



THE ICF BUGLE

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World Center for the Study and Preservation of Cranes

A Human Side to Conservation

by Jim Harris, Deputy Director

Fog covered land and lake as 70 workshop participants gathered at Cao Hai Nature Reserve (CNR) in southwest China. Through the fog, we glimpsed small groups of Black-necked Cranes striding past corn stubble, hardly startled by the farmer likewise striding, behind water buffalo and steel plough. Just beyond, cranes stood in shallow water where they dug sedge tubers from the mud and watched fishermen silently poling their boats. No where else in China do cranes and people mingle so freely.

Our "Workshop on Participatory Approaches to Integrating Conservation with Rural Development: the Experience at Cao Hai Nature Reserve" culminated four years of work. Project partners included the International Crane Foundation (ICF), CNR, Guizhou Province Environmental Protection Bureau, the Trickle Up Program (TUP) of New York, and the Rural Development Research Center of Kunming, China.

At Cao Hai, as at most places in China, the people came to live long before there was a nature reserve—CNR was not established until 1985. Scarce resources and high human populations mean that almost all reserves in China are heavily utilized by human communities. Our project has attempted to resolve the conflicts between people and conservation. While everyone agrees that such conflicts threaten China's magnificent system of nature reserves—over 700 reserves have been established since 1975—our project has been one of the first sustained efforts to involve local people in conservation.

Workshop evaluates Cao Hai project

The workshop had several purposes: to evaluate project activities, disseminate results, propose future directions, and expose governmental agencies and other organizations to our farmer-oriented strategy for conservation. We hoped to expand support for participatory work at Cao Hai and other locations in China.

Our core assumption has been that the poorest people—those with an annual income of less than \$50 per person—can become active participants in conservation. Over 20,000 farmers live within CNR, where reserve and watershed boundaries are the same.

The workshop attracted scientists and conservationists from across China, including the Deputy Administrator for the National Environmental Protection Agency

(NEPA), NEPA's deputy director for nature conservation, and a counterpart from within the Ministry of Forestry. These two agencies manage most nature reserves in China.

Workshop participants affirmed that the human "problem" was the central challenge to nature reserve management in China. But many were skeptical about our approach. How could tiny grants, of just \$100 to single families, change human use of the land to improve ecosystems home to people and wildlife alike?

Our workshop occurred within the four-story headquarters of CNR. By climbing to the top, participants gained a wide view of the mountain lake. Wind ruffled water against ten thousand sedge stems, while waterfowl floated, dove, and foraged in scattered flocks. In 1996, an ICF-CNR team counted over 75,000 waterbirds at Cao Hai.



Black-necked Cranes wintering at China's Cao Hai Nature Reserve face many human pressures. A workshop convened at Cao Hai from December 2-7, 1997 to evaluate efforts to integrate conservation with rural development. The Cao Hai project emphasizes farmer participation and leadership. Photo by Allan and Anita Beach.

Behind and beyond the lake rose the stony hills of southwest China. Their thick forests have vanished in recent decades, and the lake is half its former size. Drainage and hand-labor have created a wide circle of croplands for vegetables, corn, and potatoes. As recently as 1992, people and wildlife clashed at CNR. Poor farmers converted wetlands to farmland. Displaced waterbirds damaged crops, and poachers set snares. It is easy for foreign visitors to feel impatience, or even anger, at local farmers' activities at CNR and China's other nature reserves. The cranes are a world treasure that may lose their last homes, for what? For potatoes.

Our project began when we started listening to farmers. The changes we wanted to make for Cao Hai began with ourselves. For me, it happened through a series of visits and conversations within the farmers' homes. I remember sitting beside a dirty window that let light into a square, shadowed room. The woman wore a brown cap and kept her eyes on the wide fields between her house and the lake.

Our interview abruptly ended. She saw Ruddy Shelducks walking into a tiny, distant piece of her land. Each family has just a fraction of an acre of farmland, usually divided into several pieces. Suddenly, the woman leapt up and ran away toward the lake, to drive the ducks away from her cabbages. Left behind, I saw the ducks, and cranes, through her eyes for the first time. Conservation activities at Cao Hai would never succeed without addressing the farmer's needs.

Farmers lead community work

The condition of wetlands at Cao Hai depends on its watershed. Farming wetlands and steep hillsides, overgrazing, and deforestation all damage the ecosystems needed by cranes. These activities also damage the resource base essential for the long-term future of people living in the watershed. Poor people degrade their own resources because they see no other option.

Our community work tried to offer other options. For the first stage, small grants of \$100 were given to groups of 3-5 villagers, usually single families, to start or expand small businesses. The process and funds had been provided by TUP, an organization devoted to poverty alleviation. Just as ICF had never before worked directly on poverty alleviation, TUP had never linked its work to a nature reserve. CNR delivered an initial payment of \$50 once the small group had developed its business plan. Over the next three months, the group had to work 1,000 hours for the business, keep records, and reinvest or save 20% of the profit. If these conditions were met, the group received a second \$50 payment. Over 400 TUP groups have started at CNR.

Families accepting the grants had to design businesses compatible with conservation, and they had to cease wetland reclamation and other activities counter to CNR regulations. Reserve staff initially worked to secure technical assistance needed by the new businesses. The farmers, however, learned best from each other. As a diversity of TUP businesses evolved, dozens of successful models became available—making

stoves from old oil barrels, buying chicken eggs from one market and reselling them at another, selling baked potatoes in front of a school in the nearby town. Even people without TUP grants began using their own funds to start similar businesses.

While TUP provided immediate, short-term benefits, we designed a second stage for longer-term opportunity. For each village, a Community Trust Fund (CTF) was created by a donation of \$25 from the second payment to each successful TUP group, together with larger matches from the Chinese government and from ICF. As each village had 30-50 TUP groups, there was potential for sizable sums to accumulate for the CTFs. CNR staff met with farmers to help them decide how to use their CTFs. At this stage, and throughout the project, we sought to maximize the farmer's role in decision-making, within guidelines set by CNR.

The farmers chose to distribute CTF money in small revolving loan funds. User groups, usually of 10 families each, developed their own rules of operation. User groups had actively to involve all members, with financial management kept transparent for members and CNR. Small loans, usually \$50 or less, were taken by families in turn for 3-4 month periods and repaid with interest. Most groups chose monthly interest rates of 2% or more so that their CTF funds would grow. About 450 families are now involved in 36 user groups.

Lessons for other reserves

Workshop participants praised the success of TUP and CTF operations, and noted strong connections between these community development activities and conservation at CNR. TUP and CTF participants now willingly follow reserve regulations and also agree to take active steps for conservation. Currently, most people plant trees or iris clumps each year in areas vulnerable to soil erosion. More importantly, participants understand that the nature reserve goals—for example, to vegetate field edges, stream-sides, and potential gullies—will benefit human communities as well as cranes in the wetland below.

Increasingly, conservation represents a bond between people and the reserve rather than a source of conflict. As the project scale has grown, leadership and coordination have gradually been transferred to the farmers, with CNR staff seconding their efforts. Networks of farmer guards (concerned with reserve regulations) and community development coordinators (assisting TUP and CTF) now work closely together.

Workshop participants did note continuing challenges for CNR. Community involvement is a long-term effort, and our



In 1995, staff of the Rural Development Research Center and of Cao Hai Nature Reserve (at left) assisted farmers of Haibian Village in developing the first Community Trust Fund. Photo by Jim Harris.

successes at Cao Hai are still young. Our approach to micro finance is unique for China. As CNR establishes more and more user groups, communication and monitoring become difficult. For example, as leadership transfers to farmers, how will their work be compensated? As individual user group funds get larger, will their operations need to change?

The farmers and CNR staff have learned the power of cooperative effort. One village successfully organized among themselves to bring electricity to their village. Overfishing has long been a problem. Although today's harvest is a small fraction of harvests 15 years ago, CNR staff formerly met heavy opposition in the villages to closing the fish season during spawning time. For 1998, however, the farmers themselves are organizing the no fishing season.

Another lesson has been that a participatory approach—that allows farmers to direct their own decisions, finances, and future—requires a change in mindset. Everyone involved has long been familiar with top-down, non-participatory approaches. At Cao Hai, the most important ingredient has been the growing capacity of CNR staff, local officials, and the farmers themselves. Skills at public participation are slow to learn, practice, and teach.

Our workshop discussions focused on how to spread CNR's approaches to other nature reserves in China. Already, with support of TUP and the Chinese government, experiments have begun at a monkey reserve in Guizhou and a reserve for Black-necked Cranes in nearby Yunnan Province. The micro-finance mechanisms used at CNR should be further tested, and carefully adjusted for wider use. But the biggest lessons involve the relationship between nature reserve and local people. For any successful program, the "experts" must listen to the farmers, the reserve and people must find a unified purpose for conservation, and ultimately the farmers must lead the efforts to safeguard their own resources.

All partners to the project have a long-term commitment to the experiments at Cao Hai. ICF looks forward to deepening its partnerships on behalf of this mountain lake, its watershed, its people, and its Black-necked Cranes.

ICF has received funding for this project from the Liz Claiborne and Art Ortenberg Foundation, the Ford Foundation, the U.S. Department of State, the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation, Jack Puelicher, and many ICF members. Our China program is co-sponsored by Ernest Mourmans and the Cracid Breeding and Conservation Center. ■



Loose bird? Has this Eurasian Crane escaped? If you know your ICF history, you would know that in 1977 this bird was quite at home. Where was ICF located before Shady Lane Road? Find out in May's 25th Anniversary Bugle! ICF file photo.

ICF, Ready to Celebrate 25 Years

by Kate Fitzwilliams, Director of Public Relations and Outreach

The year 1998 marks ICF's 25th anniversary. Can you believe that the vision of saving the world's cranes—originated by two Cornell graduate students, George Archibald and Ron Sauey—has grown into a successful foundation with worldwide reach? Of course you can, because you are its supporters. We want this 25th anniversary season to be special. To help celebrate we are offering Saturday VIP tours, with your host, ICF's Director George Archibald.

Starting Saturday, April 18 and ending Saturday, October 31, George will take a small number of visitors (by reservation only) each Saturday from 11 a.m. to 2:30 p.m. down his personal ICF memory lane. For this 25th anniversary event, we are asking for a minimum anniversary donation of \$50 per person. ICF will provide lunch and a new perspective on the dream that grew from the Sauey family farm to today's 225 acre world center for the preservation of cranes. What a great way to re-introduce yourself or introduce new friends to ICF.

Interested? Please call us at 608/356-9462 to reserve your spot on the Saturday VIP tours. In the event George will not be available for a specific date, selected senior staff will lead the tour, sharing their expertise and long-term experience with ICF.

Members, if you haven't been out to visit us in awhile, use the 25th anniversary as a perfect excuse. This season we have a new and energizing introductory slide and light show. Our art gallery, located in the basement of the Ron Sauey Memorial Library, will feature an international children's art display beginning May 1 and ending June 1. From June 27 to October 31, the gallery will be filled with the art of Eleanor Briggs, an accomplished photographer who has joined ICF on many international adventures over the last ten years. ■

Let ICF help fill your calendar...

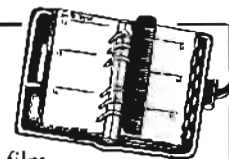
March 27–28: Now showing, ICF! Tune into the Discovery Channel when World of Wonder features ICF on their program, "Mating Rituals." The 27th it will be on at 9:30 p.m. and the 28th it will be on at 1:30 a.m. and 4 p.m.

June 13: Wildlife Photography Workshop. Hosted by Gordon Dietzman, ICF Education Manager, participants will enjoy a hands-on workshop that will help you gain a sense of what to do and what

not to do when capturing wildlife on film. Contact Gordon at 608/356-9462 or e-mail him at gordon.icf@baraboo.com for details.

Sept. 19–20: Our Annual Meeting! See the May issue for details on this unique 25th anniversary event.

Updates on these events and additional activities will be posted on our homepage (address on page 8).



ICF Creates Great Cranexperiences

By Kate Fitzwilliams, Director of Public Relations and Outreach

A gigantic metal object moving blocks of concrete from a parking lot was their first picture of a crane. By the end of two weeks, 24 Chicago youth had quite a different picture. The International Crane Foundation (ICF) helped paint this new picture of a beautiful and very much alive bird during staff's first attempt at mentoring, in an atmosphere called the Crane Ambassador Camp.

The Chicago Youth Center (CYC) was our partner. CYC is an institution and a community resource that works with parents and families to assist them in caring for their children. Their motto, "Every Kid Counts," carried over to ICF's campus as two groups from two Chicago Youth Centers, Centro Nuestro and Fellowship House, shadowed ICF staff for two one week sessions during the summer of 1997.

At the end of two weeks, 24 Crane Ambassadors went back to Chicago to spread the word of saving cranes and their habitats. Besides the knowledge they brought back in their heads, they had produced slide shows focused on their favorite crane, T-shirts they designed with Russian artist Victor Bakhtin's guidance, baseball hats that said Crane Ambassador on the front, and enough reading material to start their own crane library.

For summer 1998, we are happy to announce that we will repeat the two week Crane Ambassador Camp, with the same generous support from the Gaylord and Dorothy Donnelley Foundation that made the first camp a reality.

The work ICF does to create and sustain environments that are clean and healthy, for people and wildlife, will continue and spread if we keep getting youth involved.

The Crane Ambassador Camp is our newest addition to ICF's larger educational outreach Crane Ambassador Program. The Crane Ambassador Program has four other solid, active components: from classrooms to cranes, an international art exchange, adopt-a-crane, and small grants conservation opportunities.



From left, Nancy Businga, ICF vet tech and Julie Langenberg, ICF veterinarian, really let the Crane Ambassador campers get their hands dirty. In this picture, Nancy holds a Whooping Crane while Julie explains a routine health check procedure to Patty Baker, 14, of Fellowship House, Chicago. As ICF vet assistants, the crane campers really learned how our skilled staff manages the health of 120 birds. Photo by Shad Northshield.

THE CRANE AMBASSADOR CREED

"As an ambassador, I understand that I play an important role in protecting the environment on which both wildlife and people depend."

From Classrooms to Cranes begins April 15, when midwest students grades K through 12 are invited to ICF to receive the best visual aid in environmental education possible: all 15 crane species, live and in color! ICF tour guides will challenge students with ideas and questions about our mission to save cranes and their habitats as school groups tour the facilities. More importantly, our guides are ready to answer any question the students come up with, whether they have to do with cranes or not.

ICF curriculum packets designed for each grade level are available to teachers before the on-site tour to help focus the students. While on the tour, students observe crane behavior, and discover what a thriving wetland really is. These two important attractions, cranes and wetlands, allow students to see why a crane is designed for its habitat and why keeping wetlands healthy is so significant to humans.

After the ICF tour, students receive an official Crane Ambassador card. This card gives free admission to the Ambassador and \$1 off for an accompanying adult. The Crane Ambassador creed printed on the card, challenges students to be stewards for the environment.

How can the students continue their Ambassadorship?

Taking the idea of saving the cranes back to the classrooms can lead to the **International Art Exchange**, and our **Adopt-a-Crane** program.

Since 1988, ICF has been assisting in the exchange of children's art about cranes between American schools and schools near important crane areas in foreign countries. While differing languages create barriers between countries, the children's art has tremendous and direct impact.

Today, every time an ICF staff member travels abroad, he or she is carrying children's art back and forth. This coming May, we will exhibit selected art at ICF's library from both American and foreign children before delivering the pieces to their final destinations. We are also placing selected art on ICF's homepage. Students participating in this program have a rare chance to touch others across the world with their creative understanding of cranes.

Adopt-a-Crane is a great way for youth to locally get involved in ICF's caring mission. While this program is open to individuals and families, classrooms all over America are its main supporters. Classrooms are challenged to raise \$30 to adopt-a-crane that helps fund its care at ICF. When the crane is officially adopted, ICF provides the new crane parents with a certificate of adoption, a photograph, a biography of the adopted crane, and a one year membership to ICF. Adopting a crane connects classrooms to an individual crane creating a strong motivation to learn more about these majestic birds.

What if a classroom wants to do more?

ICF has designed a **Small Grants Conservation Program** that links students to international projects. In conjunction

with our international colleagues, important low-cost, but high impact conservation projects in foreign countries are identified, and students have the opportunity to sponsor a project of their choice. Grants range anywhere from \$100 to \$400, or more.

Once the students become sponsors, they essentially become a board of directors for a mini foundation. They follow the project starting with a copy of the original grant proposal, with budget, submitted by the foreign conservationist who will implement the project. At the conclusion of the project, the students receive a project summary and a letter from the researcher. Sponsors also receive a certificate from ICF in appreciation for their involvement that makes the project possible.

ICF encourages the grantee to link the sponsoring school with schools in the research area, creating more educational and international connections. One condition of the grant is that the grant recipient must conduct an educational activity as part of their project.

The Small Grants Conservation Program provides schools in the project area overseas with resources, information, and concepts that may never have reached them. This linkage also provides the sponsoring American schools with experience in funding small, but important, international conservation projects.

ICF strives to fashion unique environmental education programs that are meaningful to youth of all ages and cultures. On or off-site, ICF reaches out to youth, inviting them to accept the challenging yet rewarding responsibility of being a Crane Ambassador. We value each Ambassador and his or her sense of responsibility to nature. We count on them to explain their responsibility to more children and adults, and help secure a safe world for future crane generations. ■



ICF members Ed Kurdziel (behind) and Don Groschel deliver children's crane art from Wisconsin to students living beside Cao Hai Nature Reserve, China. Photo by Jim Harris.



Right: Colby Neuman, 14, visited ICF from Salt Lake City, UT during his annual vacation with his grandparents in Milwaukee, WI. Colby is an impressive birder, and at ICF he added three birds to his life list: the Willow Flycatcher, the Blue-winged Warbler and the Sora. ICF is home for many species of wild birds, and Colby is making it easier for visitors to bird at ICF with his official, International Crane Foundation Saucy Bird Trail Guide. This easy to use guide—composed and designed by Colby with just minor suggestions from staff—will be available in the gift shop this coming season. Thanks Colby for a job well done! Photo by Marshal Case.



Additional program funds have come from Lands' End, Inc., Baraboo Rotary Club, SFC Charitable Foundation, Jack Puelicher and other ICF members.

Left: While ICF aviculture staff allowed the Crane Ambassador Campers to get their hands dirty, the ICF field ecology staff helped them to get everything dirty! Here, Rich Beilfuss, ICF hydrologist, took the campers right into our wetland. Our holistic agenda for teaching the campers about cranes and their habitats could not have been accomplished without the staff's expertise and willingness to share their time. Photo by Shad Northshield.

Contributions

Received Oct. through Dec. 1997



Lufthansa
ICF's Official Airline

Grants & Awards: Walter Alexander Foundation, Inc.; Aylward Family Foundation; The Lynde & Harry Bradley Foundation; The Buchanan Family Foundation; Reed Coleman Fund; Carolyn Foundation; Chevron; Arthur J. Donald Family Foundation, Inc.; The Donnelley Foundation—Ann & Elliott Donnelley Family Fund; The Donnelley Foundation—Thomas E. II & Barbara C. Donnelley Family Fund; Albert J. & Flora H. Ellinger Foundation, Inc.; The Evjue Foundation, Inc.; French Family Foundation; Haffner Foundation; The Jacob & Terese Hershey Foundation; The Hubbard Foundation; Freda & William Hunt Memorial Trust; Industrial Coils; Reinhardt H. & Shirley R. Jahn Foundation; Knox Family Foundation; Herbert H. Kohl Charities, Inc.; Arthur C. Kootz Foundation; Krause Family Foundation, Inc.; Edward & Joan Kurdziel; Loyal Order of the Caribbean Soul; The John D. & Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation; Marshall & Hsley Foundation, Inc.; Chauncey & Marion Deering McCormick Foundation; Meadowwood Foundation; Memphis Zoo; Menasha Corporation Foundation; Milwaukee Foundation; Mutual Of Omaha; National Fish & Wildlife Foundation; Kenneth Nebenzahl; George Ranney, Sr.; Janice Price Sampson; Douglas & Eleanor Seaman Charitable Foundation; Jeffrey R. Short, Jr.; U. S. Fish & Wildlife Service; The Vermont Community Foundation; Vilter Foundation, Inc.; Wisconsin River Power Company; World Wildlife Fund; Zoological Society of Cincinnati.

The **ICF Bugle** is the quarterly newsletter for members of the International Crane Foundation (ICF). Articles review ICF programs as well as crane research around the world.

Co-Founders: George Archibald
Ron Sauey

Editor: Kate Fitzwilliams

ICF offers memberships at the following annual rates:

Student or Senior Citizen	\$20		
Individual	\$25	Foreign	\$30
Family	\$35	Sponsor	\$500
Associate	\$100	Patron	\$1,000

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And the Good Egg Award goes to...

The committed generosity and support that Jane Ridders and Oscar and Rosalie Mayer have shown to ICF was recognized with the "Good Egg Award" last fall at a dinner in Madison. Jane, ICF's first member, shared her memories of meeting George in a Baraboo field at 4 a.m. to observe wild Sandhill Cranes. That early morning escapade impressed her enough that she became a lifelong member and ICF recruiter. The Mayers had the opportunity of watching with George and Ron Sauey while a Eurasian Crane hatched. This was an experience that the Mayers say they will never forget, and their support has helped the foundation grow into what it is today.

From left, Jane Ridders, George Archibald, Rosalie and Oscar Mayer.
Photo by Tim Kohl.

It takes stewardship:

Note from Dr. Shelley Gordon to ICF staff

What delights us most about finding you is a sense of soul mates at work in common pursuits. Ever since the 1950s, my mother has watched papers to glean news of Whooping Cranes and has agonized over their welfare. Finally, we found you, the incredibly dedicated and knowledgeable staff at ICF. Thanks for allowing us to honor mom with a \$140,000 donation in her name—Janice Price Sampson—to partner with you to make a difference.

Healthy wetlands, a part of our biosystem vital to human life itself, are manifested by the vitality of their attendant species. What joy it is to know that trumpeter swans and cranes are returning to their native flyways around the earth. Your work at ICF is vital at this delicate time in crane balance to tip the scales in their favor.

Additionally, humans need beauty, and if cranes aren't beautiful, what is? Like ICF, we hope that generations to follow will have sighting privileges, that the battles will have been won. It takes more than a village. Global, networked stewardship. Yes, it takes stewardship. With our best wishes, press on.

Right: Janice Price Sampson and her daughter, Dr. Shelley Gordon, enjoyed listening to Gee Whiz and Oubleck, at the Amoco Whooping Crane Exhibit during their last ICF visit.



ICF's Bird-a-thon

Last year's Bird-a-thon raised over \$21,000 for the Ron Sauey Conservation Fund and for ICF operations here in Baraboo. Since 1989, the Bird-a-thon has raised over \$156,000.

Please help the cranes by joining in the 1998 Bird-a-thon. In March, ICF will mail you information about ICF's Ninth Annual Bird-a-thon and how you can help.

Lighting Up ICF's Life

The Reinhardt H. and Shirley R. Jahn Foundation, has let the light in ICF. With their support, ICF has completed a security lighting project. Decorative and efficient exterior lighting is now in 11 carefully selected locations throughout the site, improving security and safety. The warm glow on site, after dark, has given ICF a fresh new look. ICF Trustee Charles Jahn, son of Reinhardt and Shirley, worked closely with Dave Chesky, ICF Site Manager, to create this bright addition.

Sangre de Cristos & Cranes

by Mike Endres, Wildlife photographer & ICF member

Their cries rose out of the eastern sky with the coming dawn, building to a pitched crescendo as the rose-colored sun edged its way over the horizon. Their movements were short and tentative at first, uncertain efforts of only a few tens of feet. Soon, the warming rays of the sun began to energize them, giving the birds strength and purpose with each passing minute. Initially, only a few groups were moving, then, as if on cue, masses of these avian dancers took to the air. Wave upon wave of thousands of Sandhill Cranes and Canada Geese, a veritable sky ballet set to the symphony of their blended calls, silhouetted against a backdrop of 14,000 foot peaks in the Sangre de Cristo Range of Colorado's Rocky Mountains.

An unusual landscape for finding over 20,000 Sandhill Cranes, along with a few Whoopers, yet there I was in the crisp morning air witnessing a scene that's been unfolding for eons. The birds are drawn to the San Luis Valley in southern Colorado both as a natural geographical conduit to their nesting grounds in Idaho and as an ideally situated wetland for replenishing depleted energy stores.

Their flight from the Bosque del Apache NWR in New Mexico is a long-distance marathon and their stopover here is an essential one, in spite of this being a high-altitude desert at 7500 feet with an annual rainfall of only 7 inches. The key to such wetland success alongside the desert lies in the high peaks of the Sangre de Cristos to the east and the San Juans to the west. These ranges hold enormous supplies of water in the form of melting snow that drain into numerous valley streams. Additionally, during the 1880's, a multitude of irrigation canals were constructed here for agricultural purposes.

These same canals today provide water to both the 11,168 acre Alamosa National Wildlife Refuge (NWR), and the 14,189 acre Monte Vista NWR. The wetlands of the latter are actually artificially created and maintained in order to provide additional and essential habitat. Both offer exceptional opportunities for




Sandhill Cranes find late spring snow at their mid-day social gathering in southern Colorado. The Sangre de Cristos rise in the background. Photo by Mike Endres.

viewing and photographing the cranes and other wetland species. The refuges were established as a response to a decrease in wildlife secondary to habitat loss that occurred with the large influx of people. Lest we view all development as negative, it is worthwhile to note that much of the surrounding cropland is readily used by the birds for feeding. Local roadways provide easy viewing and a thrilling experience at dusk as the birds move, en masse, to their roosting sites.

The Monte Vista Crane Committee, at P.O. Box 585, Monte Vista, CO 81144, can provide detailed information on the annual Crane Festival each March as well as lodging. The best times for viewing birds are March-May, and September-November.

While the San Luis Valley cannot match the tremendous numbers of cranes found along the Platte River, San Luis does offer a unique solitude unmatched for viewing these graceful creatures. A trip to this area of the Rocky Mountains provides the opportunity to witness one of nature's grand movements. Cranes and wetlands of the San Luis Valley deserve our continued support. ■

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