled by a distant motorcycle, took flight in unison—all except three. One bird remained standing—unable to move. Another was on the ground with no heartbeat, a third was staggering, and a fourth, a juvenile, was later discovered lifeless in the river.

These cranes were poisoned.



Such was the scene as volunteers looked through their spotting scopes at the Liao River in northeast China. The volunteers are part of a network of concerned citizens monitoring *critically endangered* Siberian Cranes on their demanding 3,000-mile migration. This poisoning is just one example of the dangers Siberian Cranes face on their long journey. They stopped at the Liao River on their flight north from Poyang Lake to rest and feed before the long trip to their breeding grounds thousands of miles to the north. Siberian Cranes depend on a chain of these critical stopover areas. If the chain is broken, they won't make it.

There were only a few youngsters among the 118 rare Siberian Cranes at the Liao River that awful day. So, to lose even one is a devastating loss for the next generation of these struggling birds. That young crane, less than a year old, survived its first migration and first winter, only to die from unnecessary poisoning. Sadly, the poisoning of cranes, while not intentional, happens often. Poisoned bait is used illegally to catch geese and ducks to sell for food consumption. Cranes and other wildlife inadvertently eat the toxic bait. Knowing the dangers of poisoning, the volunteers rushed to the scene to help the cranes.

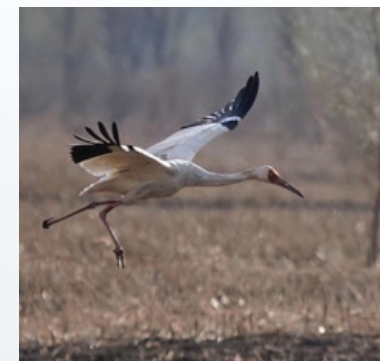


One of the dangers faced by migrating Siberian Cranes. This crane flies with an illegal trap on its foot.

THE STORY OF 419

As if being poisoned wasn't bad enough, one of the two surviving birds that day had a severely deformed leg and a missing toe. The injuries were most likely caused by a trap hidden in shallow water intended to catch small water birds. This particular crane broke free of the trap but paid the price with the loss of a toe and a broken leg that didn't heal correctly. The traumatized crane was taken to a rescue center where he recovered from the effects of the poison. A small solar-powered micro-satellite tracker was attached to the bird, now known as 419. He was released in a wetland where other Siberian Cranes stop on migration.

Upon release, he took off flying but was too weak and remained suspended in the air before falling back to the ground. Again and again, 419 tried to fly, but he gave up that day and limped toward the safety of the wetland. This was heartbreaking to watch for the assembled group of rescuers, and some could not restrain their tears. Others wondered, was it really a good idea for 419 to return to the wild like this? Could he survive?



After release, 419 tries repeatedly to take flight.

Daily satellite tracking and observations over the next 50 days revealed that 419 remained in the wetland, and he was active. But he was always alone and kept his distance from the other cranes. He sought out patches of long grass, unusual behavior for Siberian Cranes, who typically feed in the open shallow waters away from tall vegetation. During the day, 419 rested in the long grass, emerging at night to seek food in the wetland while the other cranes slept.

Stories like 419 and his mate reuniting can only happen when people care and take action. And their story isn't over. Each time they make the long journey, they depend on us to protect their critical rest stops along the way.



One morning, nearly two months after his poisoning, the signal from 419 showed that he flew north to the Russian border. After stopping overnight, he then undertook a marathon journey across the vast expanse of the boreal forest to the Arctic tundra and the traditional nesting area of the Siberian Crane. The signal transmission stopped after he left Chinese territory, but five months later, 419's tracker started recording again. This could only mean that he was back in China! The signal came from a wetland in Inner

Mongolia. The rescuers of 419 rushed to the site and were thrilled, not just to see 419 but also to discover that he was with a female crane. He found his mate!



419 flies with his mate. He is a strong flyer despite his injuries.

We are grateful to Professor Zhou Haixiang from the Shenyang Science and Technology University, his family, and the many volunteers who saved 419 and have followed his satellite signals ever since. Photos provided by Zhou Haixiang

Stronger Together

Dear Friends:

I hold dear the community we have created with you to protect cranes and the beautiful, wild places where they dance. Together, we have weathered one of the most challenging years ever, and I am humbled by all that we have accomplished. Through our stories from the field, I am reminded again and again why the work of the International Crane Foundation truly matters and why you and I are so passionate about it. We bring people together to solve conservation challenges. We work for healthy landscapes that support cranes and people too. We take action based on sound science to combat climate change, wetland loss, illegal wildlife trade, and so much more.



Stronger together! Pandemic food distribution with communities in the vital crane lands of Uganda.



The COVID-19 crisis is now raising a powerful new global awareness—our lives may depend on stopping illegal trade. As governments awoken to the health risks of wildlife markets, we are doubling down on our efforts to prevent the capture and sale of *endangered* Grey Crowned Cranes and other birds threatened by the illegal trade in East Africa and beyond. More than one-third of all bird species have been victims of international trade, including cranes. Likewise, there is a growing understanding that the **loss and fragmentation of our natural world—which puts wildlife in ever closer contact with people— is a significant factor in the spread of diseases like COVID-19.** Protecting nature is essential to protecting people.

The pandemic has taught us that **the longer we delay taking strong action to solve a global crisis, the more severe and costly the impacts and solutions become.** Combatting climate change and biodiversity loss is no different. Through our work with some of the most vulnerable communities on Earth who share their lands with cranes, we focus on solutions to climate change that increase community resiliency and provide real livelihood alternatives for the people most affected. Most important of all, the pandemic is teaching us that we are all one world, and we are stronger together. At the International Crane Foundation, we understand that our social and environmental needs are inextricably bound together. We have always sought to bring people together from diverse backgrounds to solve problems and affect change, and we always will.

Respectfully,

President and CEO

Please don't delay in taking action!

Your gift will ensure we can work toward meaningful solutions together.

WAYS TO GIVE

Please send your donation today using the enclosed envelope, donate online at www.savingcranes.org/support, or call 608-356-9462 ext. 807.

A provision of the CARES Act recently passed by Congress allows individuals to increase deductions for 2020 charitable contributions. Even if you do not itemize your deductions, you may be allowed to deduct up to \$300 in gifts to the International Crane Foundation. Contact your tax advisor to learn more.

www.CRANESHOP.org



Our exclusive new Prairie Cranes T-shirt is inspired by the resilience of the Sandhill Crane and features a flock as they soar over the prairie. Available in kiwi green with black design, or iris blue with brown design. Cotton | S-XXL | **\$14.95.**



These new 16 oz. logo mugs were created just for you—our members! Available in blue, white, and black. **\$9.95.**

The Fiscal Year 2020 Annual Report

We are pleased to announce our most recent Annual Report covering fiscal year April 2019 to March 2020. We hope you will enjoy this collection of highlights showcasing our conservation impact around the world. With eleven crane species facing extinction, the challenge ahead of us is global in scale and urgent in need. We are committed to making steady and measurable progress through the wise use of our resources. We are diligent with your investment and Charity Navigator, the leading independent charity watchdog agrees by consistently awarding us their highest rating. We will continue to operate at the highest standard, so we can make the greatest difference for cranes and the places where cranes dance. Thank you for your support.



The annual report is available on our website at www.savingcranes.org/annual-report



Impact by the Numbers!

By working strategically with partners around the world, we are able to have tremendous impact for cranes and their landscapes. On the following pages are **impact highlights** from April 2019 to March 2020.

Our work is focused on **7** key strategies

- RESOLVING THREATS TO CRANES
- ENSURING HEALTHY LANDSCAPES
- BRINGING PEOPLE TOGETHER
- IMPROVING LIVELIHOODS
- EMPOWERING FUTURE LEADERS
- ACTION BASED ON SCIENCE
- RESTORING CRANES TO THE WILD

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Editor: Betsy Didrickson

Bugle comments or questions? Please email Betsy at Bugle@savingcranes.org or P.O. Box 447, Baraboo, WI 53913 To become a sponsor of this publication, please contact the editor.

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Visit www.savingcranes.org/support/ or call 608-356-9462 ext. 807

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