



THE BUGLE

TRACKING DOWN THE BLACK CROWNED CRANE'S LAST OUTPOST IN CHAD

Come with us as we work to save Hooded, White-naped and Red-crowned Cranes in one of the most hostile landscapes on earth... visit remote Lake Fitri in Chad to find Black Crowned Cranes...and celebrate the dedication of community scientists in coastal Texas.

Approaching Galo village on Lake Fitri to conduct interviews. Mark van Niekerk/International Crane Foundation



A view of the Korean Demilitarized Zone shows fortifications and abundant bird life. Kari Stauffer/International Crane Foundation

FIELD NOTES FROM THE PRESIDENT

BY DR. RICH BEILFUSS, PRESIDENT & CEO



On this cold January morning, the depth of our mission hits home as we count huge flocks of Red-crowned and White-naped Cranes in one of the most hostile landscapes on earth. We're standing just south

of the demilitarized zone that separates the two Koreas and their fragile 70-year armistice, on a narrow strip of land called the Civilian Control Zone (CCZ). This was one of the bloodiest battlefields of the Korean War, where many thousands died. Haunting memories of the war are everywhere. The beauty of the cranes before us contrasts sharply with the backdrop of barracks, barbed wire, and mine fields. The two-star Division Commander of the Korean army and soldiers who patrol these lands stop by to scrutinize what we are doing. But soon, they're enjoying the cranes in our spotting scopes and practicing their English skills with our team.

We've brought our ICF Board of Directors here to experience one of the most important and challenging places on earth for crane conservation. The number of cranes wintering on the Korean CCZ has increased dramatically in recent years as their habitat disappears elsewhere in East Asia. The cranes feed on rice grains left intentionally by local farmers, who are allowed access by day to cultivate their fields. These working lands are vital to cranes and farmers, but their future is uncertain. Development pressure is intense and everywhere palpable, as the nearby Seoul metropolitan area pushes northwards. If wildlife-friendly rice farming gives way to industrialization and commercial greenhouses, this way

of life—and one of the last crane strongholds in East Asia—will be lost.

We are committed to helping our Korean partners find a lasting conservation solution here through new alliances with those who control the fate of these lands. Dr. Lee Kisup has monitored crane numbers and distribution in the CCZ for more than 20 years, and fostered trusting relationships with local government, farmer groups, and land trusts. Ms. Jinyoung Park leads communication and educational outreach programs for community groups and schools near Cheorwon. Mr. Jon-han Baek, a CCZ farmer, is a tireless champion of crane-friendly farming practices. The Cheorwon County government created a state-of-the-art Crane Education Center, where we base our efforts. Together, we work for land-use policies and practices that will sustain the cranes and preserve the important memories held in this special place.

Perhaps the most inspiring vision for the future of the CCZ and its cranes comes from within South Korea, where Suncheon City is recognized as a World Green City. What drove Mayor Lee Hyunjong and his team to transform their city into a global model for innovative land use, water conservation, and irrigation systems? Their dedication to protecting the thousands of wintering Hooded Cranes and the wetlands that draw more than 10 million tourists to Suncheon Bay each year!

Thanks for your dedication to our mission and a future with cranes as inspiring ambassadors for international goodwill and flagships for the healthy working lands and wild places we all need.

TRACKING DOWN THE BLACK CROWNED CRANE'S LAST OUTPOST IN CHAD

BY MARK VAN NIEKERK, DEPUTY DIRECTOR, AFRICA

Last summer, I was privileged to join a group of researchers in a far-flung region of the Sahel: Lake Fitri in northeast Chad. Lake Fitri is a crucial wetland ecosystem located east of N'Djamena, Chad's capital. The lake supports diverse wildlife, including migratory birds, and serves as an important resource for local fishing communities. The region plays a critical role in the conservation of species including the Black Crowned Crane, and Chad is considered one of the last strongholds for this species.

International Crane Foundation President and CEO Dr. Rich Beilfuss visited Zakouma National Park in southern Chad in 2019 and found massive flocks of Black Crowned Cranes in the dry season. This trip was different, though. Lake Fitri is not within a national park, and while it is

known to be an important crane flocking and breeding area, it's surrounded by agricultural landscapes where small-scale subsistence farmers grow sorghum and millet. In addition to being an important fishing area, Lake Fitri attracts

nomadic herders who pass through seasonally with their cattle. These people spend ever increasing periods of time here in search of grazing, as conflict and changing climate patterns have forced them to relocate.

In the months leading up to the expedition, I made contact with French research organizations that have maintained a presence in Lake Fitri and Chad over several decades, studying a broad spectrum of topics from agronomy to climate change. My interest was first to understand the number of Black Crowned Cranes in the region which may be captured, traded or consumed based on community surveys conducted by the researchers in 2018 and 2021, and second, to learn whether a conservation project could be established in this important Black Crowned Crane region going forward, particularly if crop damage was a perceived issue.

Our trip by 4x4 northeast to Lake Fitri took us more than 14 hours. We passed many flooded villages and saw large flocks of white-faced whistling duck and many species of waders taking advantage of the flooded areas. At the lake shore, we loaded our equipment onto horse-drawn carts, since the mud and flooding made travel by 4x4 impossible. The carts delivered us to a place where we boarded a pirogue (motorized large canoe) which took us to Yao, an island in the northeast of the lake and the base of the Sultan of Fitri.

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Top Left: Fishermen returning home with their catch of the day.
Bottom: One of numerous flooded villages en route to Lake Fitri.
All photos pages 3 and 4 by Mark van Niekirk/International Crane Foundation except where noted.

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We stayed at one of the Sultan's compounds for 10 days, conducting surveys with the villagers who lived on the many islands, and hoping to find Black Crowned Cranes. Each day we left by boat early in the morning. Boating was slow and arduous and distances were long, but each village welcomed us enthusiastically. Our visit began with tea and a chat. After tea, we discussed the community surveys that had been conducted over the preceding years to gain insight into the reliability of the results. This also provided a good opportunity to ask about Black Crowned Cranes—whether these were consumed or traded and whether they were perceived as problems. We noted only rare occurrences of consumption and only two cases of trade. And on our third day, we finally found Black Crowned Cranes!

The meetings were very productive, and almost all villages were receptive to the establishment and continuation of a project that could incorporate conservation practices, agricultural improvement, and human well-being in this biodiverse landscape.

We returned to N'Djamena by canoe, horse cart and 4x4, conducting running repairs as we traveled, feeling fulfilled by the authentic experience and time in the field. We look forward to establishing the next phase of a Black Crowned Crane conservation program in Chad. The October 2024 field visit to Lake Fitri provided invaluable insights into the ecological health of the region and the challenges facing both wildlife and local communities. Moving forward, conservation efforts will focus on habitat preservation, sustainable resource use, and stronger community involvement to protect this vital ecosystem.



Approaching Batah.



Black Crowned Cranes perching in an island in Lake Fitri. Christoph Deniau



Presenting the results of the 2018 and 2021 surveys in the village of Galo, with researchers Audrey Mbagogo (Ati University) and Christoph Deniau (CIRAD).

SCIENCE NEVER HAPPENS ALONE: VOLUNTEERS STEP UP TO HELP WHOOPING CRANES IN TEXAS

BY PAITYN MACKO, OUTREACH BIOLOGIST-TEXAS, AND
KATIE FERNALD, WETLAND/RANGELAND ECOLOGIST-TEXAS



Picture yourself as a Whooping Crane, walking into a wetland. The mud squelches beneath your toes, the reeds rustle in a light breeze. Blue-winged Teal quack at you from the far shore and an inquisitive Marsh Wren pops out of the cattails. If your imagination has brought you to a Texas wetland, don't forget the buzz of mosquitoes around your head and a pair of alligator eyes watching you from a discreet distance.

Texas Whooping Cranes are well known for their love of salt marshes, but in drought years, the salt marsh and estuaries can become too salty for some of the cranes' favorite foods, like blue crabs and wolfberries. At times like these, Whooping Cranes often seek additional food and drinking water in nearby freshwater wetlands. In 2023, we initiated a study of those freshwater wetlands to understand the characteristics that make them suitable for cranes. We only had one problem—we needed to know which wetlands were being used by Whooping Cranes. We couldn't rely solely on data from the birds with GPS transmitters, since only about 10% of our Texas crane population has one. Instead, we set up trail cameras on the wetlands, programmed to take pictures all day from January to the end of March, peak Whooper season in Texas. This led to a new problem—we ended the winter with almost 180,000 photos to go through!

So, we reached out to partners and volunteers across Texas and Louisiana for help processing all those game camera photos. In days, 40 people responded to our call and signed up for training. These community scientists took on 5-6,000 photos at a time, some processing as many as 20,000 photos individually! In the end, volunteers spent over 900 hours processing photos. The time volunteers gave back to researchers (over a month!) was priceless.

Sitting at a computer scrolling through photos isn't the most glamorous volunteer work, but it provides an exceptional window into these remote wetlands and a peek into the lives of Whooping Cranes that most people will never see. Our volunteers also had unique, even blazing interactions with nature. One volunteer was surprised to watch the progression of a prescribed burn towards the camera as the temperature climbed to a whopping 161 degrees Fahrenheit before the camera failed. While on the lookout for one rare, charismatic bird, a volunteer had a chance encounter with another—the Northern Aplomado Falcon. The Northern Aplomado Falcon is another endangered species that relies on open landscapes in coastal Texas, but we were quite surprised to have caught this one on camera.

Once our final count of Whooping Cranes on each camera is complete, it will be paired with habitat data we collected on the ground to determine which characteristics contribute to high (or low!) crane use. We plan to use that data to publish additional research on the diverse community of species that stands to benefit when wetlands are conserved for cranes.

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Above: Members of the ICF Texas team collect vegetation data along a transect through a freshwater wetland. Paityn Macko/International Crane Foundation

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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.

Memberships make our work possible. Please join or give a gift membership. Email membership@savingcranes.org if you have questions about your membership.

MEMBERSHIP ANNUAL RATES:

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|-----------------|----------|
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This trail camera image from March 7, 2023 shows a family of Whooping Cranes enjoying the freshwater wetland.

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At the Texas office we like to say, “science never happens alone.” The continued success of the conservation story of the Whooping Crane takes a community, especially as threats to these magnificent birds increase. Our work is not possible without passionate, dedicated people, so to our incredible flock of volunteers, a sincere thank you from all of us here in Texas.

This freshwater wetland research project, “Wintering Whooping Crane Use of Inland Freshwater Wetlands in Relation to Site Characteristics,” was funded by the Leiden Conservation Foundation and the Regina Bauer Frankenberg Foundation. This research is done in partnership with the United States Fish and Wildlife Service and the United States Geological Survey.

MEMBER SPOTLIGHTS



JANET AND CURT EHRMANTRAUT

Lexington, Kentucky
Members for 20+ years

We discovered the International Crane Foundation more than 20 years ago while returning to our home in Kentucky after visiting family in our “first”

home state of North Dakota. Impressed with the Foundation’s work with cranes and mesmerized by these beautiful beings, we established a monthly gift to the Foundation as well as making an annual gift. A treasured memory is a winter trip to Arizona, visiting the Sandhill Crane wintering site at White Water Draw near McNeil. We were awed at the vibrant beauty of the resting birds. We have a deep appreciation for ICF’s collaborative approach to international work—bringing sustainability to the crane species and also goodwill to people around the world. It’s been a joy over the years to see the Baraboo location grow not only in size but in its international reach.



RAY KIRKWOOD

Rockport, Texas
Member for 14 years

I’ve been interested in Whooping Cranes ever since learning about them in my Texas panhandle elementary school. Shortly after I retired back home to

Texas in 2000, I took a job as narrator of the Whooping Crane story on a boat taking people out to see them in their winter habitat.

When ICF opened a branch in Rockport, I volunteered to help in any way they needed. One project was to provide freshwater ponds inland from the coastal marsh so cranes could get a drink when the marsh water got too salty. To demonstrate that these ponds were useful for the cranes, we installed game cameras programmed to take a picture every five minutes all day long. The multitude of images proved that cranes used the ponds and also let us study crane behavior.

The very existence of this endangered species protects the estuarial wetlands surrounding the local bays. During the last 25 years, I have been honored to watch the Whooping Crane population grow, and to see many more of our critical wetlands protected.



BECOME A MONTHLY GIVER

When you make a gift each month, you ensure that you’re growing our efforts to save cranes and the threatened places they call home—every day of the year! It’s easy to set up, and to change or cancel your gift amount at any time.

Learn more at: savingcranes.org/monthly-giving

TURNING TO ONE ANOTHER

Cranes migrating at the Platte River. Ryan Michalesko/International Crane Foundation

Many people tell us about an inspirational moment they had with cranes. I was thrilled to read nature writer Margaret Renkl's experience witnessing an exuberant mass of Sandhill Cranes in their wintering grounds at Wheeler National Wildlife Refuge near Decatur, Alabama. Many other waterbirds, mammals, amphibians and plants flourish in this protected area—but the human visitors are all there to see the cranes. While others focused their cameras and binoculars for close-ups, Renkl watched the flock and saw cooperation.

"Birds don't exist to teach us anything," Renkl writes. "They have their own purposes and their own complicated lives—but we are fools if we can't learn something important for our purposes, too, for our own complicated lives, in their dazzling, life-sustaining cooperation. How sensible it is for a fragile species, having no fangs and no claws, to share resources. How wise to turn to one another for help."

Renkl's words illuminate our mission at ICF: everything we've accomplished comes because we turn to one another. It's through the support of our donors, our partners, and the communities across the globe who share lands and livelihoods with cranes, that we save these remarkable birds. If cranes have inspired you, too, ***please support our work with a gift today.***

Kari Stauffer

Kari Stauffer
Vice President - Development



GIVE A GIFT TODAY!



Return your gift in the enclosed envelope, visit savingcranes.org/donate, call 608-356-9462 ext. 807, or scan the QR code.

MARK YOUR CALENDARS!

Come join us for these special events in 2025 at the International Crane Foundation in Baraboo, Wisconsin.

MIDWEST CRANE COUNT
APRIL 12

MEMBER APPRECIATION DAY
SEPTEMBER 27

CRANE DISCOVERY CENTER* OPENING DAY
MAY 1

CRANE DISCOVERY CENTER* CLOSING DAY
OCTOBER 31

EVENING WITH THE CRANES
JUNE 21

GREAT MIDWEST CRANE FEST
NOVEMBER 15 - 16

Check our website at savingcranes.org/events for other happenings throughout the year!

*Our visitor site in Baraboo is now the Crane Discovery Center. Same great experience, new name.





International Crane Foundation

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GO CRANIACS!

Support International Crane Foundation Co-Founder Dr. George Archibald and President and CEO Dr. 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!

Pledge a specific dollar amount per species or make a fixed gift before the team heads out in May. Funds raised support efforts to save cranes and the places they dance around the world. Gifts of \$40 or more are eligible for a one-year International Crane Foundation membership!

QUESTIONS? Please contact Jennifer Fiene at 608-356-9462 ext. 151 or email info@savingcranes.org. To donate, visit savingcranes.org/bird-a-thon.

Prothonotary Warbler.
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AN EVENING WITH THE CRANES

SATURDAY, JUNE 21 · 4 P.M. TO 7 P.M.

Enjoy a magical evening at the headquarters of the International Crane Foundation and appreciate the beauty of cranes while sampling local food, craft beer, and wine.

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Black Crowned Cranes. Ted Thousand