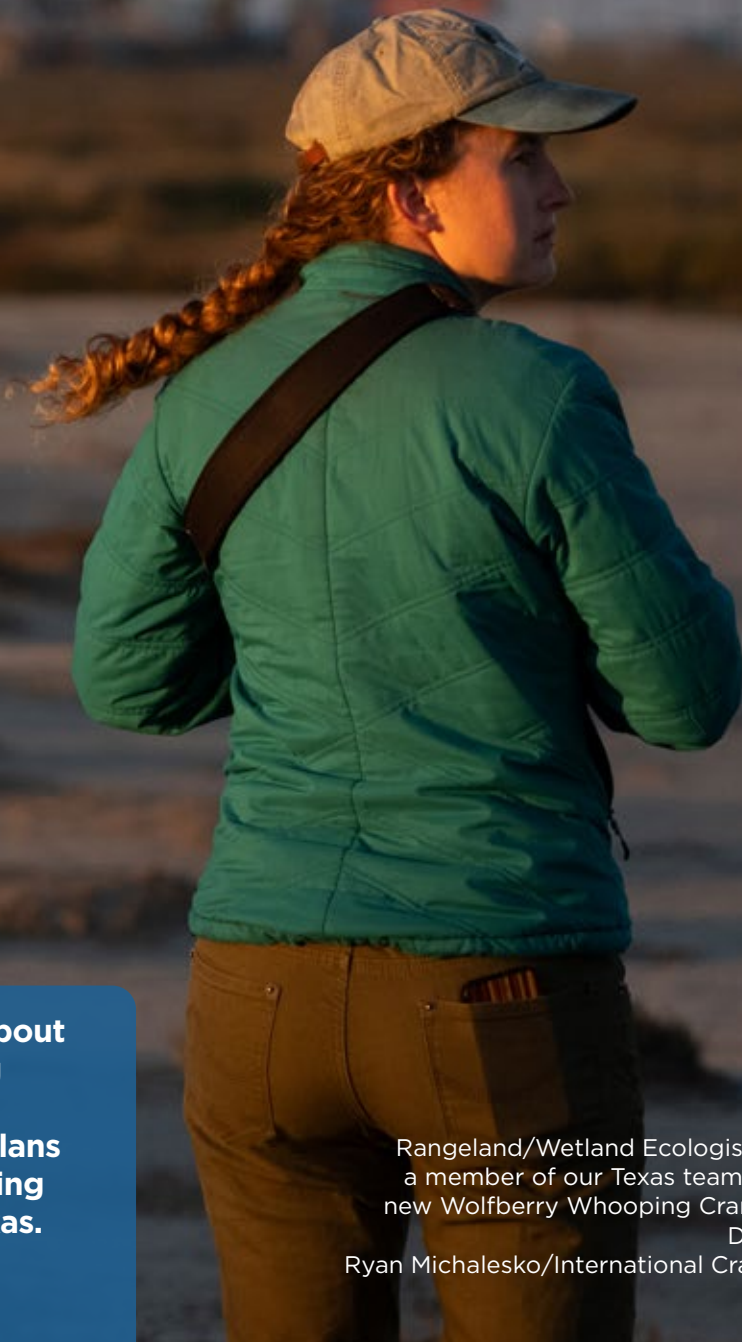




# THE BUGLE

## OUR NEXT BIG STEP:

### A VITAL SANCTUARY FOR WHOOPING CRANES



**We're excited to share more about our next big step in Whooping Crane conservation. Dr. Carter Crouch's story describes our plans for the new Wolfberry Whooping Crane Sanctuary in coastal Texas. Our purchase is complete, and there's a lot of work to come.**

Rangeland/Wetland Ecologist Katie Fernald, a member of our Texas team, looks over the new Wolfberry Whooping Crane Sanctuary in December 2025.  
Ryan Michalesko/International Crane Foundation

# FIELD NOTES FROM THE PRESIDENT

## RESILIENCY AND CHANGE

BY DR. RICH BEILFUSS, PRESIDENT & CEO

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When I first joined the International Crane Foundation as a budding wetland ecologist back in the 1980s, one of the things that most excited me about working with cranes was their sensitivity to environmental change. With their high visibility and cultural appeal, cranes seemed the perfect sentinels for protecting the health of our planet. I focused on restoring the exact wetland conditions that Sarus Cranes needed to reestablish at Tram Chim in Vietnam, and in Zambia, on the timely release of outflows from hydropower dams on the Kafue River to sustain Wattled Cranes and other floodplain-dependent wildlife. Without these targeted efforts, I was sure we would lose these species. But I also knew these efforts would take years. Could the cranes hang on? Somehow the cranes persisted, even in years when their feeding and breeding grounds were far from ideal.



Photo by Mariah Lundgren


A key lesson I've learned from these and many other experiences with cranes worldwide is their remarkable resiliency. I think of crane resiliency as their ability to withstand negative changes that occur at times in their natural environment. That's a good thing! Cranes are one of the most endangered families of birds in the world and face so many threats. We've hunted some of them nearly to oblivion, drained and farmed the wetlands where they breed, dammed the rivers that sustain their feeding and roosting grounds, stretched powerlines across their migration routes. But none has gone extinct under our watch.

Crane resiliency gives hope for the recovery of even the most imperiled species. Resiliency also buys us

time to get things right. Establishing the wetland conditions cranes need in Vietnam, in Zambia, in China and elsewhere has taken decades of engagement with partners and government leaders, training of staff, and testing of methods, and it's finally paying off. But we can never take the resiliency of cranes for granted. Even in the best of conditions, cranes are very long-lived birds that take years to breed and produce few young. Cranes can remain on degraded breeding grounds for years without successfully producing chicks to replace themselves, making it difficult to detect a population in decline. When we lose adults from the population due to overhunting, illegal capture, or powerline collisions, the population can drop precipitously. And I join other scientists in my increasing concern over the possibility of a devastating outbreak of disease.

When cranes feed on waste grain with ducks and other waterfowl, they are vulnerable to disease. Last spring we lost thousands of Sandhill Cranes to Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza (bird flu) in Tennessee, Kentucky, and Indiana, and had our first confirmed deaths of Whooping Cranes due to bird flu. In Europe last fall, more than 40,000 Eurasian Cranes died within a few weeks of a bird flu outbreak—a dreadful loss. Similar disease outbreaks may put pressure on the resilient nature of cranes for years to come.

As we work worldwide to ensure a safe home for cranes, I am constantly reminded that our goal is “One Health”—the health of our cranes, the health of ourselves, and the health of the environment we share. We are committed for the long haul to conserve lands that sustain us all, taking solace in the ability of these remarkable birds (and ourselves) to persevere before all the challenges we face.



The Siberian Crane, with its serrated beak specialized for digging up aquatic plants below the water surface, is the most wetland-dependent of all crane species. When poor water quality diminished their food supply on their key wintering ground at Poyang Lake, China, however, Siberian Cranes switched their diet to waste grain on farms to make it through the winter. Zheng Zhongjie

# OUR NEXT BIG STEP:

## A VITAL SANCTUARY FOR WHOOPING CRANES

DR. CARTER CROUCH, DIRECTOR OF GULF COAST PROGRAMS

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The Aransas-Wood Buffalo Population of Whooping Cranes is the last wild self-sustaining population of the species. They breed in far northern Canada and winter in coastal habitats along the Texas Mid-coast, where the biggest threat they face is habitat loss. Securing sufficient protected habitat is vital for their continued recovery. It was only recently that the International Crane Foundation started to wonder if we could take what we called the next big step in Whooping Crane conservation by acquiring a property on their wintering grounds.

In the fall of 2023, our Gulf Coast programs finalized our 10-year strategic plan. The Texas plan included three strategies we'd been working on since our Texas office opened in 2011: 1) Applied research on Whooping Cranes and their habitats, 2) Working with landowners and partners to provide and protect Whooping Crane habitat, and 3) Outreach and education to raise

awareness and appreciation for Whooping Cranes and their continued recovery. We also included a fourth strategy that would tackle the biggest threat to Aransas-Wood Buffalo Population cranes head-on: Property acquisition and long-term ownership and management of a crane sanctuary. If we could pull it off, owning the property would advance all our other goals for Whooping Cranes.

Although this was by far the most expensive challenge our program had undertaken, it was a challenge we welcomed. With the help of ten grants and generous donations from over 550 individuals and groups, in December 2025 the International Crane Foundation became the proud owner of a 1,150-acre property we call Wolfberry Whooping Crane Sanctuary. It's named after the Carolina wolfberry, an important food for cranes on their wintering grounds.



All photos page 3 and 4 by Ryan Michalesko/International Crane Foundation

Protecting this incredible property was only the first step. This year we will be developing a management plan and initiating projects to restore habitat for Whooping Cranes and other wetland and grassland dependent species like the American Kestrel, Mottled Duck, Monarch butterfly, Northern Bobwhite, Loggerhead Shrike, LeConte's Sparrow, Long-billed Curlew, and many others. While we knew protecting this land would benefit Whooping Cranes and other species, we also believe this project will strengthen the other core strategies in our program's 10-year plan. For example, while we are undertaking restoration, we will also be building our research around understanding the impact of this work. We closed on the property on Dec. 4, and the next day Texas staff were on the property with a university partner establishing long-term monitoring plots for tracking vegetation and bird response to management. Combining restoration with research will strengthen our applied research work. It will also strengthen our collaboration with landowners and partners. We will share our restoration successes and challenges with other landowners and land-managers, and our advice will come from an informed place with data to back it up.



Whooping Cranes in flight over our new Texas property.



Aerial view of Wolfberry Whooping Crane Sanctuary.

Owning and managing the land will also help us connect with the public through outreach events, community science data collection, and community restoration projects with volunteers. Twelve days after closing on the property, Texas staff and a volunteer contributed to the Powderhorn Christmas Bird Count on the new Wolfberry Whooping Crane Sanctuary. The Audubon Christmas Bird Count is the nation's longest-running community science bird project. In six hours and 55 minutes, we counted 71 bird species on the property,

including 12 species of shorebirds, 10 species of birds of prey, seven species of wading birds (including both species of North American cranes), six species of waterfowl, and five species of sparrows. Future Christmas Bird Counts and many other opportunities will build up our outreach and education in the region.

The Wolfberry Whooping Crane Sanctuary was the International Crane Foundation's first conservation land deal in our 52-year history. It's now a flagship of our Gulf Coast programs. Building our Texas conservation program around this conservation property will allow us to increase our impact. Securing this property was a lot of work and managing the property will be a big responsibility. But when I see a Whooping Crane family on the sanctuary and know they made a 2,500-mile migration to get here, it tells me the work is well worth it!



The property is located within a complex of other protected lands. Map by Sundas Rehman/International Crane Foundation

# WHAT'S YOUR CRANE STORY?



A family of Whooping Cranes at Wolfberry Whooping Crane Sanctuary. Carter Crouch/International Crane Foundation

One question we always ask at the International Crane Foundation is, “What’s your crane story?” People pour forth sightings from their backyard, where a family of Sandhill Cranes returns each spring. Or they traveled to Africa and witnessed a pair of Grey Crowned Cranes landing at the top of an acacia tree. Hosting crane experiences is the most rewarding part of my job, whether it’s giving a tour of our site in Baraboo or leading a field trip to see cranes in Texas. For people to want to help save something, they need to see it; they need to fall in love with it. Let’s make sure we all have crane stories to tell years from now. **Cranes are here today because of decades of determined conservation work by the International Crane Foundation and our partners and supporters.** There are many ways you can help save cranes, and donating to the International Crane Foundation is one of the best ways.

*PS: You can always include your crane story when you make a donation.*

*Or reach out to the Bugle at [bugle@savingcranes.org](mailto:bugle@savingcranes.org) and tell us what made you fall in love with cranes.*

*Kate Fitzwilliams*

**Kate Fitzwilliams**  
Director of Philanthropy



Kate Fitzwilliams, Hannah Petrilli/  
International Crane Foundation

**GIVE A GIFT TODAY.**



Return your gift in the enclosed envelope  
[savingcranes.org/donate](https://savingcranes.org/donate)  
608-356-9462 ext. 807

## HONOR SOMEONE SPECIAL

Making a gift to the International Crane Foundation’s *A Thousand Cranes* is a wonderful way to recognize a special occasion or remember a loved one. Your donation of \$1,000 includes an origami crane ornament—personalized with your message—that will join the flock on our outdoor exhibit at the Crane Discovery Center in Baraboo, Wisconsin. Learn more at [savingcranes.org/a-thousand-cranes](https://savingcranes.org/a-thousand-cranes)



# CRANE ENTERPRISES PROGRAM STRENGTHENS CRANE CONSERVATION AND SUPPORTS LOCAL LIVELIHOODS IN MONGOLIA

BY TUVSHINJARGAL ERDENECHIMEG, COORDINATOR, CRANE ENTERPRISES PROGRAM, WILDLIFE SCIENCE AND CONSERVATION CENTER OF MONGOLIA, AND BOLORMAA ALEXANDER

*The Khurkh-Khuiten Nature Reserve is a biodiverse grassland and wetland landscape in Mongolia of key importance to White-naped Cranes, as well as to Siberian Cranes, Demoiselle Cranes, Eurasian Cranes and other threatened bird species. Both the International Crane Foundation and the Wildlife Science and Conservation Center, who now co-manage the Reserve, have spent a little over a decade working to build a conservation model that also strengthens the economic resilience of the area's herding communities. Since 2022, we have been working with 75 local households in production of felt goods for sale. This has helped diversify family livelihoods and strengthen their environmental stewardship. This project generated nearly \$8,000 in revenue last year from the sale of felt products, including slippers and ornaments, largely through the ICF gift shop in Baraboo, Wisconsin. **Recently one of the participants, Bolormaa, talked to me about what the Crane Enterprises Program means to her and to her family. I'm delighted to pass on Bolormaa's story to readers of The Bugle.***

- Tuvshee

White-naped Cranes in flight over Khurkh-Khuiten Nature Reserve. Kang Suggu

**My name is Bolormaa Alexander, and I live with my husband and our three beautiful children in Bayangol, a small herding community in Binder village, Khentii Province.** Since getting married, I have lived the life of a herder, raising livestock with my husband. When our children started school, I began spending weekdays in the soum (district) center so I could take them to class and help them study. On weekends, I return to our herding camp. Like many herder women, I'm always looking

for ways to earn additional income during the school year. In January 2022, I heard about the Crane Enterprises Program, a free felt-making training designed especially for herder families who live in crane habitats. I decided to join the four-day hands-on training out of curiosity, not knowing it would be life-changing.

I learned how to wash, process, and prepare discarded wool from my own animals and to make it into felt slippers, coasters, and

crane ornaments. I had sewn traditional clothing before, but this was something entirely new. In the beginning, I didn't think I could do it. By the end of the training, I realized that I had everything I needed: raw materials, guidance, and the support of other herder women. I also gained a new sense of connection. Before this, I rarely had the chance to spend time with other local women.

*(continued on next page)*

## MEMBER SPOTLIGHT



**Jason Roth**  
Janesville, Wisconsin  
Member for 5 Years  
Crane Legacy Society

In a high school conservation class, I read Aldo Leopold's *Sand County Almanac*. This passage from Leopold's book moved me to tears: "Someday, perhaps in the very process of our benefactions, perhaps in the fullness of geologic time, the last crane will trumpet his farewell and spiral skyward

from the great marsh. High out of the clouds will fall the sound of hunting horns, the baying of the phantom pack, the tinkle of little bells, and then a silence never

to be broken, unless perchance in some far pasture of the Milky Way."

For this class, I also took a field trip to a wetland, which deepened my concern for the land and animals we should be in relation with. A few years later, during a trip to the Dells, I found the International Crane Foundation and fell in love with every crane species I saw. Cranes are so beautiful! During the pandemic, I reflected on my experience with the cranes and ICF's essential crane conservation work. As soon as I could, I returned to ICF and became a member. *Sand County Almanac* and the wetlands inspired a lifelong connection to the land and animals, a connection that eventually brought me to ICF, a place where I always feel a great peace wash over me.

Our first official order was to create 50 pairs of slippers and 50 crane ornaments, to be completed in two months. It was springtime, our busiest season with newborn livestock. It was difficult to manage the work while caring for the animals and my family, but I teamed up with my neighbor Sansartuya. With each other's help and the encouragement of our trainers, we completed the order.

Later that year, we participated in our local Crane Festival. It was incredibly rewarding to sell my handmade items directly to visitors and see how interested people were. With the money I earned, I was able to buy clothes for my children. I will always remember their proud smiles. Since then, we have participated in the Crane Festival every year, where our group of women raise awareness about crane conservation through our handmade crafts.

Since we started, my friend and I have made over 815 products in five styles, earning more than 13.2 million MNT (approx. \$3,700 USD) in sales. I also sell some of my crafts locally in our soum center. Whether I'm at home, caring for our livestock, waiting at a hospital appointment, or sitting beside my children doing homework, I use any spare time to sew and create.



Bolormaa Alexander sewing.  
Nandintsetseg Iderbat



Bolormaa, Sansarmaa, and Tuvshee.  
Bayardelger Batbayar

the wetlands during the nesting season to protect the cranes, and I remind my neighbors to do the same. When people see our handmade crane products, they ask questions, and they learn. **This is how change begins.**

My husband and children also help me in small ways, and this work has brought us closer together. It has also made me see conservation work differently. When I first joined, I didn't fully understand what making a crane ornament had to do with protecting wildlife. But now I realize that every product we make tells a story about a bird, a place, a community. Today, my family keeps our dogs away from



Nyambayar Batbayar



White-naped crane family in water. Nyambayar Batbayar

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Editor: Angela Woodward

Bugle comments or questions? Please email [Bugle@savingcranes.org](mailto: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](mailto:membership@savingcranes.org) if you have questions about your membership.

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E11376 Shady Lane Rd.  
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Baraboo, WI 53913-0447  
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## SUPPORT OUR WORK WITH YOUR PURCHASE

Our Crane Shop features several items lovingly handmade in Mongolia by the Crane Enterprises Program. Warm wool gloves, comfy slippers, adorable ornaments, as well as coin purses and card cases, are available now.



Visit [craneshop.org](http://craneshop.org) or call us at **608-356-9462** ext. **171** to find more great crane gear.

## SUPPORT TEAM CRANIAC!

Our annual Bird-A-Thon is coming up soon! 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. Questions? Please contact Jennifer Fiene at 608-356-9462 ext. 151 or email [info@savingcranes.org](mailto:info@savingcranes.org).

To donate, visit [savingcranes.org/bird-a-thon](http://savingcranes.org/bird-a-thon)

Sandhill Cranes. John R. Ford

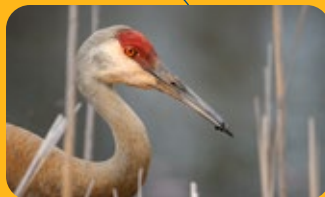


### Mark Your Calendar

Join us for these special events in 2026 at the International Crane Foundation in Baraboo, Wisconsin.

- April 18** Midwest Crane Count (Wisconsin/Upper Midwest)
- May 1** Crane Discovery Center opening day
- June 20** An Evening with the Cranes
- Sept. 26** Member Appreciation Day
- Oct. 31** Crane Discovery Center closing day
- Nov. 14-15** Great Midwest Crane Fest

Check our website at [savingcranes.org/events](http://savingcranes.org/events) for more fun crane activities in Baraboo and beyond!



Sandhill Crane, Ryan Michalesko/International Crane Foundation

## AN EVENING WITH THE CRANES

**Saturday, June 20, 4 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.

**Get your tickets now!**  
[savingcranes.org/ewtc](http://savingcranes.org/ewtc)  
608-356-9462 ext. 807

