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A Grey Crowned Crane flies over Lake Bunyoni in the richly diverse and intensively farmed Albertine Rift Valley of East Africa. Photo by Sudhir Herle

A New Dawn In Rwanda
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Annual Member Day
See page 6 for program details
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...which has long since been cut down, some replaced by eucalyptus plantations, and erosion of farmland has become common. The forests have largely been cleared to till and weed these plots. The forests have...
In mid-June we enjoyed another magical night at the International Crane Foundation. An Evening with the Cranes drew friends from across the country to share wine, dinner, and stories from the crane region of the world, under a beautiful summer sky. During our welcoming remarks, we thanked our first sponsors: Patrics and WR and Flye Sauerbrey of Baraboo and the many other supporters, partners, and volunteers who make our work possible. Greg Smith, Managing Director of Discover Marwen, shared the exciting news that ICF is featured in a new program as one of Wisconsin’s premier attractions. We honored Forrest Hartmann, ICF Co-founder and Emeritus Director, for his lifetime of conservation service. My favorite part of this annual event is the opportunity for ICF members and supporters to mingle with our program leaders. Stationed across our site, we chatted with many species of cranes we are working to save, staff shared stories of our efforts to halt the decline of Grey Crowned Cranes and wetlands in Africa, to secure the most important wetland in China for Siberian Cranes and many other species, to reintroduce Whooping Cranes in the eastern U.S., and to provide farmer-friendly solutions to crop depredation by Sandhills Cranes. The evening accentuated our unique position as a rural Wisconsin-based organization tackling conservation challenges of international importance. We think and act locally, and globally.

ICF’s landscape is a living laboratory – a place where restoration ideas have matured, literally and figuratively for nearly 40 years. Our new photo exhibit Bloom: A Year of Photographs from the Prairie Landscape, features the stunning photography of Tom Lynn. No one captures the essence of our prairies, savannas, and wetlands better than Tom, who (showing remarkable range!) is also a photojournalist covering the Day at the Packers. Tom’s captivating photos will be on exhibit at ICF’s Donnelley Family Education Center through October. Special thanks to our BLOOM sponsors Badger Glass, Bischof Construction, Econoprint, LifePhotography.com, University of Wisconsin – Madison Zoology Museum, and Wisconsin DNR Sandhill Outdoor Skills Center. Those of you watching from home can connect to our ICF Live cams to follow our conservation work as well. For over eight weeks this spring and summer our live Crane Cam provided a behind-the-scenes peek at Lily, Fen, Catchly, and other Whooping Crane release project chicks as they grew, exercised, and learned about wetlands they will soon call home. If you missed our live cam broadcast, view our series of Crane Chick Cam Video Shorts at CraneChickCam.org and stay tuned for further live cam experiences focusing on ICF’s captive flock! There are more opportunities on the horizon to visit our site and share in our local and global conservation mission. On September 15 we will host our Annual Member Appreciation Day complete with behind-the-scenes tours of our facilities, photography workshops with Tom Lynn, crane tracking demonstrations, and specialized tours of our cranes and prairies (Forum page 7). ICF’s program leader, Dr. Gopi Sundar, will share conservation highlights from the Sarus crane of India. In the evening we will hold our Annual Member Meeting on site, honoring our Good Egg Award winners and providing our 2020 Vision for the conservation of cranes and ecosystems, watersheds, and flyways they depend on, and around the world. Please join us!

Notes from the President

The Journey CONTINUES

We are deeply thankful for the tremendous difference our supporters have made over the years by joining our effort to save Whooping Cranes from the brink of extinction. Together, we will continue to ensure global stability for this imperiled bird by focusing on three distinct populations: the last naturally-occurring flock that breeds in Canada and winters along coastal Texas, the reintroduced eastern population that migrates between the Midwest and southeastern states, and a newly reintroduced non-migratory population in the wetlands of southwest Louisiana.

Last year, the Whooping Cranes migrating south from Wood Buffalo National Park in Canada arrived in Texas to face the most severe one-year drought on record. Scorching temperatures and the lack of rain, combined with over-allocation of water for human uses, reduced freshwater reaching the bay, causing increased salinity levels and a scarcity of vital food sources for many living species dependent on this complex ecosystem. A major court battle took place in Texas last winter concerning sustainable water management within the Guadalupe basin, vital for Whooping Cranes. The active litigation stage has concluded, and a decision is anticipated later this summer.

In preparation for next winter, ICF is working with partners to enhance the monitoring plan for the Whooping Cranes that migrate to Texas. This will provide us with a more comprehensive count of birds in this flock so we can better evaluate their annual breeding success when they arrive from Canada and clarify the impact of threats on their Texas wintering grounds and along their long migration route.

To ensure the long-term survival of this endangered species, ICF and partners recognize that establishing additional populations — as outlined in recommendations from the International Whooping Crane Recovery Team — is necessary to reduce the likelihood of Whooping Crane extinction due to natural disasters, such as devastating droughts or disease outbreaks. This year, ICF celebrated record numbers of Whooping Crane nests for the reintroduced eastern migratory population. Our goal is to achieve a population of at least 120 cranes with 30 or more breeding pairs. We’ve come a long way since the birds were first reintroduced back in 2000: we first observed breeding behaviors within this population in 2006; the first nest was built in 2005; and the first wild hatching occurred in 2006. Counts have gradually increased each year, and in 2012, we confirmed 29 nests and 9 hatched chicks (of three which survive today) – the most productive breeding season in the project’s history! As of mid-June, the eastern migratory population numbered 104 adult birds.

In hopes of bolstering this population even further, nine chicks produced by our captive flock in Wisconsin are being costume-reared by ICF aviculturists. Seven will be released into the wild this fall in east-central Wisconsin as part of our Direct Autumn Release program, and two will join ICF’s breeding population in Baraboo due to their important genetic lines.

In August 2009, we began working with partners on a plan to re-establish a non-migratory flock of Whooping Cranes at White Lake Wetlands Conservation Area in Louisiana, where resident Whooping Cranes were last seen in 1950. The project is in its third year, and 16 Whooping Cranes are thriving on agricultural fields and coastal marshes. Local residents and landowners are highly supportive of the reintroduction plans and take great pride in having these birds on their properties. Of the 18 fertile eggs laid by our captive breeding flock in Wisconsin this season, ICF provided 5 to Patuxent Wildlife Research Center in Maryland to be hatched, raised, and transferred to Louisiana to help secure this additional population of Whooping Cranes.

With your help, we are able to remain fully committed to these conservation priorities. Please consider making a special gift of any amount toward our continued efforts to protect and reintroduce Whooping Cranes. By contributing a gift of $1,000 or more, you will become a Whooper Keeper. As a token of our appreciation, all Whooper Keepers are offered recognition plaques bearing a customized personal message and displayed in ICF’s celebrated Whooping Crane exhibit on our campus in Wisconsin. Please use the enclosed envelope to make a difference today.

Photo by Ted Thousand

Follow Us
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Mr. Nyambayar Batbayar, founder and director of the Wildlife Mongolia, Sara Simmonds meets with Mongolian colleagues, near the wetlands where White-naped Cranes breed in northeast "Let’s get the job done!” is a favorite expression of a Sara Simmonds Conservation Hero: makes this world a better place for us all. Sometimes roadless grasslands, we camped for seven nights ICF members to Mongolia. Crossing almost 1,000 miles of reports, “We have served 25,000 plus pies and 1,061 gallons of volunteers at the Alexandria Airport Processing Center license plate that features a Whooping Crane. Sara has Whooping Cranes to Louisiana, the State issued a special at the Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries realized with first releases of Whooping Cranes in 2011 that the return of the Whooping Cranes. Sara’s dream was finally supported a graduate student, Joseph McGowan, who reduced by settlers before benefiting from legal protection. the Canada-U.S. Whooping Crane Recovery Team. She then located a gifted biologist and conservationist, Dr. Sammy King, leader of the U.S. Geologic Survey Cooperative Fish and Wildlife Research Unit at Louisiana State University, to continue the research in preparation for the return of the Whooping Cranes. Sara’s dream was finally realized with first releases of Whooping Cranes in 2011 that were captive-reared at Patuxent Wildlife Research Center in Maryland prior to release. Sara helps to raise funds from the private sector to support the project, which includes a research team headed by Sammy King that now studies and helps the released. She works hand-in-glove with Bob Love and his colleagues at the Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries that program. To celebrate the return of the Whooping Cranes to Louisiana, the State issued a special license plate that features a Whooping Crane. Sara has number 2001. Sara is also interested in serving her community and country. She helped raise funds to build six chapels in prisons in Louisiana. And since 2004 has been a part of a small group of volunteers at the Alexandria Airport Processing Center to give apple pies, soft drinks, hugs and thanks to soldiers as they go to and return from Iraq and Afghanistan. Sara reports, “We have served 25,000 plus pies and 1,061 gallons of soda... there are so many smiles.” Recently, Sara traveled to Guatemala and 14 other adventurous ICF members to Mongolia. Crossing almost 1,000 miles of sometimes roadless grasslands, we camped for seven nights on hills near wetlands where endangered White-naped Cranes still dance. Sara is a hero to me and many others. She makes this world a better place for us all. While observing the black fly situation, we also monitored Whooping Cranes that had nests in and around the Necedah refuge. The most efficient way to do this is by air. This year we collaborated with the nonprofit organization LightHawk, an environmental aviation organization that generously volunteered airplanes and pilots for daily surveys during the nesting season. By flying over the nests every day we could tell if the cranes were sitting tight on their eggs or had left the nest unattended. In addition to the tremendous assistance from LightHawk volunteer pilots, we were greatly assisted by DNR staff and pilots and planes from Windpilot Capital Corporation. We concluded the 2012 nesting season a high note. At the end of June, we still had three whoebred chicks on the Wisconsin landscape – a record! It was a long season, with the first nest observed March 26th and the last concluded June 15th. There were 29 nests total, including second nests from 7 pairs that re-nested after an initial failure. We counted 9 wild whoebred chicks at the nest survival point, but nature had its way and we are grateful to still have 3. Every year the birds become more experienced, and we hope that each year will bring more wild whoebred chicks! This past spring, ICF’s Field Ecology Department (FED) continued our study of nesting Whooping Cranes in central Wisconsin, looking at factors that may be causing nest abandonment by adult cranes. One hypothesis is that biting black flies may be harassing the cranes, to the extent that the birds cannot remain on their nest for the full 30- day incubation period. During the time that black flies are most abundant on the landscape (April to June) we set traps throughout the nesting area in central Wisconsin to monitor the abundance of black flies and other biting insects. Black flies are attracted to carbon dioxide (CO2), much like mosquitoes. Holiday Wholesale in Wisconsin Dells generously donated the CO2 in the form of dry ice that draws the insects into the traps. We are currently analyzing all insects caught in the traps and hope the results enlighten us as to what the birds might be experiencing during the nesting season. Two eggs from female 5-09 and male 33-07 sit in the nest in Adams County while the parents exchange incubation duties. The view from a plane allows us to confirm how many eggs are in each nest. Photo by Eva Styczynski.
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