Caohai: A Model for Community Conservation in China

By Erica Cochrane, ICF Communications and Education Director

Nestled in the rolling hills of culturally-rich southwestern China lies a shallow, marshy lake called Caohai (Sea of Grass). One of the largest congregations of Black-necked Cranes (more than 10% of the global population) winters here. Unlike the declines occurring in White-naped and Red-crowned Crane populations in eastern China, Black-necked Crane numbers are greater today than twenty years ago. But explosive economic development and reduction in glaciers that feed many of the wetlands on which the Black-necked Cranes depend, forebode a challenging time ahead for this species. Caohai is important not only because it supports so many Black-necked Cranes, but because it is also a model for conservation. The Caohai Project, ICF’s longest running community conservation project in China, demonstrates how community conservation approaches can successfully counter the threats posed by development. Continued on page 2

Black-necked Cranes gather to roost at Cao Hai (Sea of Grass) in southwestern China. When ICF began its community project here 20 years ago, villages were in open conflict with the nature reserve. By listening and responding to the needs of farmers, the nature reserve has improved conditions for both cranes and farmers. Now Cao Hai has a thousand wintering cranes, three times the numbers when our project began. Photo by Crane Wu

Shop for a cause this holiday season! See page 7.
Over the long haul. Over the past two decades, ICF has helped establish Reserve. This trust was gained by listening to the community, designing trust between the community and staff members of Caohai Nature protection. There was no communication, no trust, and no desire on the part of residents to look for lessons to share across ICF’s conservation successes, and challenges, and to identify ways we could each support ICF’s goals in China. Specifically, I came to help with conservation planning and adaptive management and to look for lessons to share across ICF’s community conservation projects in Asia and Africa. I left with a great love for the people (and food!) and a profound respect for Fengshan as a conservation leader determined to find a future filled with crane songs. Then I was asked to teach them a song… and that was likely the most inspiring learning experience of my work and serves as a liaison between the local community and the reserve – has built trust and true community conservation engagement. Over the next several years, we will share the Caohai experience with other wetland reserves across Southeastern China where cranes face similar challenges.

ICF works around the world to conserve cranes. For a small organization, ICF’s breadth of work can be astounding. Sprinkled over this incredible breadth are places where we have made a distinct choice to maintain adequate water conditions at Monte Vista National Wildlife Refuge in Colorado, a key stop-over area for Sandhill Cranes. This choice, and others like it, have never been higher. We shared a moment of reflection and celebration – escaped a similar fate, while redoubling our efforts to ensure the still-fragile Whooper population remains safe on its Canadian breeding grounds, Texas wintering grounds, and along the flyways that connect them.

The inspiring recovery of our beloved Sandhill Cranes is cause for celebration at festivals across the country – one of the most successful conservation stories of the past century. I recently attended the Yampa Valley Crane Festival held in Steamboat Springs, Colorado to honor the Rocky Mountain Population of Greater Sandhill Cranes. Each morning and evening, we delighted in the flight of hundreds of Sandhill between their daily feeding grounds and overnight roosting site on the Yampa River – a path that takes them right over festival organizer and ICF Director Nancy Mills home! The festival included a special session on cranes and water. I spoke about the global challenges of getting the right quantity, timing, and quality of water needed to sustain some of the most vulnerable species of cranes including highly water-dependent Siberian, Wattled, and Whooping Cranes. Colleagues from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and Nature Conservancy spoke of the local challenges of maintaining healthy water conditions at Monte Vista National Wildlife Refuge in Colorado, a key stop-over area for Sandhill Cranes as they move further south, and ensuring that the free-flowing Yampa River remains their healthy roost site forever.

Our friends in Michigan recently celebrated their 20th Crane Fest at Baker Sanctuary, North America’s first sanctuary dedicated to the Sandhill Crane, which hosts up to 10,000 migrating cranes in the fall. Weekend visitors experienced the thrill of trumpeting cranes returning to the marsh at dusk. Baker’s Big Marsh Lake is also where Larry Walkinskaw (author of “Cranes of the World”) grew up and learned to love and save cranes. We applaud all who make these cranes’ celebration possible and remain vigilant that our now-abundant Sandhill Cranes avoid the unthinkable downfall of the Passenger Pigeon that once filled our skies.

And those of you who were able to join us on a gorgeous September morning in Baraboo for our Annual Member’s Day festivities, helped us celebrate some really Good Eggs. ICF Director and Finance management guru Regina Phelps, volunteer extraordinaire Ted Vista National Wildlife Refuge in Colorado, a key stop-over area for Sandhill Cranes as they move further south, and ensuring that the free-flowing Yampa River remains their healthy roost site forever.

Our friends in Michigan recently celebrated their 20th Crane Fest at Baker Sanctuary, North America’s first sanctuary dedicated to the Sandhill Crane, which hosts up to 10,000 migrating cranes in the fall. Weekend visitors experienced the thrill of trumpeting cranes returning to the marsh at dusk. Baker’s Big Marsh Lake is also where Larry Walkinskaw (author of “Cranes of the World”) grew up and learned to love and save cranes. We applaud all who make these cranes’ celebration possible and remain vigilant that our now-abundant Sandhill Cranes avoid the unthinkable downfall of the Passenger Pigeon that once filled our skies.

And those of you who were able to join us on a gorgeous September morning in Baraboo for our Annual Member’s Day festivities, helped us celebrate some really Good Eggs. ICF Director and Finance management guru Regina Phelps, volunteer extraordinaire Ted

Notes from the President

2014 Annual Member Appreciation Day at ICF Headquarters in Baraboo. Photos by Debbie Johnson
A New Look for Our Website is Coming Soon!

Please give us your opinion by completing a short survey.

We are thrilled to announce that ICF has received a grant from the Arthur J. Donald Foundation to re-design our website. As we reach out and share our mission and conservation stories, it is important that our online presence is current and dynamic. One of the many new and exciting features of the new website will be a reactive design that adapts to desktop, tablet, and smart phone viewing. Please help us improve our website by taking a short survey and also enter to win a crane t-shirt! To take the survey, visit www.surveymonkey.com/s/icf-website-redesign.

Matching Gift

We invite you to make a special campaign gift that will be matched by ICF’s Board of Directors and several generous supporters. Your gift will help our campaign take flight and reach our goal of $600,000. Together, we can ensure cranes, our symbols of long life and fidelity, grace healthy wetlands well into the future. Thank you for your faithful support.

Strengthening our Commitment

ON THREE CONTINENTS

So much of our commitment to saving the world's cranes is about securing the wetlands that sustain them. ICF is working on behalf of many species of African wildlife. This year, we spread our wings and launched our newest initiative, the Zambian Wildlife Conservation Program, under the capable leadership of Zambian Griffin Shanungu. The program focuses on safeguarding three remarkable wetlands - the Liwua Plain, Kafue Flats, and Bangweulu Swamp - by resolving emerging threats such as water development, geothermal mining, and invasive shrubs. Our efforts in Zambia will train and empower Zambian wildlife managers to ensure the long-term sustainability of these rich wetlands and their inhabitants.

North America

Down to fewer than 20 birds in the 1940s, the Whooping Crane is one of conservation's greatest success stories - steadily recovering to over 600 birds today. But despite this progress, Whooping Cranes remain endangered with serious threats on their wintering grounds and long annual migration route. Loss of coastal land, collisions with power lines, and illegal shootings are all major challenges to the survival of the species. With your support, we will intensify our efforts to keep Whooping Cranes safe in the wild. We are launching a major educational initiative to engage people in making meaningful differences for the future of Whooping Cranes. Like the parent crane trumpeting an alarm call to its chick, we will raise awareness about the plight of Whooping Cranes. We will inspire and empower citizens to become champions in their communities, and advocate for protection of the wetlands on which Whooping Cranes and so many species depend.

Africa

We are committed to working with people who share some of the most important places on earth for cranes. Across Asia, the future for cranes depends on the value communities place on benefits their wetlands provide. These crane landscapes include Poyang Lake (winter home to 98% of the world's Critically Endangered Siberian Cranes), Hui River and Tiumpu National Nature Reserves in Inner Mongolia (key breeding grounds for the Endangered Red-crowned Crane), and even remote valleys of Mongolia (where herdermen live beside the Vulnerable White-naped Cranes). At these and other locations, we are demonstrating how restoring wetlands and water resources is vital to human communities as well as their beloved cranes. Our expanding commitments help to address urgent human needs, integrated with education programs that bring the next generations into conservation.

Asia

We are optimistic that together – through education, partnership, sound science, strategic action, and your continued support – we can secure a future graced by cranes and healthy wetlands for all. — George Archibald

Matching Gift

We invite you to make a special campaign gift that will be matched by ICF’s Board of Directors and several generous supporters. Your gift will help our campaign take flight and reach our goal of $600,000. Together, we can ensure cranes, our symbols of long life and fidelity, grace healthy wetlands well into the future. Thank you for your faithful support.
Travel with ICF

Now is the time to answer that yearning for adventure! Join ICF Co-founder George Archibald in June 2015 on the trip of a lifetime to Mongolia, where human numbers are low, and nature abounds. You will view the indigenous Naryneseiik’s horses in their expansive steppe habitat, experience life in a ger camp, and participate in a Crane Festival. Along the way you will visit important historic and cultural sites, observe nesting White-naped Cranes among many endemic species of birds, and listen to expert commentary from George about ICF initiatives to help protect the birds and their habitats. For more information contact Kurt Stoffler at 608 356-9462 ext. 115 or email: travel@savingcranes.org.

My Conservation Umbrella

By Tanya Smith, EWT Southern African Regional Manager

Since I can remember, I wanted to save the planet and every animal and plant on it. As a child, I spent any spare time with my dogs or rescuing abandoned baby birds or injured animals. One occasion, when I was 12 years-old, I very bravely (or stupidly) stood out in an African summer storm with hail falling from the sky armed with nothing but an umbrella and one mission in mind—to protect a nest of tiny Cape White-eyes from the huge hail stones that threatened their little lives. I was successful. My views of saving the planet have expanded since then and I now understand that conservation of species and ecosystems is far more complex than standing in a storm armed with an umbrella, but I will carry my umbrella symbolically into my new role as Southern African Regional Manager with a mission to lead and guide the crane conservation efforts in Southern Africa.

For the last seven years I have been part of a team of the most dedicated and passionate individuals I have ever met and I have had the pleasure and privilege of working with, to save cranes and our valuable catchments in South Africa. I began as a Junior Field Officer with the Endangered Wildlife Trust’s (EWT) Southern African Crane Working Group in 2007. I was based in the very remote farming area of the Eastern Cape, where approximately one third of South Africa’s 7,000 strongly endangered Grey Crowned Crane population calls home. The biggest threat facing the iconic Grey Crowned Crane in that area is poison set out by farmers due to damage caused to corn crops. Our efforts to prevent damage to germinating corn by cranes and other birds focused on scare tactics, but those have since proven mostly unsuccessful. In my new role, I will work with partners EcoGuard and Arkion Life Sciences on the testing of a distasteful but safe deterrent Avipel® so that it may be registered for use in South Africa. ICF played a big role in developing Avipel® and it is being successfully used in the U.S. as a seed treatment product to deter bird damage to seedlings.

One of my first tasks, however, is a thorough review of our strategy for conserving cranes in South Africa. A big focus moving forward will be the securing of critical habitats and breeding sites for Grey Crowned and Wattled Cranes in particular. In addition, in 2015 we will launch a new project in the Western Cape—the stronghold for the South African national bird, the Blue Crane. The new project will determine the movement and landscape utilization patterns of Blue Cranes in the Western Cape in order to inform wind energy farm development in the region. I also look forward to working with Griffin Shanungu and the newly launched Zambia Crane and Wetland Conservation Project (featured in the last issue of the ICF Bugle). I look forward to sharing lessons learned from the last decade with neighboring countries.

The efforts required for crane conservation in Southern Africa, and Africa as a whole, are great and only achievable through the commitment of a team of individuals—and that’s what the African Crane Conservation Programme is—a dedicated and effective team within two organizations (ICF/EWT) who have proven that partnerships work! With my diverse crane experience, my passion for conservation, and my symbolic umbrella, I look forward to standing with my colleagues in the African Crane Conservation Programme and succeeding!

Notes From the Field

By Tran Tran, ICF Southeast Asia Program Coordinator

Eight of us, four Cambodian, a Laotian and three Vietnamese, just finished a field survey to map wetlands and locate Sarus crane nests. This was the first field excursion under a research project funded by USGS and SUMMERNET. It rained hard almost every day, especially at night. Monsoonal rains filled up wetlands to their fullest water holding capacity, turning a desert-like forest of half-a-year ago into a water world. Water is everywhere. We often couldn’t tell where the wetland ended and where the upland began. The whole sanctuary (some 1.2 million acres) has transformed itself into a gigantic wetland at this time of the year. Everywhere there are aquatic plants, birds, fish, frogs, crabs, snails—and lots of them. What else could we ask for from a wetland? Life fully manifested itself, indulging in the luxury of abundant water and foods—busy producing offspring for the generations to come, but perhaps most importantly, storing enough energy to endure a harsh dry season that will very soon descend.

For a wetland botanist, few things could make me as happy as seeing so many wetland plants in full bloom. Many of these plants would either disappear or be unidentifiable in the dry season. We can’t wait to return to this sanctuary in May or early June at the onset of the rainy season, an ecological equivalence of spring time in the Midwest, when a special group of wetland plants will bloom. These “spring ephemerals” plants live shortly and can only be seen during the time when the dry season progresses to the wet. That is also the time when the Sarus cranes return to their breeding grounds.

Siem Reap, Cambodia 10/7/2014

Holiday Gifts for Craniacs!

Two Sandhill Cranes call out a simple message in many languages—May Peac Prevail on Earth. This original watercolor by Wisconsin artist Diane Splinter, adorns our cards printed on 100% recycled paper. Each package contains 8 cards and envelopes. Inside blank. Price: $30.00

These delicate square earrings frame the silhouette of a crane. 1.75 inches long in gold or silver tone. Price: $24.99

Inspired by Leonardo DaVinci, our new DaVinci Crane T-shirt is a must-have for craniacs this holiday season. The long-sleeved 100% organic cotton t-shirt is pigment dyed and super soft. Color: Pacific Blue. This design is also available in unisex short-sleeved in meteorite brown, and ladies-cut short-sleeved in navy blue. Price: $34.99.

Shop online at www.craneshop.org, email: giftshop@savingcranes.org, or call (608) 356-9462 ext. 115.

By Tanya Smith, EWT Southern African Regional Manager

Since I can remember, I wanted to save the planet and every animal and plant on it. As a child, I spent any spare time with my dogs or rescuing abandoned baby birds or injured animals. On one occasion, when I was 12 years-old, I very bravely (or stupidly) stood out in an African summer storm with hail falling from the sky armed with nothing but an umbrella and one mission in mind—to protect a nest of tiny Cape White-eyes from the huge hail stones that threatened their little lives. I was successful. My views of saving the planet have expanded since then and I now understand that conservation of species and ecosystems is far more complex than standing in a storm armed with an umbrella, but I will carry my umbrella symbolically into my new role as Southern African Regional Manager with a mission to lead and guide the crane conservation efforts in Southern Africa.

For the last seven years I have been part of a team of the most dedicated and passionate individuals I have had the pleasure and privilege of working with, to save cranes and our valuable catchments in South Africa. I began as a Junior Field Officer with the Endangered Wildlife Trust’s (EWT) Southern African Crane Working Group in 2007. I was based in the very remote farming area of the Eastern Cape, where approximately one third of South Africa’s 7,000 strongly endangered Grey Crowned Crane population calls home. The biggest threat facing the iconic Grey Crowned Crane in that area is poison set out by farmers due to damage caused to corn crops. Our efforts to prevent damage to germinating corn by cranes and other birds focused on scare tactics, but those have since proven mostly unsuccessful. In my new role, I will work with partners EcoGuard and Arkion Life Sciences on the testing of a distasteful but safe deterrent Avipel®, so that it may be registered for use in South Africa. ICF played a big role in developing Avipel® and it is being successfully used in the U.S. as a seed treatment product to deter bird damage to seedlings.

One of my first tasks, however, is a thorough review of our strategy for conserving cranes in South Africa. A big focus moving forward will be the securing of critical habitats and breeding sites for Grey Crowned and Wattled Cranes in particular. In addition, in 2015 we will launch a new project in the Western Cape—the stronghold for the South African national bird, the Blue Crane. The new project will determine the movement and landscape utilization patterns of Blue Cranes in the Western Cape in order to inform wind energy farm development in the region. I also look forward to working with Griffin Shanungu and the newly launched Zambia Crane and Wetland Conservation Project (featured in the last issue of the ICF Bugle). I look forward to sharing lessons learned from the last decade with neighboring countries.

The efforts required for crane conservation in Southern Africa, and Africa as a whole, are great and only achievable through the commitment of a team of individuals—and that’s what the African Crane Conservation Programme is—a dedicated and effective team within two organizations (ICF/EWT) who have proven that partnerships work! With my diverse crane experience, my passion for conservation, and my symbolic umbrella, I look forward to standing with my colleagues in the African Crane Conservation Programme and succeeding!
Black Crowned Cranes are threatened and declining across their range in West and Central Africa, but recent reports from Zakouma National Park in Chad – where as many as 7,000 birds were observed with flocks numbering in the thousands – are very encouraging. ICF hopes to work in partnership with Chad wildlife managers and the Africa Parks Foundation to safeguard this important stronghold for the species. Photo by Michael Lorentz