

INTERNATIONAL CRANE FOUNDATION

The **Bugle**

Saving cranes and the places where cranes dance!

Volume 50, Number 3

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Into Whooperland



Whooping Crane families unison call near Marcellin, Saskatchewan. Michael Forsberg



Read an exclusive excerpt of photographer Michael Forsberg's new book documenting North America's Whooping Cranes. Plus, celebrate more than 30 years of border-crossing conservation action to save the Siberian Crane.



Field Notes from the President

By Dr. Rich Beilfuss, President & CEO



Sandhill Crane. Ted Thousand

As I write this note, I'm getting ready for a three-week trip to Zambia and South Africa to meet with our project teams and energize our supporters. By the time you receive this *Bugle* in your mailbox, I'll be back in Wisconsin celebrating our Great Midwest Crane Fest and preparing for program meetings in China and South Korea. To lead this organization, I don't only crisscross the globe. I travel into the past and future, too. We spent much of 2023 celebrating the achievements of ICF's first 50 years. At the same time, we're looking ahead to our next 50. More specifically, we've been engaged in intense planning of our vision for the next decade. To see where we want to be, it's vital that we accurately assess where we've been, how we're progressing, where we're meeting our goals and where we might need to change our tactics or welcome unexpected opportunities.

How are the cranes doing? Here's a snapshot.

During the past decade, we made great progress for 10 of the world's 15 species of cranes. Eight species showed an overall population increase, including Siberian, Red-crowned, White-naped, Hooded, and Black-necked Cranes in Asia, Eurasian Cranes across Eurasia, and Whooping and Sandhill Cranes in North America, while Grey Crowned and Wattled Crane populations in Africa remained stable following decades of

decline. Only two populations decreased over this past decade—Blue Cranes in Africa and Demoiselle Cranes across Eurasia—although the population trend was uncertain for three other species—Sarus Cranes in Asia, Brolga in Australia, and Black Crowned Cranes in Africa.

Does that seem like a successful decade for such an endangered family of birds? It might.

But it's clear that our attention can't waver. Rapid changes in politics, demographics, climate, and many other factors means that the International Crane Foundation doesn't pause or rest. We turn our conservation dreams into reality through constant adjustment, scientific learning, vital partnerships, and the goodwill of everyone who cares for cranes and the places they call home. What never changes is our commitment. You'll read in this issue of *The Bugle* two stories of the long game ICF plays. We've been working to conserve the Siberian Crane for more than 30 years, and through tremendous international cooperation, we're succeeding. You'll also find a piece about Whooping Cranes—back from the brink of extinction, with a future that's still precarious. Photographer Michael Forsberg's intensive observation of these birds tells their story like no one else can.

Until next time, thanks for all you do make our vision a reality.

Committed For As Long As It Takes: Decades of Siberian Crane Conservation

By Hou Bo, China Program Coordinator and Claire Mirande, Asia Program Manager (emerita)

This year the International Crane Foundation marks both the 30-year anniversary of the global Memorandum of Understanding Concerning Conservation of the Siberian Crane and the final year of a 10-year plan funded by the Disney Conservation Fund. Our work has achieved very positive high-level outcomes.

The Critically Endangered Siberian Crane disperses across vast, inaccessible wetlands and migrates across national boundaries. In the International Crane Foundation's work to conserve the world's third rarest crane, we have risen to the challenges of the immense distances of their migration, the complexities of their biology, and the differing politics of the countries in their range.

As the program leader under the Disney grant, ICF works closely with partners from breeding, staging and wintering areas in China and Russia. We collaborate with governments, universities, nature reserves, research institutes, local non-government organizations, and volunteers and communities along their flyway, from the Russian Arctic to southeast China. And we are proud to affirm that the eastern population of Siberian Cranes continues to thrive. In the 2000s, the Siberian Crane population stood at approximately 3,500. In 2022 we saw the highest numbers we've ever recorded: about 5,500 individuals.

China's Poyang Lake is one of the most important habitats along the entire East Asian-Australasian flyway, and more than 98 percent of Siberian Cranes spend their winter there. The area is a haven for White-naped Cranes, Hooded Cranes and Eurasian Cranes too, as well as many other waterbird species. ICF has worked with Poyang Lake National Nature Reserve since 1999 to build a robust long-term ecological monitoring program and to train local staff to conduct surveys and analyze data—work which continues today.

Our Siberian Crane conservation strategy also includes work at staging areas in China, primarily in nature reserves at Momoge, Xianghai, Tumuji, Yellow River Delta, Wolong Lake, and Huanzidong. We are aiming to elevate these major Siberian Crane staging areas by working with the Chinese government to manage the wetland and water resources and establish a national park especially for cranes.

Because all the world's Siberian Cranes breed in arctic Russia, this region is a critical part of our flyway-level conservation strategy, too. Over the last decade, we saw the official establishment of Kytalyk National Park in Russia. Upgraded protection provided by the park has meant ecological, institutional, and financial sustainability. Russia has also endorsed a national Action Plan for Siberian Cranes, and Kytalyk National Park is listed as a proposed World Heritage Site.

International cooperation along the Siberian Crane's eastern flyway is critical to the species' recovery. ICF Director – East Asia Yu Qian explained, "Our global work in Siberian Crane conservation has inspired many people—from those sharing their lands with cranes to school children to nature reserve staff to government officials at all levels—to join this work and make it their own."

We're proud of the achievements of ICF and our many partners, benefiting Siberian Cranes as well as other threatened waterbirds. Our decades of work have also contributed to the integrity and resilience of wetland ecosystems along the flyway. With the rich experience and extensive partnership network, we are confident to move forward to the next decade effectively addressing emerging challenges such as extreme weather and behavior change.

Continued on page 4



Siberian Cranes at Momoge National Nature Reserve, China. International Crane Foundation

MEMBER SPOTLIGHT



Nina Faust

Homer, AK
Member for 20+ years

My 30 years of working with cranes in Alaska led me to seek out and be part of the International Crane Foundation—the information and education source for cranes of the world. My late husband Ed Bailey and I founded Kachemak Crane Watch in 1996. In collaboration with ICF, we funded a banding project that documented the migration path of Homer's Sandhill Cranes all the way to Sacramento, California. My husband and I also founded a haven for cranes, the nearly 700-acre Inspiration Ridge Preserve (donated to the Center for Alaskan Coastal Studies in 2019) in Kachemak Bay. I've been surveying crane chick numbers and mortalities for over 20 years, and I lead crane tours as Sandhills congregate at the Preserve in the fall. I love sharing my enthusiasm for cranes with others.

Impact by the Numbers (2015–2023)



Flock of Siberian Cranes at Poyang Lake. Ji Weitao

We're Committed... For As Long As It Takes

The International Crane Foundation's transformative projects span decades and cross borders. We're committed for as long as it takes. And our results are breathtaking.

As you've read in this issue of *The Bugle*, we're celebrating a 30-year global conservation agreement to protect and save the Siberian Crane. With support from people like you, the Siberian Crane is thriving. This is just one of many long-term projects the International Crane Foundation is so proud of. We recently signed a 20-year agreement to manage two national parks in Zambia's critical wetland the Kafue Flats, home to Endangered Wattled Cranes and hundreds of other bird species. In Mongolia, we're now co-managing the vast Khurkh-Khuiten Nature Reserve, a crucial habitat for Endangered White-naped Cranes.

Our visionary work has taken decades to plan and carry out, and has decades more to go—and all this amazing work has happened because of your support.

Whether you've been with us for years or just recently joined our flock, your support makes a difference.



In 1978, ICF Co-founders George Archibald (left) and Ron Sauey (right) open a suitcase of four incubating Siberian Crane eggs and one chick—who hatched en route—flown in to Baraboo from the Soviet Union. International Crane Foundation

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Timeline of Our Commitment to Siberian Crane Conservation

<p>1977–78</p> <p>Collaborated with Russian colleagues to collect eggs from Siberian Crane nests in the Siberian tundra, fly them to ICF in Wisconsin, and start a captive flock.</p>	<p>1981</p> <p>First captive breeding of Siberian Cranes at ICF.</p>	<p>1993</p> <p>Memorandum of Understanding Concerning the Conservation of the Siberian Crane adopted, at first with four signatory countries, later 11.</p>	<p>Mid-1990s</p> <p>Advocated for establishment of protected areas at Poyang in addition to Poyang Lake National Nature Reserve.</p>	<p>1999 to Present</p> <p>Monitored ecology of Siberian Cranes, water, and vegetation at four sub-lakes at Poyang Lake National Nature Reserve: our data formed the basis for reports and letters to senior Chinese officials advocating ecosystem management of Poyang Lake.</p>	<p>2002–2009</p> <p>Served as International Implementing Agency for the UNEP/GEF Siberian Crane Wetland Project for work in Russia, China, Kazakhstan, and Iran.</p>	<p>2004–09, 2013–14</p> <p>Supported crane and large waterbird monitoring along the Siberian Crane flyway, including key coastal areas along part of the Yellow Sea east of Beijing.</p>	<p>2012–2017</p> <p>Implemented the Wetlands, Cranes, Communities, and Climate Change project at Momoge and Tumuji National Nature Reserves and drafted first Climate Change Vulnerability Assessments and Climate Change Adaptation Plans for nature reserves in China.</p>	<p>2013</p> <p>Helped secure protected area status for Siberian Crane stopovers in northeast China.</p>	<p>2022</p> <p>Eastern Population of Siberian Cranes reached the highest numbers recorded to date: approximately 5,500 individuals.</p>
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The Bugle is the triannual newsletter of the International Crane Foundation. The organization was founded in 1973 by Ronald Sauey, Ph.D. (1948 - 1987) and George Archibald, Ph.D.

Editor: Angela Woodward

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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Into Whooperland

By Michael Forsberg

Looking back over the past four years, I've traveled roughly 50,000 miles on what I call the "Whooper Highway," an ancient north-south pathway. I've accompanied these birds through the cycles of their seasons and met many people who love them. Along the way, I've amassed more than 100,000 photographs, over 50 hours of film footage, a stack of 10 coffee-stained field journals filled with scribbles and words, and an endless collection of pictures and videos on my phone. I strategically planted a dozen time-lapse cameras in critical places where whoopers reside, capturing every



Courtship dance, Rainwater Basins, Nebraska. Michael Forsberg

hour of daylight, every day, the ever-changing landscape. It has been like witnessing the Earth breathe.

In a single year, I saw more than 200 individual Whooping Cranes, almost a quarter of their total wild and captive populations. During this journey, an old buddy and I flew a three-week flight path in his sassy red plane that traced the Whooping Cranes' slender 2,500-mile flyway up the Great Plains from the Texas Gulf Coast to Canada's Northwest Territories during spring migration. I hid in a blind for eight days and nights, witnessing Whooping Cranes

hatch chicks in one of the most remote and vast wetland wildernesses left in the world. I accompanied researchers pouring out of helicopters, hiding in fencerows, and dressing up in white hooded crane costumes to outsmart and capture whoopers, who sometimes outsmarted their capturers. Thumbing through historical photographs, I saw Whooping Cranes slung over hunters' shoulders and pinned on barn walls and clotheslines during the 1800s and early 1900s, when birds were killed in large numbers for their feathers, meat, and for sport.

I've also witnessed Whooping Cranes doing some extraordinary things: Teaching a chick how to navigate a headwind in Nebraska. Demonstrating patience before crossing a road to a Wisconsin cornfield. Dancing a tango that brought tears to my eyes.

There have been some sad moments too, like when I

picked up strewn feathers flecked with blood at a scene where cranes had been shot and killed. While sitting in a truck on a county road, I helplessly watched a Whooping Crane's amputated leg bleed. I received late-night texts and early morning calls from friends about a bird that struck a powerline and died. I've seen people crying, laughing, yelling, and exclaiming joy for these birds—I've been one of them.

Throughout these experiences, I find myself standing humbled and grateful for the lessons from both the people and the birds who have shared these moments with me.

The question I started with four years ago still haunts me today: Can Whooping Cranes survive us and our 21st-century world?

The answer rests squarely in our hands.

The Bugle is pleased to share an exclusive excerpt from photographer Michael Forsberg's new book Into Whooperland. Forsberg's photos have been featured in National Geographic and other magazines, and he is the recipient of the Ansel Adams Award for Conservation Photography and an Environmental Impact Award from the North American Nature Photography Association. ICF President and CEO Rich Beilfuss writes in his introduction to Into Whooperland, "This is a book that is as unforgettable as it is essential to all who care about Whooping Cranes and wild places." You can buy Into Whooperland through our online gift shop at craneshop.org.



Flying over Johnson Ranch, Lamar Peninsula, Texas. Michael Forsberg



International Crane Foundation

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Red-crowned Crane in Hokkaido, Japan. Ted Thousand

