

INTERNATIONAL CRANE FOUNDATION

The
Bugle

Saving cranes and the places where cranes dance!

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A New Safe Haven

Eastern Sarus Cranes. Tran Triet/International Crane Foundation



FLY TOGETHER

“The Sarus Crane, the world’s tallest flying bird and sacred species across South and Southeast Asia, is a wonderful flagship for conserving land, water, and biodiversity. In Vietnam, our efforts to save the Eastern Sarus Crane led to the protection of the last remaining wetlands and grasslands of the Mekong Delta, creating new safe haven for many threatened species.”

– DR. RICH BEILFUSS, President & CEO



Field Notes from the President

By Dr. Rich Beilfuss, President & CEO

Ancient. Elegant. Endangered. Cranes inspire us to work for a better world. Reflecting on our golden anniversary, I am drawn to the amazing places where cranes have led us, and how decades of commitment and partnership inspire innovative ways to safeguard cranes and the lands and waters we share.

Tram Chim in the Mekong Delta of Vietnam is one of those amazing places. Tram Chim was a local nature reserve when the International Crane Foundation became involved 35 years ago in hopes of saving the only known wintering grounds for the endangered Eastern Sarus Crane. Tram Chim was created by the late Mr. Nguyen Xuan Truong, Governor of this region, affectionately known as “Muoi Nhe,” who had survived in these wetlands during the long period of warfare. Muoi Nhe had the foresight to realize that the 10-million-acre Mekong Delta was rapidly converting into the world’s largest rice bowl and few wetlands would survive. He also understood that healthy wetlands are essential to the future of the people and wildlife of the Mekong Delta and sought our help in managing Tram Chim as an island of biodiversity in a sea of rice. As a young graduate student at the time, my job was to learn from Muoi Nhe and create a water management plan for Sarus Cranes and wildlife at Tram Chim. Now serving as our Southeast Asia Program Director, Dr. Tran Triet also started his career at Tram Chim at about the same time, studying wetland vegetation that was increasingly scarce in the region. Triet later launched the Mekong Wetland University Network, a 20-year partnership involving 26 universities in Southeast Asia that is a leader in research and management across the Mekong River basin.

Today, Tram Chim is a national park, a designated “Wetland of International Importance,” and a global biodiversity hotspot. The park hosts more than 60,000 annual visitors, many of them Vietnamese who learn a new appreciation for wetlands and their abundant life. They delight in huge flocks of Asian Openbill Storks and Glossy Ibises flying overhead, and abundant birdlife with colorful names

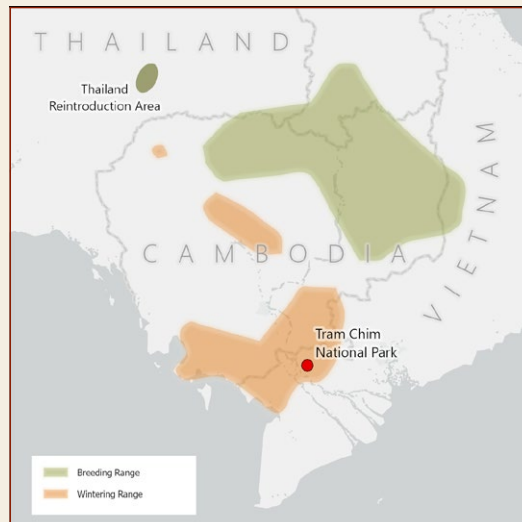


Entrance to Tram Chim National Park.
Rich Beilfuss/International Crane Foundation

like Bronze-winged Jacanas, Green-billed Malkohas, and Cotton Pygmy-Goose. Sarus Cranes are celebrated everywhere — billboards, park sculptures, playgrounds — and are featured on the logo for Tram Chim National Park and the emblem of Dong Thap Province where Tram Chim is located. But every winter fewer and fewer Sarus Cranes return to Tram Chim from their Cambodian breeding grounds. What is happening?

Cambodia, Vietnam’s neighbor to the north, does not share the same story for wildlife. There, the Eastern Sarus Crane is in alarming decline, perhaps the most endangered population of cranes in the world with more than an 80% decline over the past decade. This decrease stems from cranes being hunted for food and poisoned by pesticides when they feed in rice fields, and rapid habitat loss as their breeding grounds are farmed, logged, and settled with people. The International Crane Foundation and many conservation organizations have been instrumental in protecting small wetlands in Cambodia for cranes and other endangered birds, but government support for conservation is weak and the decline of Sarus Cranes, and their habitat, continues.

Fortunately, our strong history, team, and partners across the Saruslands of Southeast Asia still give us hope for this



beleaguered species. One country over, Thailand, boasts a crane success story. Sarus Cranes were extirpated from Thailand in the 1960s due to hunting and habitat loss. But local conservationists, with strong support from the government and national zoos, stepped in with a plan. With research, training, and advice from experts like our Co-Founder, George Archibald, our Thai partners began breeding Eastern Sarus Cranes in the 1980s and began releasing birds in 2011. The Thais also created an outreach program with local farmers who have Sarus nesting on their lands, supporting their production of organic rice sold locally as “Sarus Rice.” More than 100 Sarus Cranes are re-established in the wild, and last year 15 chicks successfully fledged.

Together with our partners the Government of Vietnam, the Vietnam Zoo Association, and the Zoological Parks Organization of Thailand, we are planning the reintroduction of a non-migratory Eastern Sarus Crane flock into the bountiful Tram Chim National Park. With the vision of Muoi Nhe, a strong conservation team, and lessons learned from successes like “Sarus Rice” outreach, we move ahead. Rearing and release facilities are under construction, training exchanges are underway between the Thais and Vietnamese, and the first Sarus Crane chicks will arrive next year. Our talented aviculture and field monitoring teams at the International Crane Foundation will share their decades of experience and wisdom drawn from Whooping Crane reintroduction efforts. Reintroducing and securing Sarus Cranes in Vietnam also gives us time to work more deeply with partners in Cambodia to safeguard Eastern Sarus Cranes and other imperiled wildlife across this region.

Many years ago, Triet and I dreamed of success for Sarus Cranes as we dove into our student research. Through the decades-long commitment of our team, and the hard work of our colleagues in Vietnam, Thailand, and across the Mekong River basin, there is still a place for Sarus Cranes in Southeast Asia. Though we have a long way to go, our beacon of hope for Sarus Cranes in Vietnam and throughout the region shines on. This effort reminds us of the good things that happen when we make long-term commitments to people and places for 50 years and beyond.



Cotton Pygmy-Goose. Tran Triet/International Crane Foundation



Boat passage among reintroduced Sarus Cranes in Thailand. Tran Triet/International Crane Foundation

Kudos to Mr. Attapon Srihayun, Ms. Nuchjaree Purchkoon, Dr. Piyakarn Teartisup, and many others on the Thai team for leading one of the most successful crane reintroductions in the world... and for giving us new hope for the future of Sarus Cranes in Vietnam.

Muddy Boots & Whooping Crane Pursuits

By *Matti Bradshaw*
and *Katie Fernald*

Photos by Carter Crouch/International Crane Foundation

In January of 2023, two future conservation leaders joined the International Crane Foundation's Gulf Coast Program armed with biology, ecology, and conservation backgrounds. Matti Bradshaw, Leiden Conservation Whooping Crane Biologist, and Katie Fernald, Wetland/Rangeland Ecologist, share a peek into their first few weeks of Whooping Crane conservation.

In late fall, people around the world are looking forward to the holiday season. In Texas we're gearing up for something equally exciting: Whooping Crane field season. The cranes turn up on the Texas coast in late October or early November, arriving with the first cool fall breezes. Many people would anticipate that their first few weeks at a new job would involve trainings, introductions...and more trainings. When you're a new employee for the International Crane Foundation in Texas and your first day is smack dab in the middle of Whooping Crane season, some of those trainings must wait. We hit the ground running with two research projects geared towards helping us better understand inland wintering behavior in the Aransas Wood Buffalo flock and how Whooping Cranes use freshwater wetlands near the coast.

In our second week, we maneuvered on empty gravel roads searching for Whooping Cranes that winter in rice country west of Houston, more than 50 miles from the coast. After

piping up every time we saw something large and white that resembled a Whooping Crane, we finally caught a glimpse of a family group foraging in a field. Throughout the winter, we were able to confirm, with the help of local landowners, that there were at least 11 birds using the area. One of the groups, which we termed the "red barn birds," were the stars of the show because of their regularity in the area. This family group was often seen foraging in a fallow rice field located next to – you guessed it – a red barn. On one occasion, we were surprised by the chick's incessant begging for food. The parents eventually relented and provided their chick with rooted plants, which are more challenging to access than food exposed on the surface. Spending time observing these inland wintering birds was rewarding but also allowed us to collect essential data for understanding their population. This year we focused on collecting behavioral data on these inland birds to compare



Monitoring inland Whooping Cranes.



Installing trail cameras.

them to the more traditional coastal birds. The continued use of these inland areas has implications for how we manage and plan for this species, so understanding how and why they are using these areas is critically important.

In our fourth week, we started working on a study comparing Whooping Crane use of freshwater wetlands based on a range of characteristics, including soils, water quality, and vegetation. This research will help us better understand why cranes prefer certain wetlands. After spending hours with our feet in the same mud (sometimes literally) as Whooping Cranes, we came to understand that cranes and crane biologists like the same type of wetlands: wide, shallow areas with short vegetation, and few gators or woody plants. A couple of times, we were even treated to a flyover from Whooping Cranes looking to land in the same place we were standing! Collecting the data for this study gave us an appreciation and innate sense of what Whooping Cranes like about certain wetlands, and we're excited to see how the data will back that up.

We have already been impressed by a Whooping Crane's ability to surprise us, even though they have been of interest to researchers for almost a century. Cranes have so much to teach us, and we have so much to learn.



Counting invertebrates in a water sample.

You Empower Future Leaders. You Save Cranes.

Every spring as Whooping Cranes journey north, a few young birds will venture far from home. These birds are exploring new territories and looking for a wetland they will eventually claim as their own. In time, they will find a location suitable for a nesting site where they will solidify their place in the population.

Likewise, young conservationists begin a journey toward finding their calling and place of impact every year. For many, that journey includes an experience with the International Crane Foundation, where they learn to track cranes on their migration routes, care for captive birds who will contribute offspring to wild populations, or lead critical research like Matti and Katie from our Gulf Coast Program. They are finding their place and leaving their mark on conservation.

The immersive internships and international cross-training done today impact the world we all leave to the next generation of conservationists.

You can also leave a mark by giving a gift that empowers future leaders and protects cranes and the places they call home.



Andrea Vale/International Crane Foundation

GIVE TODAY

You can leave your mark by returning a gift in the envelope provided, visiting Savingcranes.org/donate or calling 608-356-9462 ext. 807.

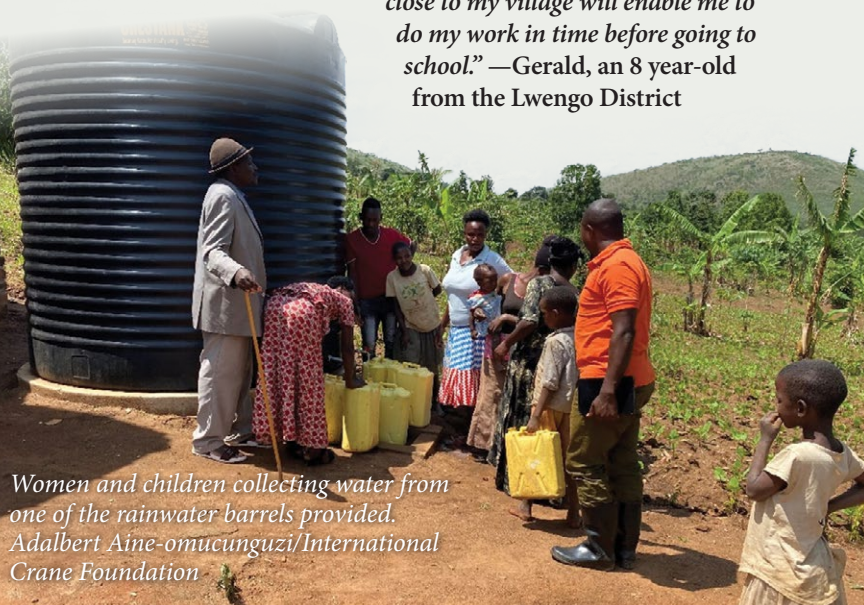
Clean Water and Shared Solutions

Near the rural villages of Uganda, Grey Crowned Cranes and the local people share a vital need for healthy water sources. Community members here have inadequate access to drinking water and travel long distances to collect water from wetlands that are contaminated by livestock. With shared landscapes comes the need for shared solutions.

Because of the generosity of members like you, the International Crane Foundation, in partnership with the Endangered Wildlife Trust, procured and installed 20 rainwater barrels in the Rukiga and Lwengo Districts of Uganda. The barrels were installed at schools, churches, and health centers, where everyone can access them. These rain barrels provide safe water for families in hundreds of homes and in turn, reduce strain on nearby wetlands where cranes and other threatened wildlife live.

For 50 years, we've made it our mission to save cranes and their habitats while improving the lives of the people who consider these birds neighbors all across the world. Thank you for making this possible.

"I stay with my 92 years elderly immobile grandmother, and I have to travel two villages over to fetch water before going to school in the morning. I am always worried to leave her unattended to, and also to travel unsafe distances. The rainwater barrel being close to my village will enable me to do my work in time before going to school." —Gerald, an 8 year-old from the Lwengo District



Women and children collecting water from one of the rainwater barrels provided. Adalbert Aine-omucunguzi/International Crane Foundation



MEMBER SPOTLIGHT

Nancy Graham & Gary Gehrman
Stillwater, MN | Members for 17 Years

Reading *The Birds of Heaven* by Peter Matthiessen many years ago inspired us to combine our passion for nature and culture with observing all the species of cranes in their native habitats. One of our most meaningful trips took us to northern Japan in winter to see the Red-crowned Cranes and learn about their importance to the Japanese culture. When we started contributing to meaningful causes, we were drawn to the International Crane Foundation's recognition of the connection between the vulnerable cranes and the local people who share their habitat worldwide. We like specific, measurable projects like funding rain barrels for Ugandan villagers who previously disturbed nesting cranes when they drew their drinking water from local wetlands. It was wonderful to get feedback from the people who benefited. We also see the need to support international flyways, as cranes are not bound by national borders. Since crane species have survived since antiquity in the face of constant threat, it is important for us to team up with ICF's efforts on their behalf.

Join us for the Great Midwest Crane Fest!

Celebrating Community and Conservation

November 10–11, 2023

Save the date for the second annual *Great Midwest Crane Fest* in Baraboo, Wisconsin, November 10–11, 2023, as thousands of Sandhill Cranes gather near the Wisconsin River before flying south for the winter.

Witness the marvel of Wisconsin's largest crane congregation and participate in guided crane-viewing tours, workshops, conservation lectures, and extraordinary events. Explore the beautiful landscapes and rich histories connecting festival co-hosts the International Crane Foundation and the Aldo Leopold Foundation.

To learn more go to greatmidwestcranefest.org



Ted Thousand

Imagining a World for Cranes

By George Archibald, Co-Founder



Imagination. That's what the International Crane Foundation was 50 years ago when Ron Sauvey and I had the idea to create an organization to save the cranes of the world. Fifty years later, here it is — an expansive operation wrapped around the world, with more than 100 employees and many more partners, all dedicated to helping cranes.

Imagination, faith, persistence, optimism, and lots of work, together with an army of helpers over these five decades have made it happen. You, our faithful supporters now almost 10,000 strong, are part of the bedrock upon which a safer future for cranes is promised as expressed by the increases in numbers of all the most endangered crane species. Thank you.



The International Crane Foundation's motto for the future, "Fly Together" is magnificently expressed by the song "Pure Imagination" by Leslie Bricusse and brilliantly presented in song and video by my favorite songstress, Barbra Streisand. Just tap the internet and imagine.

As a child, I was sometimes criticized for imagining things. But that's what faith is: as the Bible says, "the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen." That evidence became a reality in 1966 when I heard an unfamiliar sound from high in the sky but could see nothing until binoculars revealed tiny specks — Sandhills migrating over Alberta, Canada. I wanted to follow them back then and am happy to continue following them to this day.

Once I asked a Tibetan herder why Black-necked Cranes were sacred to his people. Seemingly amazed by my ignorance, he replied, "They're sacred because they're sacred!"

That says it all. My prayer is that the next half-century will be even more productive for our fragile birds than the first half-century. I welcome you to continue to fly with us on this great adventure. And never forget to imagine.

I would love to see you at our anniversary events on September 16, 2023 to celebrate 50 years of saving cranes!



Photos from International Crane Foundation archives.

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

Interim Editor: Hannah Field

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

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Let's Fly Together and Celebrate 50 Years of Saving Cranes

SATURDAY, SEPTEMBER 16, 2023

Come home to our headquarters in Baraboo, Wisconsin to celebrate 50 years of saving cranes!

Our annual Member Appreciation Day will be at our headquarters from 9 a.m. – 5 p.m. and includes talks and tours by our staff and special behind-the-scenes opportunities.

After our crane gates close, join us for our 50th Anniversary Benefit from 6–9 p.m. at Kalahari Resorts and Conventions in Wisconsin Dells. Fly together with Rich Beilfuss, President and CEO, and George Archibald, Co-Founder. You'll hear lively stories of the important places ICF helped save over the past 50 years, and learn about our crane conservation vision for the next 50.

Learn more about this special day and purchase benefit tickets:
savingcranes.org/flytogether | 608-356-9462 ext. 807



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