From Down Under... To Baraboo

by George Archibald
ICF Director

"There's a sneaker..."

"Where, Roy?" I frantically scanned the five-foot-tall vegetation that carpeted the Out Back Wetland, hoping to see a crane head.

"It's a Big Red One," Roy pointed. With binoculars up and sweat stinging my eyes, I finally saw the Eastern Sarus hunkering with lowered head.

"He's sneaking away from his nest..."

But we couldn't stop long to watch the eluding bird. The leeches would get us. We had to keep on the move through the ankle to knee deep water.

Roy's sharp aboriginal eyes had caught the crane stepping from its platform nest and sure enough, we were soon peering down on two enormous white eggs. Another crane nest had been located, and it held the promise for reintroduction of the Eastern Sarus into Southeast Asia.

The nest arrived in late December at the 1.1 million-acre More Mort Castle Station in the western lowlands of Cape York, Queensland, Australia. Water birds had a chance to breed in the newly formed wetlands that batted a recently parched countryside.

The rain usually started in late afternoon and continued in cloud bursts through the night, dumping as many as four inches of water before dawn. Then the sky cleared and two species of cranes trumpeted their claims to wetland real estate.

The Brolgas, known by many as the Native Companions, have their last stronghold in Australia's north and they still number in the tens of thousands. The Eastern Sarus was first reported in Australia in 1964 and they have subsequently increased into the thousands. The Sarus are larger than the Brolgas and compete with them for nesting habitat. In my study area, the Sarus outnumbered the Brolga two to one and the Brolga survival may eventually be threatened by the immigrants from Asia.

Prominently, the proliferation of Eastern Sarus in Australia has paralleled by the extermination of these towerings gray birds, red headed and pink legged, across much of their traditional range. In recent years they have disappeared from Thailand and the Philippines, and possibly Vietnam and Cambodia as well. High human populations along with social disruptions and wars have been responsible for their demise.

So that the Eastern Sarus could be established in captivity at ICF, the Australian government graciously allowed me to bring six cranes from Queensland to Baraboo in 1972. Unfortunately, only one of these was a female. Before her death in 1981, Gloria mothered seven offspring including three females. To prevent the breeding of related individuals new blood was needed from Australia, particularly since the Royal Forestry Department of Thailand wants to reintroduce the Eastern Sarus into the Bangora wetlands east of Bangkok. Australia agreed to allow ICF to bring 24 Eastern Sarus and 12 Brolga eggs to Baraboo this winter, and through the vital support of ICF Board Member John Henry Dick, I spent from mid-January until mid-February in the field searching for crane eggs.

The roads were flooded. Mr. Neville Travis Jones, the chief of police in a frontier town called Normanton, flew me in his single engine aircraft out to the airstrip of Mort Mort. Recently this station was purchased by the aboriginal people and under the excellent leadership of A Million Cranes

in Gujarat

While the Eastern Sarus Crane is acutely endangered in southeastern Asia, its larger cousin the Indian Sarus is abundant across the northern plains of India. Wildlife is protected for centuries by the Hindu faith, and species that have been able to adapt to humanity and to feed in agricultural fields have proliferated. Cranes are particularly revered by the local people in the State of Gujarat that borders Pakistan in the northwest of India. Gujarat is sanctuary to some of earth's greatest concentrations of birds. In late January a statewide crane survey was conducted by the Forest Department of Gujarat under the able leadership of Mr. B.P. Lakhati, the Chief Conservator of Forests. The State was divided into more than 18 sections and the "whole Forest Department was mobilised to undertake this enormous task." Indian Sarus Cranes are resident in Gujarat and 19,659 were spotted. Any region can be proud of such a crane population, but the Sarus were vastly outnumbered by two other species. Common Cranes and Demoiselle Cranes migrate to Gujarat from nesting areas in the Soviet Union and perhaps Mongolia. The Forest Department logged 83,317 Commons and a staggering 1,478,073 Demoiselles! Just northeast of Gujarat, another important Sarus Crane count took place, in the famous Kshetra National

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Winter Crane Counts

With the exception of the Wattled Cranes of Africa, the endangered species of cranes are migratory and easily counted on their wintering grounds where they congregate in flocks. Winter counts provide valuable information on the population size, and since the chicks-of-the-year have distinct brown plumage, the productivity of the species can be accurately determined. ICF encourages continued, consistent, and expanded crane counts in areas wherever crane flocks traditionally winter. We wish to thank our colleagues Kunitzko Morose, Doug McNeal, Feng Kemin, Li De-hao, Teng Wing-ning, and Rod Druwein for providing us recent data.

For almost half a century, the Whooping Cranes have been counted at the Aransas National Wildlife Refuge along the Gulf of Mexico, Texas. They increased from 44 birds in 1941 to 75 cranes this winter. Since 1975, Whooping Crane eggs have been placed in Sandhill Crane nests in Idaho, in an effort to establish a second Whooper flock. In 1983-84, twenty-nine of these Whoopers wintered at Bosque del Apache National Wildlife Refuge in New Mexico. This brought the total population of Whooping Cranes this winter to 141, including 37 in captivity — 34 at Patuxent, Maryland, 2 at the San Antonio Zoo in Texas, and 1 at ICF. Since about 1950, Crane counting has been a tradition in Japan, where the rich flocks of Red-crowned (increasing from 33 to 345), White-naped (increasing from 118 to 1,050), and Eastern Sarus Cranes have recovered following the turbulent era of the Pacific War.

Siberian Crane counts began in India in 1970 when 26 birds spent from November through March at Keoladeo National Park near Bharatpur. Unfortunately, flock has declined to only 37 survivors, a drop that is attributed to losses on migration to hunters in Pakistan and Afghanistan.

China is a major wintering area for five endangered species of cranes and only during the past few years have the flocks been located and their critical habitats protected. In 1980, 100 Siberian Cranes were spotted on the mudflats of Poyang Lake near the lower reaches of the Yangze River. More extensive surveys at Poyang Lake during the next two winters chalked up 200 Siberians. But the counts this past winter far exceeded anyone's hopes or expectations: 840 Siberians and more than 1,000 White-naped Cranes! And 360 to 400 Red-crowned Cranes wintered along the seashore near Yangzou.

Black-necked Cranes breed across the Tibetan Plateau and winter in river valleys near the edge of the escarpment. So far, two major wintering areas have been located: the Pobshika Valley of Bhutan, and the Sea of Grass in China. Last winter 300 Black-necked Cranes and more than 1,000 Common Cranes wintered in the Sea of Grass.

Archibald Receives MacArthur Award

In early February ICF Director George Archibald was in the Australian outback studying Brolga and Eastern Sarus Cranes. A group of tin-roofed buildings formed his headquarters in the middle of a million-acre cattle station 75 miles distant from the frontier town of Normanton. The "Wet" had made all roads impassable. For anyone else but George, it would have seemed an impossible place to answer a telephone call and learn that you'd won $192,000.

Archibald was one of 22 recently selected as a Prize Fellow by John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation of Chicago. The fellowships, known collectively as "Genius Awards" and "Mac's," are one of four major programs administered by the MacArthur Foundation. No applications are accepted for these unusual grants. Instead a Selection Committee assembles its own list of recipients. The Foundation provides the fellow a no-strings-attached grant, based on the individual's age and paid over five years. The program's goal is to free exceptionally creative and productive individuals from financial constraints on their work.

Archibald was selected "in recognition of accomplishments in ornithology which demonstrate originality, dedication to creative pursuits, and capacity for self-direction." George intends to use the money to establish an endowment for support of international conservation programs. In addition to George's fellowship, the MacArthur Foundation will be paying $15,000 a year for the next five years directly to ICF.

The Call of the Crane for China

The ICF Budge has a younger sister in China. She is known as The Call of the Crane, and the crane expert from Harbin's Institute of Natural Resources, Professor Ma Yi-ching, is the editor. Crane researchers, conservationists, and enthusiasts all over China now have a forum for information exchange to study and help the 8 species of cranes found in China. The newsletter will be published twice a year with a grant provided through ICF by the World Nature Association. And there is much exciting news to report:

- On February 15-20, twenty crane experts met in Nanjing to discuss research and establish a Joint Crane Protection Committee, headed by the Director of the Forestry Bureau of Heilongjiang Province.
- The Chinese government has designated a Red-crowned Crane Winter Reserve near Yaching, Szechwan Province, and a Black-necked Crane Winter Reserve at the Sea of Grass in Gzouhsen Province.
- Teams of EARTHWATCH volunteer researchers from the USA will monitor the migration of birds at Zha Long Nature Reserve in northeast China in May, September, and October.

A Bird Week in each of China's Provinces celebrates the importance of birds and their conservation. Professor Ma Yi-ching has sent hundreds of slide shows accompanied by tape recordings to Bird Week coordinators throughout China.

New Fund for Bird Conservation

Wolf Brehm of West Germany's Vogelpark Walsrode has been a major supporter of ICF since 1976. Wolf sent Siberian Cranes on breeding loan to ICF and each month, since 1979, he has paid fixed payments for ICF's new site are met through a regular grant from the Vogelpark.

In 1982 Charles Luthin, a former ICF volunteer, was employed by the Senator to head a conservation office. Charlie was just completing his graduate studies at the University of Wisconsin where his dissertation concerned the ecology of ibises, those curious, well-adapted companions of cranes. Wolf and Charlie then established a World Working Group on Storks, Ibises, and Spoonbills in conjunction with the International Council for Bird Preservation.

Recently Vogelpark Walsrode announced the incorporation of a non-profit organization, the W. B. Brehm Funds for International Vogelschutz, devoted to financing basic research and conservation activities to help endangered birds. WBBF is directed by Wolf, Henry Makowski, and Wolfgang Burhenn. Charlie Luthin is the administrator and a group of well-known conservationists from many countries constitute the Advisory Board. An attractive bilingual newsletter Flying Free tells WBBF members about recent activities and future needs.

Currently the WBBF is supporting a study of the Echo Echidna in Australia, a species numbering fewer than 8 individuals. Aerial counts have been conducted of storks, ibises, and spoonbills colonies in Latin America, and Mr. Luthin makes long zig-zagged trips through clumps of countries to spread enthusiasm for conservation, to help local researchers develop approaches to crisis, and where possible to back financially their initiatives.

We encourage ICF members to join the WBBF by sending $15.00 to WBBF, Vogelpark Walsrode, 303 Waltham, West Germany. Let's support our European colleagues in their productive efforts to make a safer place for birds flying free.
Hour 49 of the flight from Australia to Wisconsin...an operation over the Pacific. Photo by F.S. Fishel.

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Bill Johnson, thousands of cattle are rounded up by horse and helicopter during the dry season and beef is exported. But during the wet, most of the men return to Normanton to rest with relatives while the cranes hatch then rear their families.

Roy, 42, was born and reared in Morr Morr and knew it intimately. From early morning until the storm clouds warned us to return to the bike house late afternoon, I followed Roy on long treks through the wetlands. When midday temperatures soared to 120°F, we relaxed in the shade of the white gum, bloodwood, and box trees and enjoyed a billie of tea. Sometimes a fast flowing stream intersected our path and provided a welcome dip, while Roy kept a keen lookout for the gigantic crocodiles. He was always concerned that I would "get washed" (lost), bitten by the snakes, or eaten by the crocs.

By mid-February we had located 60 crane nests and during my last week we revisited them to collect eggs. Some had been flooded, others had lost their eggs to predators, some eggs had hatched, and many eggs were rotten. But we were able to meet our quota of 36, and had 10 very early eggs for the Queenland National Parks and Wildlife Service's research center near Townsville. The eggs were maintained at Morr Morr in an electric incubator kindly provided by Peter Johnson.

Then at 6:00 a.m. on February 19 I carefully placed the eggs in two plywood portable incubators and, with Neville Travis Jones and Roy in a twin engine plane, began a flight across the continent to a Pan American connection in Sydney. Dr. Richard Wright and family put us up that night and the Ororonga Zoo had joined the Wrights in an electric incubator for the crane eggs. I had timed my journey late during the incubation period for the cranes, as then the eggs would be least vulnerable to the disruptions I would cause. But with 36 eggs close to hatching, my trip was bound to be eventful. That first night in Sydney, "Roy" hatched, and during the next two days while I flew over the Pacific to Baraboo, four more cranes emerged amidst puzzled stares of fellow passengers. The chicks completed their migration in great shape, but I felt ready to drop after 72 almost sleepless hours playing crane paren.

Today, 18 beautiful Eastern Sarus and 6 healthy Brolgas are being reared at ICF. When I see "Roy" under his heat lamp in our new chick rearing building, my thoughts drift back to that other Roy and the cranes in their soggy wilds under a blazing tropical sun. Step by step, we will help bring these Eastern Sarus back to the marshes of southeast Asia where they belong.

Wisconsin Crane Count — 1984

Despite the wind, cold, and rain, Wisconsin's 1984 Sandhill Crane Count was another tremendous success. But due to the weather, the number of participants decreased dramatically. Almost 5,000 people greeted a wetland sunrise on April 14, an increase over last year of 25 percent.

This is the fourth consecutive year that a statewide Crane Count has been conducted. We now know that Sandhills are widespread in Wisconsin and nest in essentially every county of the state. To assist ICF in the analysis of the massive amount of data already collected, a graduate student has offered to computerize the data. This will give us a better understanding of crane numbers and, most importantly, our ability to change wetland habitats and how these changes are affecting breeding cranes across Wisconsin.

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Park near Bharatpur in the State of Rajasthan. Organized by the Gheena Keola Deo Natural History Society, the Bombay Natural History Society, and the Forestry Department of Rajasthan, 82 volunteer observers gathered at twelve sites during the morning of April 29. They tallied 657 Sarus Cranes, in contrast to 258 counted one year ago.

The count at Bharatpur is particularly important because local people are interested and involved. Until recently the Keoladeo National Park, which is also winter refuge to the last flock of Siberian Cranes visiting India, was threatened by overgrazing of domestic animals and by the cutting of forests. The Sarus count is a means of involving the nearby people in crane research and thus conservation.

These research initiatives are a vital step in preserving India's cranes. We hope additional areas in southern Asia will follow India's fine example.

Hour 69, between Los Angeles and Madison...a successful hatch. Photo by F.S. Fishel.

Iranians Resume Crane Research

In 1975 the Iranian government initiated an ambitious program with ICF to start a new and more secure flock of Siberian Cranes in western Asia. Common Cranes that winter on the plateaus of the Zagros Mountains in southwest Iran and bred in the Soviet Union were to be used as foster parents to Siberian Cranes hatched from captive-produced eggs substituted into the nest of Common Cranes.

The first step was to determine the Russian nesting grounds of Common Cranes that winter within the sanctuary of Arjan National Park, Iran. During the winters from 1975 to 1978, 192 cranes were captured at Arjan, then released with bright plastic streamers attached to their wings. Three cranes were spotted in the spring and summer months southwest of the Ural Mountains in the boreal swamps of the U.S.S.R. Subsequently, a captive breeding center for Siberian Cranes was established in the nearby Oka State Nature Reserve with the intent of eventually transferring Siberian Cranes "out of the back door" and into Iranian tagged Common Crane nests.

The political changes in Iran in intervening years complicated crane research. The budget of Iran's Department of the Environment was reduced and vehicles were not readily available for researcher Heidar Forhadpour and his colleagues.

However, Heidar did attend ICF's International Crane Workshop in India in February 1983 and his resolve to continue crane research was rekindled. Using yellow wing tags and an oral tranquilizer (alphachloralose) that ICF left in Iran in the mid-1970s, Heidar and his comrades successfully marked 59 Common Cranes during the past winter. We congratulate our Iranian colleagues, and hope our Soviet colleagues can find the yellow-tagged cranes. The more we know about Common Cranes the more we can help the Siberian Cranes that number fewer than 50 birds in the wild in western Asia. Such continued international cooperation builds well for the future of these repli stocks.

Save this date: Sept. 29, 1984

ICF ANNUAL MEETING

More information to come with your next newsletter.

Heidar Forhadpour (center) and colleagues bag a narcotized Common Crane at Arjan National Park, Iran.

Mr. M.G. Soni (Gheena Keola Deo Natural History Society) at the podium, Mr. R.G. Soni (Deputy Chief Wildlife Warden of Rajasthan) left at table, Mr. Charles Pickett (U.S. National Zoo), and Dr. V.S. Vijayan (Bombay Natural History Society) officiate at the return of the Sarus Crane Count at Keoladeo National Park.
Marion was scheduled to give a presentation at ICF’s research meeting this spring, but her nametag was missing. We didn’t know what to put on the line used for the job title. Over the last six years, Marion has given every possible type of work at ICF from scrubbing water buckets to hosting receptions. After extended deliberations, we finally decided that the perfect designation for Marion was simply “The Volunteer.”

There are several ways to measure Marion’s contributions to the Crane Foundation. You could total time, which numbers the thousands of hours over the years that Marion devoted to ICF by her own choice. You could count crane checks she has helped to record, no doubt over a hundred. Or you could count the people she introduced to ICF; she is ICF’s busiest tour guide by summer and does over half our talks at schools each year. She has probably talked to 10,000 people about cranes.

But if you asked a staff member how they would measure Marion’s contributions, they’d recite stories about her. Last year for example, while the Dudley Visitor Center was still under construction, a busyard of senior citizens pulled up for a tour. It started to pour rain, and there was nowhere for the group to go. Marion, undaunted, jumped into the bus and told crane stories over the intercom system until the rain stopped.

This winter Marion had an especially heavy schedule of school presentations, including several four-program-in-a-day daters at “tough” inner-city schools. She was beginning to wear out, wondering if her efforts were paying off at all, when she overheard a little boy in a restaurant telling his family all about the lady who visited his class to tell about the “whoopee birds!”

At an organization that has always attracted extraordinary volunteer contributions, Marion Hill is truly the volunteer. Her talk at the research meeting was (by the way) on how to recruit, train, and retain volunteers. It was the only talk during the conference that was applauded at the end.

ICF’s new headquarters, the Norman and Claire Sauve Hatchery and Chick-Rearing Complex, has just been completed. Our next newsletter will feature these facilities and their dedication on May 18, 1984.

Grants and Awards:
Anonymous
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Citizens Natural Resources Association
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Elkridge Foundation
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