Ethiopia: Ancient Land of Cranes

By Rich Beilfuss, Africa Program Director

Long before the first light of dawn reaches the Rift Valley floor, the clamor on the marsh builds to a raucous crescendo. First in groups of three or four, then in numbers that blur into the hundreds and thousands, the cranes take flight from their roost. They rise higher and higher, circling up and over the surrounding peaks before descending on the terraced fields where waste grain of teff and wheat is plentiful. My companions stand at the ready with expensive cameras, but are fully absorbed in the sights and sounds of the spectacle overhead. In the distance, we hear the Muslim call to prayer and the ring of Christian bells that renew daily life in Ethiopia.

Mention Ethiopia and you are likely to conjure up images of desert, drought, and famine. Few can forget the haunting footage of starvation and hopelessness that beckoned a new era of crises in the 1980s. But the Ethiopia we “discovered” this past winter is far more complex, a country of diverse peoples, landscapes, and wildlife, and a country surprisingly rich in wetlands and cranes.

The only African nation to have largely avoided colonization, Ethiopia has maintained a strong sense of cultural identity through the centuries. Ethiopia features granite monoliths of Aksum, dating back more than 2000 years, mark one of the greatest civilizations of ancient times. Ethiopia’s rugged landscape is a source of unparalleled biological diversity. Nearly 20% of the flora is found nowhere else in Africa. Ethiopia is home to 31 endemic mammal species, and birdlife is abundant with more than 850 species. Water is surprisingly plentiful in the Ethiopian highlands, giving rise to the Blue Nile River and a wealth of lakes and marshes - crane marshes. Ethiopia is the only country in Africa that hosts four species of cranes, including wintering Demoiselle and Eurasian Cranes and resident Black Crowned and Wattled Cranes.

I visited Ethiopia to work with our long-term colleague, Yilma Dellelegn Abebe. Yilma is employed by the Ethiopian Wildlife and Natural History Society, an indigenous non-profit organization dedicated to protecting and conserving Ethiopia’s natural heritage. Yilma is one of the top ornithologists in Ethiopia, and for more than a decade has championed the protection of cranes and wetlands.

Our team also included two renowned crane experts from Germany. Carl-Albrecht von Truenufels, President of WWF-Germany, is a lifelong friend of the cranes and has visited ICF projects around the world. He also sponsored our trip to Ethiopia. The magnificent spectacle of the morning fly-out of Eurasian Cranes ranks among the best crane experiences in Africa, and it is only a short distance from the capital Addis Ababa. Ethiopia now supports the largest wintering population in Africa — we counted more than 9000 cranes at the Choliwika Marsh roost alone. But the cranes have a
very uncertain future. Over the past 30 years, rapid human population growth in the Rift Valley has led to intensive subsistence agricultural development. Local landowners complain that the cranes are increasingly causing significant crop damage when they first arrive for the winter, a time when the fields are freshly planted and kernels are vulnerable. Because waterbird hunting is illegal in Ethiopia, farmers resort to cracking whips, firing blank shots, and making other loud noises to chase cranes off of their fields. There is little doubt that devastated farmers could soon turn to poisoning and snaring, however, as we have witnessed elsewhere in Africa. We will launch a new project with our colleagues in Germany to assess the root biological and social causes of land-use conflicts between farmers and cranes and develop proactive measures to reduce this tension.

Our most exciting discovery involved the largest and rarest of the African cranes. Separated by more than 1,700km from the next closest population in Tanzania, the Wattled Cranes of Ethiopia have long been the subject of curiosity and speculation. In sharp contrast to their cousins that breed on the large flood-plains of southern Africa, Ethiopia’s Wattled Cranes are known to breed only in the isolated alpine wetlands of the high mountain plateaus above the Mountain National Park.

During the dry season they are thought to form larger groups that feed at lower elevations. By George Archibald, Co-founder

During the Cold War the tension in Afghanistan in 1979, relations froze

Do svidaniya, Vladoka

On March 23, having just celebrated his 80th birthday, Dr. Vladimir ICF's first major project. Lessons learned helped prepare us for other major initiatives. Vladimir Flint was the father of the Siberian Crane Project and through it, an inspiration for other programs around the world. He will always be a part of my life.
Environmental Education from a Local Perspective

By Sara Gavney Moore, Field Ecology Program Assistant
Li Fengshan, ICF China Program Coordinator


"Bai He!" These simple words, "White Crane" . . .

were excitedly called out by students and their teachers as they viewed a small flock of birds during a recent field trip to Poyang Lake Nature Reserve in southeastern China. The students were participating in the first ever environmental education camp held at the reserve, which is a critical wintering habitat for nearly all of the world’s endangered White or Siberian Cranes. As they viewed the birds through binoculars, the students took careful notes on the cranes’ physical appearance and behavior, noting their diagnostic black wing tips and necks outstretched in flight.

For many of the students, these were not the first cranes that they had seen, for they live within the boundaries of the reserve and use the same resources as the thousands of migratory cranes and other wintering waterbirds. But the excitement behind their recognition of the White Crane was perhaps new, as they had just completed two days learning about the significance of the area’s wetlands to both birds and people.

During the three-day camp, the reserve staff and teachers emphasized to the students that these birds, although a common sight while their families fish or tend water buffalo near their homes, are special — they, the students, are in part responsible for their survival.

Critical to preserving Poyang Lake and other wetland areas in China is the involvement of local people in the management of these resources, for their actions will help to determine the future of these areas. A key tool in achieving this goal is the development of education programs that promote a sense of pride and respect for nature and that convey the critical importance of protecting these resources for the health of both human and wildlife populations.

With the aid of The Henry Luce Foundation, the International Crane Foundation (ICF) has partnered with educators and nature reserve staff in China and Russia to achieve this goal through the development of environmental education programs at six nature reserves and surrounding communities in China and Russia.

Through these programs students learn about basic principles of ecology and environmental stewardship, while their teachers and local nature reserve staff are trained to continue these efforts.

The two-pronged educational project combines an initial summer or winter environmental camp at each site with the development of a site-specific curriculum to be implemented in local schools. The educational materials are developed with and by local reserve staff and teachers to ensure that the unique perspectives and challenges faced by local communities are addressed in the camp and classroom materials. At the same time, ICF is working with all six sites on management planning, field research, and community-oriented activities that address the significant resource issues faced by each site and its vicinity.

Twenty students and six teachers from four local elementary schools participated in the winter camp at Poyang Lake Nature Reserve. The camp was led by educators from the Beijing Brooks Education Center, a non-profit organization based in Beijing that is leading the education component of the project. The two-week camp was completed during the first year of the three-year project. In July 2003, this project sponsored the environmental education camp at Muraviova Park for Sustainable Land Use in Far East Russia. The summer camp was the 10th environmental education camp held at the Park, whose education programming has reached over 1,500 students and teachers from China, Russia, South Korea, and the United States since the Park’s creation in 1994. Over 40 Russian elementary and middle school students participated in the 2003 camp, which focused on the region’s wildlife and wetlands and the student’s role as stewards of these important natural resources.

In 2004, additional summer camps and corresponding school curricula are planned for the neighboring Zhalong Nature Reserve and Changlindao Nature Reserve in northeastern China. Russian students and teachers will travel to China to participate in the Changlindao summer camp. This international camp is designed to foster increased cooperation and understanding of environmental issues that affect the border region of eastern Russia and China, which is an important breeding and migration corridor for the Red-crowned, White-naped, and Hooded Cranes, Oriental White Stork, and other threatened migratory birds.

ICF is partnering with educators in China and Russia to develop environmental education programs based on the needs of local populations at five nature reserves in China and a sixth protected area in Russia (project locations are indicated by red circles). Map by Dorn Moore.

Environmental Education from a Local Perspective

Celebrating 25 Years of Crane Conservation in China

In November 1979, ICF Co-founder George Archibald traveled to China for the first time as a guest of the Chinese Academy of Science’s Institute of Zoology in Beijing. During his six-day visit to Beijing, George met with prominent Chinese ornithologists and discussed developing a collaborative crane conservation program between ICF and the Institute of Zoology. These initial discussions laid the foundations for ICF’s China Program, which today is an important component of ICF’s international programs that span five continents and over 20 countries.

The diversity of crane species found within China’s borders — nine species in total — and the significance of cranes in Chinese culture are unique factors that have made China one of the critical geographic regions for ICF’s activities.

Today, ICF’s environmental education work at Poyang Lake and other nature reserves is one of eight active projects that ICF coordinates in China. Along with public education, ICF’s China Program focuses on research, professional training, and poverty alleviation and rural development programs. To learn more about these projects, visit the new China Program section on ICF’s website at www.savingcranes.org/China or contact ICF’s China Program Coordinator, Dr. Li Fengshan at fengshan@savingcranes.org.
**Nature Gifts from around the Globe!**

Enjoy guilt free shopping at ICF’s Gift Shop. ICF is non-profit – all purchases benefit global conservation efforts!

- Clothing exclusively designed for ICF in Nepal
- Custom designed jewelry and cards
- Robert Bateman and Owen Gromme prints
- Wide variety of adult and children’s books on cranes, wetlands, prairies, nature conservation, wildlife gardening and birds, and much more!
- Terrific Kids section! Stuffed animals, books, origami paper, crane dolls, posters, t-shirts, postcards

Please be sure to visit our online gift shop at www.savingcranes.org and click on “Shop”. New items are being added continually so be sure to check back frequently.

Remember ICF membership includes 10% discount!

---

**Leopold Workshops**

The Leopold Education Project is an interdisciplinary environmental education curriculum based on the classic writings of Aldo Leopold. The LEP teaches students and adults about humanity’s ties to the natural environment in the effort to conserve and protect the earth’s natural resources. The workshop involves participants in hands-on, minds-on activities that demonstrate how students can be involved in responsible decision making that will help them to become ecologically literate citizens. Lessons are coordinated to Wisconsin Academic Standards.

- **June 15, 2004 at Aido Leopold Nature Center, Monona, WI**
  - 8:30 - 3:30, Fee: $20 includes lunch (a few scholarships available)
  - Contact: Gail Epping, 608-221-0495, gepping@naturenet.com
- **June 16, 2004 at the International Crane Foundation, Baraboo, WI**
  - 9:00 - 3:00, Fee: $20 includes free trip to Leopold’s Shack
  - Contact: Korie Klink, 608-356-9462 ext. 127, korie@savingcranes.org

For more information contact: Treva Brauch, 608-238-3212, email: wbrauch@wisc.edu

---

**10 Years and Growing!**

By Harry Parrott, ICF and Friends of Muraviovka Park Member

Muraviovka Park For Sustainable Land Use in Far Eastern Russia is 10 years old and continuing to expand opportunities for international awareness of environmental education and organic farming. Under the guidance of ICF and Sergei Sminrinski, park director, programs that began with Russian and American teachers leading ecology camps for children during the summer have expanded to include international language schools and camps in China for school children and teachers. Guests from Russia, China, Japan, South Korea, and the United States at this summer’s 10th anniversary celebration at Muraviovka will see how cabins have replaced tents, farm equipment has been upgraded, and a bus now transports children and visitors. The Friends of Muraviovka Park invite you to visit ICF’s website for more information or http://zhuravl.freeshell.org to read the 2004 newsletter Zhuravl and to see opportunities for involvement.

---

**Travel**

This year there are two special opportunities to travel with George Archibald

1. **Celebrate Whooping Cranes in Wisconsin at the Whooping Crane Festival in Necedah, Wisconsin on September 18 with George Archibald as your guide.** Contact Julie Zajicek at 608-356-9462 ext. 156, julie@savingcranes.org

2. **High in the mysterious and majestic Himalayas, nestled between Tibet and India, lies the small Kingdom of Bhutan. From November 4-21, you have the opportunity to travel to Bhutan with ICF co-founder George Archibald. Welcome the wintering Black-necked Cranes and experience the rich culture and tradition of the Bhutanese. Please go to our website for more information:** www.savingcranes.org/Travel/George_Future_Bhutan_Trip.asp or contact Julie Zajicek at 608-356-9462 ext. 156 or julie@savingcranes.org

---

**Wish List**

- ICF’s Crane Conservation Department is in need of a 27” screen (minimum) for use in viewing Whooping Crane pairs and chicks via video.
- Low mileage four-door sedan
- Microwaves for the library

Please contact Bob Lange at 608-356-9462 ext. 140