At Last Count – The Rise of International Crane Counting

By Erik Brynildson, ICF Education Associate

In the past few years, the popularity of citizen crane counts has gained momentum around the world. Currently, almost half of all crane species are being monitored annually by volunteers from several continents. Participants share in a love for wild nature, and find that counting cranes is a grand way to express that reverence. The majestic birds are highly visible, awakening and inspiring curiosity and wonder in people of all cultures. And cranes, because of their large size and characteristic vocalizations, are easily counted.

Historically, scientists were the first to count cranes. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service began to collect data on the endangered Whooping Crane in Texas at Aransas National Wildlife Refuge in 1941. At that time, only 15 Whoopers occupied the refuge. Last winter’s count, 45 years later, recorded 112 of the birds.

Many of the pioneer censusing strategies used by scientists to keep track of animal populations relied on public participation. Volunteer observers are still a vital aid to managing agencies, especially in times of drastic budgetary cutbacks and escalating operational costs. Cranes, often widely dispersed over nesting and feeding sites, can be difficult for small teams of scientists to count; but volunteers can be organized to survey large areas.

The earliest known grassroots non-professional crane count is the winter count continued on page 2
of endangered Red-crowned Cranes in Hokkaido, Japan, an event which started in the early 1950's. Then in 1975, in response to the lack of data about changing Sandhill Crane populations, concerned citizens in Wisconsin, U.S.A. began to record crane numbers in two counties of their state.

Today, the Wisconsin count has evolved into an annual statewide rite of spring, with 2500 volunteer participants covering over 1400 sites in 64 counties. The Wisconsin Sandhill Crane Count is organized and administered by the International Crane Foundation (ICF), and we are delighted to report the growth of the program. At last count, our 13th annual Crane Count recorded over 7100 cranes in Wisconsin on April 11th of this year. The project has become a model for other regions to follow.

Presently, several countries have established citizen crane counts. Many more such counts are needed, however, because endangered crane populations still go uncounted. ICF urges the development of two counts now lacking. The vanishing Black-necked Crane of southern Tibet, with a total population of under a thousand, needs to be consistently counted. And, since the end of the recent war in Vietnam, a small flock of Eastern Sarus Cranes has been rediscovered along the Mekong River Delta. These birds too should be monitored closely.

In order to design and implement effective preservation strategies, we must first know the distribution and abundance of the cranes. The best method to obtain this basic ecological information is by involving those peoples who live with the cranes.

Perhaps the greatest benefit of crane counting is the opportunity it provides for people to interact with and learn from nature. This exposure often stimulates participants to develop a deeper concern for wildlife conservation in general, so they can then help to spark local action on behalf of cranes and their threatened habitats.

**South Africa**

Three crane species inhabit South Africa: the Stanley or Blue Crane, which is the national bird; the Gray Crowned Crane; and the Wattled Crane. All of these species appear to be declining, and are less widespread over their ranges than they once were.

Several hundred citizen observers began to monitor approximately 300 “observation units” or sites in 1986. Two crane counting weekends take place each year. A summer count in late January is followed by a winter tally taken in late July. Road surveys and “casual sightings” from designated sites are also used in establishing totals. At last count (1986), the cranes numbered Wattled 183, Blue 3800, and Gray Crowned 2103. These figures do not include the Karoo regions of the South African Republic, where Blue Cranes reside in unknown numbers.

These latest tabulations help to substantiate the losses in all three species of South African cranes. The sharpest declines appear to be in Blue Crane populations, where both the citizen count and scientific aerial surveys show fewer birds than in previous years. The majority of Blue Cranes observed during the winter count were foraging in wheat fields. In reaction to crop losses, farmers have poisoned the cranes. This poisoning may be the main reason for the decline.

**Hokkaido, Japan**

Since 1952, counting cranes has been a Japanese tradition. Relict flocks of three endangered species of cranes, the Red-crowned, the White-naped, and the Hooded, have experienced gradual recoveries since the turbulent war period in the Pacific.

Hokkaido is the northernmost main island in the Japanese archipelago. Near the villages of Akan and Tsurui, a resident population of Red-crowned Cranes inhabits the paddy fields and marshes adjacent to warm tidal flats. The open stretches of coastal river are crucial habitats for the cranes, as they provide fish and crustaceans for over-winter food. Winter food availability is often a primary limiting factor in bird populations.

During the unusually hard winter of 1952, the rivers froze, promoting local Japanese villagers to begin feeding the “sacred” birds. Feeding stations were established outside Akan and Tsurui, with farmers and school children scattering grain to help the cranes survive. At that time, the children also started to count the cranes. Back then, only 30 Red-crowned Cranes inhabited the area. Today, nearly 400 Red-crowneds live on Hokkaido. This flock represents a third of the total population of this species.

Since that special winter, children of those
original children who came to the rescue of the cranes have participated in the annual December count. And today the descendents of those 30 starving Red-crowned still benefit from the efforts of these youth.

Kenya

The recent formation of the Kenya Working Group on Cranes has stimulated much activity in Kenya. In August of 1985, the Wildlife Clubs of Kenya (WCK) published a questionnaire in the Clubs’ magazine, Kombaa, requesting information on status, abundance, nesting success, and local habitat conditions affecting the Gray Crowned Crane. WCK consists of 1200 localized clubs throughout Kenya.

Data from 430 responses suggest that the cranes are widely distributed in Kenya, but that their primary breeding sites are in potentially important agricultural areas within central and western Kenya. The data also indicate that wetlands in Kenya are rapidly dwindling in size and number due to drainage and filling, land clearing, and overgrazing and degradation by livestock. It further appears that some Gray Crowned have failed to breed in apparently suitable habitats because of harassment by local people. In addition, the survey substantiates the decline in Gray Crowned Crane populations in recent years.

WCK staff now hope to expand the count into an annual nationwide event.

Bharatpur, India

Crane counting in India began in 1970 when scientists started monitoring the diminishing western flock of endangered Siberian Cranes at Keoladeo National Park near Bharatpur. For the past four years, citizens have been recording numbers of Indian Sarus Cranes, another crane suffering population losses. In 1987, this citizen count expanded to cover the entire Bharatpur district. The Bharatpur Sarus Count is particularly valuable in that it directly involves the local people in conservation at their outstanding, and threatened, national park.

The Indian Sarus Crane is non-migratory and is known as the world’s tallest flying bird. The species is found in wetlands throughout northern India. Easily identified by their large size, the cranes can effectively serve to enhance concern and awareness for conservation issues.

It is hoped that the Bharatpur count will be viewed as a precedent for other crane-inhabited regions of India. At last count, 66 men, women, and children counted a total of 313 Indian Sarus Cranes. The latter figure reflects a sharp decline from previous years.

Planetary Peace and Counting Cranes

The ultimate crane count will record more than avian abundance. It will count on global unity and goodwill among all nations and peoples.

From a purely scientific standpoint crane counts generate baseline data otherwise unavailable. As an educational tool, they are an effective means for bringing people closer to their natural world. United in a spirit of enthusiasm, participants build a greater receptivity toward all life. Crane counting helps people as well as cranes, and in the final tally, these simple counts may also play a part in international coexistence.

For anyone interested in developing a crane count, ICF has an instructional packet available. A fee of $6 is charged to cover printing costs for all U.S. requests. Conservationists outside of the United States can obtain the materials free of charge.

Crane counts can cover a single wetland or an entire country. But to be effective, such projects require careful planning and implementation by a sponsoring organization committed to the endeavor for a period of years. The results are always worth the efforts.

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Sandhills and Windsocks: a resident of the Fenner’s Lake area in Adams County, Wisconsin, has reported that an adult Sandhill Crane frequents her lakeshore yard and is especially fond of a pair of “windsocks” there. It seems the windsocks, one of a loon and the other a Canada goose, have lured the crane regularly since early June.

Windsocks are commonly displayed as lawn and garden ornaments and depict various birds using light paper for the body and wings that become animated in the breeze.

Volunteer Crane Counters Needed for Expedition to China

ICF is organizing an expedition to Poyang Lake Nature Reserve in southeastern China. We are looking for members and other interested participants, to help with the expedition’s two goals: to continue studies of the numbers and distribution of cranes and other water birds at Poyang Lake; and to work with the reserve staff in educating children and villagers about the significance of the cranes, and the ways in which people can help to protect them.

The expedition is a special opportunity to experience the people and wildlife of a remote part of China and to contribute to China’s recently expanding efforts to preserve its extraordinary wildlife. Poyang Lake is the winter home for three endangered cranes (Siberian, White-naped, and Hooded) and 100 other species of water and land birds.

Tentative dates are February 22 to March 12, 1988. The schedule includes a day each in Hong Kong, in Guangzhou, and in Futen Nature Reserve (with a fine mangrove swamp and many water birds). The trip offers an optional visit to a mountain forest in southern China.

All costs are tax-deductible. For more information, contact Jim Harris at ICF. No scientific background is necessary, only a willingness to work and to learn.
Crane Researchers Meet in China

by George Archibald, ICF Director

As spring arrived in northern China, 225 conservationists from five continents gathered in Qiqihar, near the vast Zhalong Marsh where cranes of six species probed the shallows just recently free from ice. The co-hosts were ICF and the Chinese Wildlife Conservation Association, the latter being an organization administered by the Chinese Ministry of Forestry. We had come to participate in the International Crane Workshop (ICW) following our last such gathering in India in 1983 at Bharatpur.

Most of the foreign delegates arrived in Beijing on April 30 or May 1. Weary from jet lag and awkward airline connections, we gathered at the Chang Chun Yuan Hotel, where we were delighted by the welcoming speech from China's leading ornithologist Cheng Tsosin of the Institute of Zoology in Beijing. Professor Cheng and American crane biologist Lawrence Walkinshaw were the honorary chairmen of the workshop although neither of them was able to attend the meetings in Qiqihar.

Beijing was in the full bloom of spring. Some delegates had an opportunity to visit Beijing Zoo to see two captive Crested Ibis (a species numbering perhaps fewer than 30 in the wild) as well as the impressive new captive propagation center for cranes. Four pairs of Black-necked Cranes were preparing to nest.

On May 2, we boarded the train for Qiqihar, a long journey northeast to Heilongjiang Province which borders the U.S.S.R. Along the way, farmers plowed their fields and planted their crops; inside our train, crane talk pervaded as Pakistanis took their places on the platform and fed the vociferous children a cavalcade of busses. ICF's Curator of Birds Claire Mirande summed it up neatly by claiming her jaw muscles hurt from so much smiling.

We all stayed at the Crane City Hotel (Qiqihar after all is known in China as Crane City). But before the meetings began we journeyed 25 kilometers outside the city to the headquarters of Zhalong Nature Reserve. From the tower of the headquarters building, captive-reared cranes could be seen on their nests in the marsh nearby. For most of the delegates, it was their first glimpse of a wetland in China. But time was short and the opening ceremony soon began on the steps of the conference building at the reserve.

The next days were packed with technical sessions in the conference rooms of the Hubei Hotel which was adjacent to the Crane City Hotel. We heard over 100 papers, and developed 25 resolutions. The papers will be published in both English and Chinese versions in 1988. The resolutions will go to governments all over the world, expressing the concerns of the 225 ICW conservationists for issues affecting cranes and wetlands.

Delegates were interested in more than cranes. The Eastern White Stork is also endangered and shares wetlands of northeast China and southeast Siberia with the threatened cranes. Under the leadership of Charles Luthin of the Vogelpark Walsrode of West Germany, special meetings convened to discuss the biology and conservation of the storks. Stork nesting trees continue to be cut and the young birds are collected for zoos.

Another highlight of the workshop was a one-day excursion to Lindian on the east side of the marsh. Here we saw hundreds of Siberian Cranes feeding and resting before completing their long migration to the Arctic. Then there was The Banquet with a band, singers, and the presence of the former Governor of Heilongjiang Province, Mr. Chen Lei, and the current Vice Governor, Mr. Wang Lianzheng.

The merit of such a meeting rests not only in the technical sessions, but especially in the friendships and ideas that evolve outside the conference room. Members of working groups from Africa, Europe, the Indian Subcontinent, Southeast Asia, Japan, and North America met on an informal basis to discuss regional activities. And never in China's history have so many Chinese gathered to discuss cranes and wetlands.

It would require a volume to describe the manifold transactions that took place during that week beside Zhalong Marsh. ICF will be compiling most of these plans — together with proposals from researchers not at ICW — into a Crane Action Plan that will provide direction for crane research and conservation for the years 1988-92. To mention just a few ICW outcomes, we anticipate an international winter count of Red-crowned Cranes, cooperative conservation work between India, and...
and China, and between Thailand and China; expanded efforts at Zhalong Marsh toward wetland management and public education; and growing ICF involvement in Africa.

The five days in Qiqihar passed all too quickly and before any of us were quite ready to leave, we were back on the train to Beijing. But the delegates have approved plans for the next ICW, for 1992 in Africa. In the meantime, challenging work awaits all of us.

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ICF wishes sincerely to thank the Wildlife Conservation Association, and in particular Dr. Qing Jianhua, Mr. Bai Jingyu, Mrs. Chen Huiyuan, and the other Chinese organizers for making the International Crane Workshop such a success. Hosting a bilingual conference, of such a large size and in a remote location, provided a unique challenge in logistics and communication. I am also certain the delegates join me in thanking Mrs. Zhao Zhongqin and her team of eight interpreters from China, and in appreciating the efforts of Douglas McNeal and Jim Harkness who transferred information day and night from English to Chinese and back again.

Above: crowds of children, including dancers dressed in white like Red-crowned Cranes, greeted ICW delegates at the Qiqihar train station. Photo by Kyoko Archibald. Below: 225 crane conservationists came from 28 nations to attend ICW. Photo by Ted Gilman.
The Bottom Line — New Facilities at ICF

by Bob Hallam
Development Coordinator

ICF has undertaken two major construction projects this year. In the spring we added 1040 square feet to the Cudahy Visitor Center. The seating capacity was doubled to accommodate 120 adults, and additional restrooms were installed. The remodeling was necessary so that ICF could handle growing numbers of visitors. Just after the project was completed, we experienced a record 160 school children on a single tour.

Most of the $37,000 construction cost for the Cudahy addition was met by a gift from the estate of Ralph Moser. Additional capital support was provided by Modine Manufacturing Company and the Kohler Company.

We have also nearly finished the first phase of “Cranedominiums.” Funds from ICF’s capital campaign, “A Gift to the World,” provided the $300,000 cost needed to complete this initial phase. In 1988, we hope to complete Cranedominiums by adding another 25 pens.

ICF’s Capital Campaign
Gifts and Pledges

ICF’s “A Gift to the World” campaign has received gifts and pledges totalling $844,917.54. We wish to thank all of our members and friends who supported the campaign from October 1986 through June 1987:

Dr. & Mrs. John F. Alden; George W. Archibald; Mr. & Mrs. Richard Askey; Thomas Ashman; Abigail Avery; Mr. & Mrs. Rex Bates; Ann M. Bauer; Harold & Ruth Bessac; John S. Best; Annette W. Beyer; John C.W. Bliese; Herbert R. Bird; Jane E. Bjorklund; Robert M. Bolz; Lynde & Harry Bradley Foundation; Ruth D. Breckon; Marcia L. Brehmer; Mary Burke; Mary Livingston Griggs and Mary Griggs Burke Foundation; Paul J. Campbell; Robert E. Carroll; Chapman Foundation; Clarissa H. Chandler; Mr. & Mrs. William Chester, Jr.; Barbara Ann Crass; Patrick and Anna M. Cudahy Fund; John & Judy Day; Dellwood Foundation; John Henry Dick; Mr. & Mrs. Thomas Dolan; Gaylord Donnelley; Mr. & Mrs. Thomas Donnelley; Carol and Elizabeth Eberbach Foundation; Mr. & Mrs. Kenneth Findley; Kenneth M. Finkel & Jane E. Delzer; Robert T. Foote; Joan & David Fordham; Albert C. & Susan T. Friedman;

Haffner Foundation; Bob & Vicki Hallam; Josephine L. Harper; Frances Anne Harrington; Mrs. J. Dudley Haupt; Joseph J. Hickey; Katherine B. Hill; J.B. Charitable Trust; Mr. & Mrs. Reinhardt H. Jahn; Wallace & Lois A. Jensen; Cecelia M. Johnson; Richard K. Johnson; J.W. Jung; Charles Kahn; Warren King; Herbert H. Kohl; Arthur C. Kootz Foundation; Mr. & Mrs. Donald Koskinen; Charles A. Krause Foundation; Frank Y. Larkin; Jenny J. Lind; Mr. & Mrs. Robert Lovejoy; George & Florence G. Mairs; Mr. & Mrs. William R. Marling; Dorothy A. Moen; F. Morgan & Barbara Taylor; Tracy M. Morris; Mr. & Mrs. Earle E. Muschlitz; Neenah Foundry Foundation, Inc.; Edward J. Noble Foundation, Inc.; Oshkosh B’Gosh Foundation; Dorothy Pain; Pepsi Cola Bottling Company of Madison; R.D. and Linda Peters Foundation; Mr. & Mrs. Roger Peterson; Russell & Lillian Peterson; George Ranney, Sr.; Barbara Runge;

Mr. & Mrs. Gerard St. George; Christina E. Savit; Mrs. Joseph Scheerer; Walter Schroeder Foundation, Inc.; Schwartz-Hart Family Foundation; Shade Information Systems, Inc.; Mr. & Mrs. Arthur O. Smith; Mr. & Mrs. Edward Byron Smith; Willis G. Sullivan; James A. Taylor Family Foundation; Ann & Stuart Tisdale; Mary Willson Von Neumann; Emily Wade; Richard & Pauline D. Weibel; Mrs. Howard F. Weiss; Wicor, Inc.; Mrs. John Wilbur; Margaret Winston; and Wisconsin Power & Light Foundation.

As the initial phase of “Cranedominiums” nears completion, ICF’s 24 new “cranedominiums” are reached. A service building will follow. Photo by Marion Hill.

The ICF BUGLE is the quarterly newsletter for members of the International Crane Foundation (ICF). Address: E - 11376 Shady Lane Road, Baraboo, Wisconsin 53913, U.S.A. Telephone: (608) 356-9462. Articles review ICF programs as well as crane research around the world.

Co-Founders: George Archibald
Ron Sauy

Editor: Jim Harris

Asst. Editor: Erik Brynildson

ICF offers memberships at the following annual rates:

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ICF members and guests are invited to attend a field trip to the Upper Mississippi River National Wildlife Refuge. The excursion will also give you a chance to meet some of the foreign visitors studying at ICF.

The trip is planned for Sunday, September 27, the day after ICF’s annual meeting. We’ll leave ICF at 8 a.m. and return that evening (or you can meet the group by the Mississippi). We’ll focus on the unusual nature of this wildlife refuge that is also an important recreational area and commercial waterway. Problems in river management as well as the natural history of the area will be discussed.

Participants will be responsible for their food and travel expenses. We’ll send you details about what to bring, and a participant list to encourage car pooling.

We are asking for a $20 donation per person, to help support ICF’s foreign training efforts. To reserve a place, send your full payment to ICF. Include name(s), addresses, and telephone numbers.
ANNOUNCING:

The 13th Annual Meeting of the International Crane Foundation
Saturday, September 26, 1987

ICF members and their guests are invited to attend the annual meeting and dinner. Reservations are required; please use the form provided below. Be sure to respond by September 16th, as reservations are limited. You may wish to sign up for the field trip that ICF is offering for Sunday, September 27. See opposite page for details.

Schedule

4:00 p.m. TOURS for members and guests, of ICF's new site — including Crane City. Take advantage of this rare chance to see our new breeding facility!

5:30 p.m. COCKTAILS (cash bar) at the Holiday Inn, Wisconsin Dells.

6:30 p.m. BUFFET DINNER at the Holiday Inn.

7:30 p.m. ANNUAL MEETING PROGRAM by George Archibald on the International Crane Workshop and ICF programs in Baraboo and around the world.

Please clip or copy, and mail to ICF, E-11376 Shady Lane Road, Baraboo, Wisconsin 53913.

Reservations deadline — September 16

____Please make dinner/program reservations for _______ people.
   My check for $13.00 each is enclosed.

____I cannot attend the meeting, but please send me a copy of the Annual Report.

Name: ____________________________

Address: ____________________________
Helping to Educate the World
by Erik Brynildson, ICF Education Associate

Public education is an urgent priority near wetlands that are home to endangered cranes. But education materials, so costly to develop, are frequently lacking in these regions. Some of the finest materials developed by ICF's education department to date were recently assembled for distribution at the International Crane Workshop held this past May in China.

The collection, called "An International Education Packet for the Conservation of Cranes and Wetlands," is designed to help conservationists initiate education programs that promote the co-existence of people and cranes. The packet includes assorted fact sheets, 8" x 10" photographic prints, a 40-slide slideshow with an accompanying script, and suggestions for use of the packet.

Ideally, presentations will be supplemented with regional materials relevant to the local audience. The packet is especially suitable for use in schools and villages near wetland nature reserves, but can also be effective for more general audiences. We have created both English and Chinese language versions.

The project was funded by the Frances R. Dewing Foundation and the Institute of Museum Services. Agri-Images Ltd., donated reproduction of the photographic materials, while fifteen photographers from seven countries allowed us to use their pictures. A limited number of packets are available free to active conservationists and conservation agencies in Asia and Africa. Otherwise they can be purchased for $40 each, including postage.

To obtain the packet, mail a check to: International Crane Foundation, E-11376 Shady Lane Road, Baraboo, Wisconsin 53913-9778, U.S.A.

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The "Proceedings 1985 Crane Workshop" is available for $6.00 from Platte River Whoooping Crane Maintenance Trust, 2550 N. Diers Avenue, Suite H, Grand Island, Nebraska, 68803. This hardbound, 415-page proceedings contains 51 papers. The papers are grouped by workshop sessions: population factors, behavior, hunting, disease and mortality, winter habitat and activities, reproduction, aspects of migration, habitat and management, and captive propagation.