MAKING TRACKS - news of the foundation

EXTRA EXTRA... ICF UNCOVERS THE Afghan Connection

by Ron Sauey

Through the heat waves the distant birds appeared like slowly whirling dervishes, their white bodies emerging and submerging at the shimmering interface between lake and sky. White egrets, I first thought, since through the telescope I could see a blurry form leap suddenly into the air without a trace of black on its wings. But our vision was obscured by the wavelike layers of hot air that we all piled back into our jeeps for a drive closer to the flock of white birds along the distant lake shore.

Our party, consisting of U.S. Ambassadors Theodore Elliot, Joel Scarborough of the Asia Foundation, Joseph Young of the Nebraska Project, Khushal Habibi and Ron Petocz of UNFAO, and John McCough and me of the International Crane Foundation, had spotted these birds soon after our arrival at the huge saline lake, Abc-Estada, in east central Afghanistan. We had left Kabul, Afghanistan's capital, seven hours earlier at dawn and had driven along spectacular highways lined with snow-capped peaks of the Hindu Kush. Roads in Afghanistan can be either very good or very bad. The good roads we traveled were courtesy of the U.S. whose continuing rivalry with the U.S.S.R. for Afghanistan's allegiance has brought modern airports and asphalt highways to a land in which the camel and horse still play the major role in transportation. We had crossed bad roads also, dirt paths gullied with deep ravines where the drivers simply "gummed" their jeeps down the steep inclines and hoped for the best. But we had made it, in three separate jeeps full of two days' provisions of water and food, and a stockpile of telescopes, binoculars, and cameras. Our mission: to track down the rare Siberian White Crane and perhaps (Continued on page 4)
Our Cranes Return Every Spring
by Dr. Olaf Swanberg

Springtime to many people in Sweden is incomplete without a trip to Lake Hornborga in southcentral Sweden to see the annual return of thousands of cranes. Scientists know them as Grus grus, the Common Crane, a bird with a distribution from Norway and Sweden in the west, clear through central Asia and frigid Siberia in the east. To Swedes, they are simply "Our Cranes" and their appearance at Hornborga in early spring is cue for people all over Sweden to drop their business and make for the lake to see again the spectacle of thousands of large grey birds dancing on snowy fields.

Indeed, the flood of people is so great that police have to inaugurate one way traffic for some of the roads in the area.

Being the resident crane expert, I got a lot of questions, as usual. "How many are they? Why don't they rest here in autumn, etc.? At first, I was unable to answer these questions because few studies had been made of the migratory habits of our cranes. We did know from earlier banding studies that these birds breed in the remote marshes of our country and winter in Spain and Morocco. But their migratory behavior was still incompletely known.

In order to better understand our cranes and their habits, I and a few local people in the Skövde Bird Club decided to begin a study of the cranes and their comings and goings on Lake Hornborga. We started planning our procedures in the winter of 1965-66. That spring we counted both the daily number of cranes as well as the total number visiting Hornborga during the whole season. The daily count was easier, because the cranes roost together in one open area in the southern part of the lake (Hornborga is so shallow that it is actually more of a marsh than a lake). At dawn the birds gradually leave the roost in well divided groups to visit surrounding fields.

(KCCP) caught the weak bodied bird and sent it to ICF. Won arrived in Baraboo on April 28 after spending six weeks in quarantine in Hawaii, and he will soon be paired with a young female Japanese Crane that KCCP raised last summer.

Won's presence at ICF is a glowing tribute to the concern and generosity of many different private and public organizations. Dr. Won and KCCP caught and treated the crane, and alerted ICF. The Government of the Republic of Korea approved loan of the bird to ICF, and Korean Airlines provided free passage for Won to Honolulu. ICF in turn, provided all the U.S. Department of Interior and Agriculture issued permits to allow the crane, an endangered species, to enter the U.S. We express our deepest thanks to everyone involved in Won's importation. Won's future mate conveys her thanks as well.

In other developments in Korea, KCCP established two new feeding stations for cranes, one at Andong, west of Seoul, and another at Ieun Pyeong, just south of the Demilitarized Zone (DMZ). 40 Japanese Cranes were seen in south Korea this winter and Dr. Won suggests that the very severe winter was responsible for this unusually large number of birds. The Purim Company of Korea gave a warm welcome boost to the crane feeding effort by donating a ton and a half of grain to KCCP.

On a less up-beat note, North Korean soldiers were seen shooting at least four Japanese Cranes during the winter. One bird, shot on the 25th of February damaged to flee the southern side of the DMZ where it was caught by Dr. Won and his assistants. The bird had both feet severely damaged and died six days later of gangrene. KCCP has written letters of protest to several international conservation organizations.

We commend the KCCP, our sister organization in Korea, for their latest achievements in promoting the conservation of rare cranes throughout the Korean peninsula.

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Our Cranes Return...

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cranes, we were able to detect birds whose arrival in our area had been missed.

The outcome of our census was extremely encouraging. Thanks to the numbers and enthusiasm of our volunteer observers, we obtained what appeared to be very reliable figures. We decided to repeat this large scale census every five years and to monitor changes in the population size of our cranes, and to obtain an accurate figure of the number of cranes at Lake Horborga, we also reached the following conclusions for the birds stop-over:

1. Between their wintering area in Spain and Lake Horborga in Sweden, our cranes apparently stop only once, along the German coast of the Baltic Sea. Here they rest for favorable migratory weather. From the German coast to Horborga is 450 kilometers (270 miles). This appears to be a good distance for a one day flight, if migration weather is acceptable.

2. Horborga, with an area of 25 square kilometers and yet with a very shallow depth of water, is an ideal place for cranes to roost.

3. Two big events take place at the marsh: in the fall, extensive fields of potatoes. Here, the cranes find ample numbers of frozen potatoes that were missed in the previous fall's harvest.

In 1970, we cranes researchers learned to our dismay that a local housewife was harvesting potatoes. These estates were owned by the government and the potatoes were produced to make alcohol. The government decided to concentrate all distillery into one factory in southern Sweden, where this type of potatoes in the future would no longer plant potatoes at Horborga.

While we were not worried about the cranes themselves since these tough birds always seem to get along, we knew that the cranes would no longer concentrate in large numbers at Horborga and this would greatly affect our census and study. Our appeal to the National Nature Conservancy Department and to the state distillery to continue potato plantings were to no avail. Today, there is little little growing area exists around Horborga and each year, the number of cranes grows less. Ten years ago the normal number was about 6000 birds. In 1975, the figure had dropped to 3200. Our cranes had indeed been dependent on a spirit distillery, but the setback, the consuming stills go on and we are still collecting interesting information on our cranes. We know now that the timetable for migration is regulated by a combination of inner programming and favorable weather. If we predict on our own that our cranes arrive they may stay only a single night and depart the next day. If, however they meet hard, wintery conditions, they may stay for weeks waiting for favorable currents.

Migrating cranes almost always start on the trip north between 8 o'clock and 12 o'clock in the morning. Any later start, and the day will be too short, cranes don't seem to enjoy migrating at night over Sweden. As a result, Horborga lead to another equally satisfying experience. During the winter of 1973-74, the International Crane Foundation contacted me asking if I would collect six eggs of our cranes for export to their Bamboo header. Having grown up with an appreciation of the crane families, we knew that cranes do not often raise more than one young, though they normally lay two eggs. We therefore collected six eggs, one sparrow each from six nests, and flew them in a specially insulated box to ICF. The eggs arrived safely, all hatched, and all six chicks later grow to fine adult crane.

When I reported this to the Swedish National Nature Conservancy, I received their reply: We are happy that the eggs all hatched out properly since we will probably never give permission to collect the eggs of our cranes again.

I hope our cranes will render useful information to ICF. Perhaps they will become good breeders and one day give us fine progeny for further work on rears and conservation.

Map of India and Afghanistan, showing Kushadee Qanawata Sanctuary where Siberian Cranes spend most of the winter months, and Ab-e-Et retina, a salt lake in eastern Afghanistan where these same birds stop on their way to and from Siberia.

Dr. Tadamichi Koga

PROFILE

by Ken Kawata

Tadamichi Koga was my boyhood idol. As a young student in elementary school, I would send him much fan mail because I was passionately interested in zoos and animals, and he was the famous director of the Ueno Zoo (pronounced WAY-uno in Tokyo). I'd never forget the day I received a post card from him. I was the happiest boy in the world. Dr. Koga is a large man. When I first met him in the summer of 1959, I felt like a small farm boy looking up at John Wayne!

It was my pleasure and honor to work for Dr. Koga, first as a student volunteer and later as editor of Animals and Zoos. To him, I owe my present career in the zoo world.

Tadamichi Koga was born in 1903. After graduating from the University of Tokyo College of Veterinary Medicine in 1928, he took a position at the Ueno Zoo and became Director in 1932. He served in that capacity until 1962. Later he became an honorary member of the International Union of Directors of Zoological Gardens. Now in his seventies, he is considered Japan's "Mr. Zoo", the father of modernization of Japanese zoos, a leading conservationist and author, and a TV personality as well.

One of Dr. Koga's remarkable achievements is the restoration of a waterfowl sanctuary in the midst of Tokyo, Shinobazu, a pond in Ueno Zoo, once was a part of Tokyo Bay, a paradise for wildlife. At the end of World War II, with Tokyo in ashes and ruins, all of the birds had disappeared.

Determined to prove that man and wildlife can peacefully coexist in an urban environment, Dr. Koga released domestic ducks and geese to graze their wild cousins. Years passed before a flock of wild ducks found this pond a safe place, but now Tokyoites can enjoy various species of ducks by the thousands, along with herons and coots, as they winter in Shinobazu Pond.

His study on penguins has also proved rewarding: The mortality rate of Antarctic penguins in captivity was formerly very high because of aspergillosis, a killer disease. Dr. Koga enabled zoos to reduce the mortality rate drastically when he developed a new treatment using the antibiotic Aureomycin.

However, Dr. Koga's most significant work is undoubtedly the propagation of cranes in captivity. Japan once ruled vast areas of northeastern Asia, the home of several rare crane species. Japanese would capture these beautiful birds by the dozen to exhibit in their zoos and parks, but this practice ceased with World War II.

At the end of the war, Ueno Zoo had two pairs of Japanese Cranes and two female White-Naped Cranes. Later, one of the Japanese Cranes was lost in a freak accident, leaving the zoo with only one breeding pair of cranes until 1952, when a White-Naped male was acquired. There seemed to be an urgent need to propagate them in the zoo before the species disappeared.

Usually these species lay only one clutch of two eggs each year. If eggs should be removed from the nest, the hen lays a second clutch after ten to twenty days. In 1952, the first clutch often turns out to be infertile. Even if the clutch hatches, they are apt to die of colds within two months. Needless to say, the reproductive rate of cranes in Tokyo seemed hopelessly low.

Dr. Koga decided to remove all eggs from the nests, replaced them in an incubator for the following reasons: First, to stimulate fertility, as he had discovered that later clutches had a better chance to hatch; second, the artificially hatched and raised young can be protected from colds and other diseases, and thirdly, the number of offspring can literally be multiplied by this artificial method, which was especially important since those crane species were endangered in the wild.

Later Dr. Koga added another species, the Square Crane, to his enterprise. After years of removing eggs from crane nests, he arrived at a record of sixteen eggs from a White-Naped Crane, eight eggs from a Japanese Crane and seven from a Square Crane in one season. He thus became the world's pioneer in this field.

Dr. Koga showed great foresight. Long before other Japanese were aware of it, he talked of the

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settle an old but important question once and for all.

As our j eppeaches the flock, we could see that it consisted of both small and large white birds strung out in a long line along the mountain base. We stopped the jeep and set up our scopes: the smaller birds were definitely egrets, the larger — Siberian Cranes! We had found them — within an hour after our arrival at the lodge. For more than twenty years we had been promised the experience by our incredible good fortune. Ab-e-Estada is a huge lake, and its northern borders are cross-wissed with springs that make even jeep travel impossible. We could have spent hours pursuing the birds, but had to leave miles of shoreline; yet there they were, standing and feeding serenely at the lake's most accessible point.

To John McGough and me, finding these birds had been a personal significance. It was a reunion. We knew these birds — we had spent months observing and recording every facet of their daily lives. We knew their likes and dislikes; we understood the meaning of many of their honorous, clarinet-like calls; we had seen many of them. Standing now at the edge of this remote lake in Afghanistan, we found it difficult to resist calling out their names in greeting.

Ab-e-Estada was actually the tail-end of a stock which had come to Afghanistan and seven hundred miles south at the Ghana Bird Sanctuary in India. There, under the joint sponsorship of the World Wildlife Fund and the International Crane Foundation, a group of 385 cranes had continued to grow. This is the third rarest crane in the world, and perhaps the most endangered. These birds, believed to number less than 360 individuals, are found as two separate populations, a western population which winters in and around the New Siberian Islands and winters in India; and an eastern population which breeds in the Siberian tundra just south of the New Siberian Island and winters somewhere in southern China. Though little is known of the origin and distribution of this species, it was apparently much more widespread and common in previous centuries. Our study, part of ICF's overall plan for research on endangered species of cranes, is only a small step toward understanding the Ghana Crane: whetting a broad stretch of Indian territory from the Vale of Kashmir in the northwest, through the immensely Cangetic Plain, to the northeastern state of Bihar.

Yet, despite the three years of interviews with ornithologists, government officials, and our own attempts to locate birds within this area, we could find no evidence that Siberian Cranes winter anywhere but at the Ghana Bird Sanctuary near Bhdrpur, Rajasthan. This meant that the 57 cranes that John and I repeatedly counted at their nightly roost within the sanctuary were probably the last Siberian Cranes in western Asia.

Still, a small matter needed clarification. Scattered reports in ornithological journals told of Siberian Cranes at Ab-e-Estada in Afghanistan. Most of the sightings were in the fall or spring, and it seemed reasonable that the cranes would winter in Afghanistan and fly north to and from their nesting grounds in Siberia. But were there cranes actually the Ghana Siberian Cranes, or were they, perhaps, another unknown population which had somehow escaped the attention of scientists? The possibility was remote, and yet tracking the cranes to Afghanistan seemed a good idea. Migratory cranes often use an area like Ab-e-Estada as a staging ground; cranes from many different regions with congregate at this place in large numbers before their final push north or south. If Ab-e-Estada was a staging ground, the presence of more than 57 cranes at the lake would mean that other areas in India or perhaps Pakistan harbored large herds.

All of these things flashed through our minds the afternoon of March 17 when we spotted the cranes at Ab-e-Estada. Over and over we counted the flock wading in the shallow waters of the salty lake. Each count was the same — 56 of the 57 cranes we had counted the day before. Not only had we not gained cranes, we had somehow, somewhere lost one of the precious few in this population. We could only hope that this bird had temporarily lost its way and would soon regain its family. If we were leaving Ab-e-Estada for the ride back to Kabul, I looked back at the tiny band of white cranes standing at the water's edge, totally dwarfed by the immensity of the lake and the mountainous backdrop. I had never been so afraid. Not only had we lost one of the few remaining Siberian Cranes, but tragedy of the Siberian Crane struck me with such force; never had these birds looked so fragile, their hold on existence so tenuous.

'Mr. Zoo' Dr. Koga . . .

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importance of propagating rare and endangered wildlife species in captivity to save them from extinction.

In the summer of 1980, while we were chatting in his office, he told me of a dream project, an "international crane center." It would be something like a zoo, except that the zoos could be kept for research and propagation. He thought the ideal location would be at Kusimo in Hokkaido, the northernmost mainland, in the midst of the habitat of the Japanese Crane. He had even suggested the name: "Kusimo World Zoo" to exclude the possibility of building a crane center there.

However, looking out at the smog-laden sky over downtown Tokyo, I had to ask myself whether those local politicians and bureaucrats could ever understand and share Dr. Koga's views and values. His dream never came true in his own country.

In 1975, six years after I left Tokyo, Dr. Koga and I had a reunion in Chicago and then drove to Bamboo to attend the first International Crane Workshop at the International Crane Foundation.

The trip stirred up many memories, and as we toured ICF I wondered what was going through Dr. Koga's mind. His dream had finally come true in Wisconsin, home of the Sandhill Crane, and only a few miles from Kusimo, across the Pacific Ocean.

But I said to myself, "After all, what difference does the place make as long as the dream comes true?"