

The
Bugle

Saving cranes and the places where cranes dance!

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Unraveling the Mystery of Demoiselle Crane Migration

*By Spike Millington, VP International-Asia
and Nyamba Batbayar, Director, Wildlife Science
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Researchers recently discovered why this dainty little crane, the Demoiselle—or “little lady” as described by Marie Antoinette, makes a long loop migration from wintering areas in the arid steppes of Rajasthan in India to reach the glorious grasslands of Mongolia to breed and raise chicks.

Photo by Mike Endres

Looking at a relief map of Asia, one topographical feature immediately stands out. North of the Himalayas and extending over much of southwest China and southeast Central Asia, the Tibetan Plateau would seem to pose a huge physical barrier to migratory birds. Indeed, most birds migrate around the plateau. Some particularly hardy species, such as Bar-headed Geese, traverse the plateau directly, flying at over 24,000 feet. However, one species has a unique “loop migration,” crossing the Eastern Himalayas in fall to winter in northwest India and Pakistan, returning by skirting the western limit of the Tibetan Plateau and then heading back east to breeding areas in south Russia, Mongolia, and northeast China. This species is the beautiful and charismatic Demoiselle Crane, superficially delicate but, as shown by its extended migration, a strong and resilient species.



Map by Dorn Moore



Photos by Ciming Mei and Andrew Holman

Demoiselle Cranes are a characteristic species of the grasslands of northeast Asia in the northern summer, less wetland-dependent than other crane species and able to utilize agricultural lands for nesting, as long as their favored food—grasshoppers—are nearby. The cranes often nest near the traditional houses of nomadic herders in Mongolia and are familiar companions among the grazing livestock populations. It is said that the cranes act as watchdogs for approaching predators, but they also benefit from the presence of the herders’ dogs, which keep predators, such as wolves, away from the herds. In the fall, post-breeding flocks, sometimes several thousand strong, gather in selected areas before migration.

In India, Demoiselle Cranes are not encountered in solitary family groups but rather in large concentrations at favored sites, particularly around wetlands in the otherwise arid regions of the northwest. Just as in Mongolia, people in India love the cranes. At one site, Khichan village at the northern end of the Thar desert in Rajasthan, local people spread out grain for the wintering cranes, which have increased in number to several thousand birds, attracting tourists from near and far.

The summer nesting areas and the favored wintering grounds are linked by a complex and, until recently, largely unexplained migration path. Why do these birds undertake a perilous journey over the high Himalayas in fall but then take such a circuitous route back in spring? A recent analysis led by Batbayar Galtbalt, a Ph.D. student at Deakin University, Australia and a staff researcher of the Wildlife Science and Conservation Center of Mongolia, together with other colleagues, examined this question.

They looked at the conditions—wind and weather patterns and land and vegetation suitability during the spring and fall migration. They then imagined the situation if the migration pattern was reversed, and the cranes migrated across the mountains in spring but went around the plateau in fall. It turns out that the wind conditions are not favorable for a direct crossing in spring, but in fall, the temperatures and winds favor the part soaring and part flapping flight of cranes as they move south. Although predators, such as Golden Eagles, lie in wait for migrating cranes, the risks are relatively low.

The ground conditions, particularly related to availability of grains and insects, which cranes feed on during migration stopovers, are also much better suited to the routes the cranes take in spring. In other words, it would be extremely difficult, if not impossible for Demoiselles to undertake the “reverse” migration. However, changing climatic patterns and land use patterns will continue to test the resilience of these birds. But for now, the herders of Mongolia can continue to welcome their crane friends in spring and the villagers of India can look forward to their return to desert villages in the fall.



Notes from the President

By Rich Beilfuss

Working Together for A Better Future



The return of spring is a great time to take stock of the triumphs and challenges of the past year as we chart our way forward for the year ahead. Many of us can't recall a more stressful couple of years, with the ongoing pandemic, global conflict, and political divisiveness pulling us apart. But as I reflect on our past year, I am struck by all the ways we joined together, at home and across the globe, to overcome challenges and seize on new opportunities.

Our 30-year commitment to Muraviovka Park in far-eastern Russia, through the tireless work of Sergei and Elena Smirenski, is a great example of how we can foster international goodwill during turbulent times through the charisma of cranes. Carpeted in a rainbow of irises, orchids, and lilies, Muraviovka Park provides a safe breeding ground for highly threatened White-naped and Red-crowned Cranes and Oriental White Storks, and an invaluable stopover for thousands of White-fronted and Bean Geese on migration. Muraviovka hosts international summer camps that bring together thousands of students and educators across Russia (eleven time zones!), China, Korea, Mongolia, and Japan to take pride in their cranes and wetlands. Collectively, they ensure that cranes have safe flyways to complete their long, transboundary migrations each year—and remind us that we are all interconnected on one planet Earth.

In East Africa, rapidly growing human populations and grinding poverty are placing tremendous pressure on natural resources shared by people and Endangered Grey Crowned Cranes. We join with these communities to build a foundation for conservation that they value, embrace, and lead—acknowledging that community health, wellbeing, and sustainable livelihoods are essential to the health of cranes and the wetlands they need. Our team in western Kenya is training local farmers to adopt climate-smart, biodiversity-friendly agricultural practices that improve their productivity and income while reducing pressure on wetland resources. Around Rugezi Marsh in Rwanda, we provide herders with grass seedlings to produce sustainable livestock fodder in upland plots, away from wetland breeding grounds for cranes. Around Rukiga wetland of Uganda, we work in partnership with the Margaret Pike Trust and others to provide better health services for the community, including family planning. These resources help empower women to engage in local livelihood activities that support their families and reduce pressure on local natural resources, benefiting both people and cranes.

In Texas, private lands hold the future for Endangered Whooping Cranes as they expand out from Aransas National Wildlife Refuge on their wintering grounds. We are building strong relationships with ranchers and other coastal landowners to help guide them through options to protect, maintain, and restore their lands for Whooping Cranes and other coastal wildlife in ways that mesh with their economic needs and vision for land conservation. By supporting landowners with best management practices for water conservation, wetland restoration, and climate change adaptation, we can better ensure healthy habitat and healthy ranches, for today and tomorrow.

We need to work together to keep successful species successful just as much as we do to save endangered cranes. Last December, the largest disease outbreak ever observed in Israel killed more than 8,000 Eurasian Cranes in the Hula Valley. Eurasian Cranes are a highly successful species, increasing rapidly across Europe, but the outbreak was a stark reminder that large congregations of cranes are highly susceptible to bird flu and other diseases. We are grateful to our Israeli colleagues for their swift actions to limit the spread of the disease, while also using this incident to raise global concern about the vulnerability of cranes and other birds when they are concentrated at feeding stations in Israel, Japan, India, and elsewhere.

Here at home, I am grateful for so many of you who joined together to stop the proposed hunting season for Sandhill Cranes in Wisconsin. We connected with our elected representatives across the political spectrum, diversified and strengthened our partnerships, and engaged with our members on an issue that we know you care deeply about. We also put a strong new focus on the need to solve crop damage for farmers in Wisconsin. We are working to ensure that deterrents like Avipel are affordable and convenient for farmers—and maybe even to create a Sandhill Crane stamp that would generate support for habitat conservation and farmers who experience crop losses.

Whether we are working to save endangered cranes across political boundaries or leveraging the charisma of cranes to help communities save wildlife places, I take comfort in the ways cranes draw us together during times of division. I draw hope and inspiration from our great team at the International Crane Foundation and all we achieved this past year. I look forward to a productive year ahead. Our mission makes us guardians of special places around the world—the glorious, irreplaceable landscapes where cranes dance!

CRANES DRAW US TOGETHER DURING TIMES OF DIVISION

Saving Cranes—One Rain Barrel at a Time

RAINWATER COLLECTION REDUCES PRESSURE ON WETLANDS AND CRANES

By Adalbert Aine-omucunguzi, East Africa Regional Manager
International Crane Foundation/Endangered Wildlife Trust Partnership



The wetlands of Rukiga District in southwest Uganda are home to the Grey Crowned Crane, Uganda's national bird, which appears on the country's flag and coat of arms. Overall, the population of Grey Crowned Cranes in East Africa has declined by over 80% in the last 25 years, largely due to increasing pressure on wetlands. The population of Grey Crowned Cranes in Uganda—once a stronghold for the species—is now believed to consist of only 10,000 to 20,000 individuals. The number was estimated at 100,000 in the 1960s.



The need for clean drinking water is universal.

And therein lies the challenge for wetlands and cranes. Rukiga District is characterized by high rainfall during two raining seasons, yet, the district has one of the lowest per capita water availability and storage capacity. Most households fetch water for domestic use from wetlands. While fetching water, people, mostly children, inadvertently disturb breeding cranes. Nests are abandoned, and an entire season of new chicks can be lost from a wetland.

In addition to wildlife disturbance, there are other concerns with collecting water from wetlands. Runoff occurs when rainwater flows over the hillslopes and picks up contaminants that corrupt drinking water sources in wetlands and valleys. And there are high soil erosion levels on hillslopes. Like runoff, erosion allows unhealthy sediments and nutrients to enter into drinking water sources. Most households have corrugated iron sheet roofs that gather a lot of water and contribute to soil erosion that causes sedimentation in wetlands and affects downstream drinking water sources. This runoff from roofs can be turned into an opportunity to provide safe water for domestic use by using collection tanks.



Abandoned nest due to disturbance.

Our team on the ground in East Africa is tackling wetland disturbance to cranes wherever it occurs. Last year, we shared the story of growing sustainable fodder to reduce harvesting plant material for cattle from the wetlands in Rwanda. That story, like this one, focuses on workable solutions that improve the lives of the people who live near crane marshes. It's the key to increasing the national bird of Uganda, and it's key to the harmonious co-existence of people, wetlands, and wildlife.

Our solution to tackle disturbance at Rukiga is not a new one. We will install rainwater collection tanks at public places like churches and schools in the district. Rainwater harvesting tanks provide the infrastructure for clean water every day. They also mitigate the problem of excess runoff causing sedimentation in wetlands. We'll begin with ten tanks—each one serving at least 50 households averaging six people per household. That's relief from water insecurity for 3,000 local people, and hopefully, that many fewer people in the wetlands.

**We'll report back on our progress, and we hope you will join us
and be a part of workable solutions in Uganda.**

Dear Fellow Craniac,



As we enjoy spring and the return of the cranes to their nesting grounds, I think about the threats they face on their long journeys north. They all need fresh water, accessible food, and protection from predators. They all need solutions that work for them and their human neighbors so both can thrive.

For cranes to flourish, they and their human neighbors need clean water. As you read on the previous page, the International Crane Foundation plans to install water tanks to collect rainwater for the people who live near the cranes in Rukiga District, Uganda. These inexpensive tanks, which can be installed for about \$1,400 each, cost little to maintain and reduce pressure and disturbance on the nearby marshes where the Grey Crowned Cranes breed and nest. It is gratifying to know that my contributions, and yours, will benefit both cranes and people!

Our focus on cranes allows us to pursue specific, results-oriented projects like this. We lean into problems people face, and work with them to find solutions that benefit cranes as well. The proposed Sandhill Crane hunting bill in Wisconsin is on hold, thanks to you and many others who voiced their opposition. But we heard the concerns of farmers and are working to find solutions that prevent crop damage without harming cranes or other wildlife. We believe these solutions can benefit farmers in other parts of the world where cranes and agriculture are closely connected.

As you reflect on the impact you want to make in the world, we hope you will invest in the International Crane Foundation as your partner in conservation. Our “boots on the ground” teams have been protecting and restoring wetlands, grasslands, and other critical habitats in the name of cranes for nearly fifty years!

We are so grateful for your past support, which enabled us to continue our work and make progress on key projects throughout the pandemic. We look forward to continuing our work this year with your support.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Eleanor Hoagland".

Eleanor Hoagland
Board Chair, International Crane Foundation



Please consider a gift today to make workable solutions a reality for some of the most vulnerable crane and human populations.

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.

CELEBRATE Cranes of the World IN 2022

We can't wait to see you as we begin our new season on Sunday, May 1, 2022. The crane gates will open every day from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. through October 31. Always check our website for the latest information to plan your visit. New programs in 2022 include *Cranes and Culture*, *Spirit of Africa*, *Whooper Wetlands*, and a day of family fun is planned for this year's *Cranes of the World* event in August.

Don't forget—when you are a member of the flock, you enjoy some very special benefits. This year's Member Appreciation Day on September 17, 2022, will include an opportunity to meet our team, fun demonstrations, and Good Egg Awards. Our final event of the year has become a tradition as we thank our community for the amazing support we receive and share that gratitude with our neighbors in need during *Good Neighbor Day*. Each visitor bringing a non-perishable food item on Saturday, October 29, 2022 will receive free admission.

Don't worry if you're not able to attend one of our special events, we're ready to celebrate cranes any time you visit. We hope to see you soon!

The 2022 Visitor Season On-site Special Events

Sun., May 1	Opening Day
Sun., May 8	Mother's Day – all moms get free admission
Sun., June 19	Father's Day – all dads get free admission
Sat., June 25	An Evening with the Cranes
Sat., August 6	Cranes of the World family day
Sat., September 17	Member Appreciation Day
Sat., October 29	Good Neighbor Day
Mon., October 31	Closing Day



The Fiscal Year 2021 Annual Report MARCH 2020 TO APRIL 2021

The crane's ancient call is one of resiliency and survival, and it guided us during this challenging time. We are struck by the important things we achieved together—how our teams quickly adapted to the situation and pivoted to create new opportunities when faced with circumstances beyond our control. We feel privileged to share with you the uplifting ways we stayed safe and “on mission” and made a real difference for cranes and the people and places that sustain them.

We will carry many of the lessons with us long into the future as we grow and expand our programs and impact. Thank you so much for your continued support and partnership as we seek a healthier planet for cranes, ourselves, and all life on earth.



A downloadable pdf of the annual report is available on our website at www.savingcranes.org/annual-report

Support Team Craniac!

Support International Crane Foundation Co-Founder George Archibald and President and CEO Rich Beilfuss and their team, *The Craniacs*, as they set out with binoculars in tow to see how many bird species they can spot in 24 hours!



Prothonotary Warbler photo by Tran Triet

Pledge a specific dollar amount per species or make a fixed gift before the team heads out in May. All funds raised will support efforts to save cranes and the places they dance.

Pledges or fixed gifts of \$40 or more will receive a one-year membership to the International Crane Foundation. Questions? Please contact Jennifer Fiene at 608-356-9462 ext. 151 or email info@savingcranes.org. To donate, visit www.savingcranes.org/bird-a-thon/ or mail a check to International Crane Foundation, Attn: Bird-a-thon using the envelope in this issue.

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Platinum Transparency 2022

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Crane Totes!

Our beautiful crane totes are an exclusive! These totes are constructed of 100% polyester canvas lined with 100% cotton sateen. They have interior zippered pockets and a magnetic brass closure to keep your belongings secure. Straps are black "vegan" leather. This generously sized bag is 16" tall by 13" wide and 3" deep. Available online at www.craneshop.org or by phone at 608 356-9462 ext. 171.



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? Please email Betsy at Bugle@savingcranes.org or P.O. Box 447, Baraboo, WI 53913
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Calling All Craniacs! AN EVENING WITH THE CRANES

Saturday, June 25, 2022 from 5 p.m. to 8 p.m.



Please join us for the highly anticipated return of our annual fundraising event. Enjoy a magical evening strolling the grounds of our beautifully renovated site in Baraboo, Wisconsin. Explore new exhibits while sampling local food, craft beer, and wine. Tickets are now available (\$80 Member, \$100 Non-member) Please email or call us if you have questions or would like to sponsor this event, events@savingcranes.org or 608-356-9462 ext. 807. We hope you will join us!

Click or call to purchase tickets
www.savingcranes.org/ewtc or 608-356-9462 ext. 807

Photo by Ted Thousand