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REINTRODUCTION 2003

Siberian Crane Reintroduction in Iran in 2002/03

By Sadegh Sadeghi Zadegan and Yuri Markin

On 7 January 2003 Yuri Markin left for Iran with three Siberian Cranes chicks raised at the Okskiy Biosphere Reserve Crane Breeding Center (OCBC). Two of the chicks (Khooper and Don, both males), reared by isolation technique, participated in hang-glider experiment and made a very long voyage from the Siberian Crane breeding grounds near Kunovat (north of West Siberia) to Armizon (south of West Siberia). Then the two birds were returned to OCBC where they were kept in visual and sound isolation from people. On 7 January they made their next voyage – by plane to Iran. The third chick, a female named Angara, was reared by parents. Yuri and the three birds arrived safely in Iran and then traveled by truck to the Siberian Crane wintering grounds near Fereydoon Kenar.

On 13 January 2003 Angara, equipped with a PTT and a yellow ring with black number 77, was released into the new (built by duck hunters only 7 years ago) Sorkh Rud Damgah (wintering site of a lone wild Siberian Crane male and a young Eurasian Crane). The very same evening local people caught Angara and brought her to the village of Sorkh-Rud. Next morning (14 January) we released this young female Siberian Crane once again into the same damgah.

On 16 January, Angara began feeding together with the wild adult Siberian Crane male and the young Eurasian Crane. We are hopeful that this young bird will be accepted by the wild adult, since their relationship is looking better every day. On 17 January, Angara flew over Sorkh Rud Damgah together with the wild Siberian and Eurasian Cranes for the first time. Since then Angara, the wild adult Siberian Crane, and the young Eurasian Crane were seen flying together on several occasions. Almost every night this group was seen flying to roosting site, mainly to Fereydoon Kenar and also probably to Ezbaran or other unidentified places, flying back early morning to feed in Sorkh Rud Damgah.

Behaviour of the released birds is different from day to day. Angara was usually observed feeding and flying with the wild Siberian Crane male and the young Eurasian Crane. The adult Siberian Crane was not trying to chase the young crane away. Our main concern is that the young Siberian Crane (Angara) does not have enough self-confidence to follow the adult Siberian and young Eurasian Cranes outside the damgah since it keeps coming back into the damgah after following them for a while. Still, Angara is spending more time every day with these cranes giving us a hope that she will bond with them strongly enough to leave together for the breeding grounds.

Until 16 January, Don and Khooper (young Siberian Cranes who participated in the 2002 hang-glider experiment) were used as decoys to lure and capture a wild pair of Siberian Cranes in Fereydoon Kenar Damgah. They were kept in a temporary pen outside the damgah. The wild pair, however, did not show any interest in these young cranes.

Our efforts to capture any of the wild birds were not successful. At Sorkh Rud, where the lone adult Siberian and young Eurasian Cranes stayed inside the damgah, we could not do much without disturbing duck trapping operations. At Fereydoon Kenar, we tried several times to capture wild cranes by baiting them with drug-treated (α -Chlorolose) grain and luring into a cage or nets. These attempts failed because this pair has been changing its territory every time in response to unusual activities nearby.

We visited both Fereydoon Kenar and Sorkh Rud every day to check the status of the wild and released birds and assess the possibility to catch one wild bird and attach a PTT.

On 16 January, Don and Khooper, the two "hang-glider" Siberian Crane chicks, were released into Fereydoon Kenar Damgah - the same place where they were kept in the pen. The chicks were staying together most of the time gradually getting better at flying inside and outside the damgah, always spending nights near the release site. Sometimes they were seen feeding in just about 100 m from the wild pair of Siberian Cranes. The adults did not chase them away; neither did they show any interest in joining the young birds.

On 5 February, the two "hang-glider" chicks flew near the Fereydoon Kenar Village when one of them, Khooper, was struck with a bamboo stick thrown by a shepherd. His left wing was injured and he could not fly. On 6 February, after an examination by a veterinarian, Khooper was caged in the pen near Kumeh (trapping station) in Fereydoon Kenar; the bird stayed inside the cage or close to it until the migration began on 2 March. On the same day we captured the second chick

(Don), attached a PTT (with a green ring and white number 04) to his body, and released him in the new Sorkh Rud Damgah, the staging area of the group of three cranes (Angara, the wild adult Siberian Crane, and the Eurasian Crane). The very old eastern and the 7-year-old western Sorkh Rud Damgahs are both located near the Sorkh Rud Town.

On 7 February, Don flew to the old Sorkh Rud Damgah where he was once again captured by local people and brought to the village. Upon our request the trappers took Don back to the new Sorkh Rud Damgah and released him there. Because of improper handling during this transfer, Don suffered a leg injury, could not walk very well and had to stay in one place most of the time. Once in a while he made a move to join the group of three cranes. On 9 February, Don flew together with the group over the new Sorkh Rud Damgah for the first time.

On 25 February, Don flew from new to the old Sorkh Rud Damgah and stayed there until 2 March, the day when migration of wild Siberian Cranes has begun. On that day at 9:30 a.m. a group of cranes including the wild pair of Siberian Cranes, the single Siberian Crane (Angara), and the young Eurasian Crane arrived to the new Sorkh Rud Damgah and circled it. Suddenly the young Eurasian Crane landed inside the damgah and after that the group left the area within a few minutes. On 3 March, Sadegh captured Don in the old Sorkh Rud Damgah, removed the PTT and took Don along with Khoper to the Bujagh National Park (Bujagh is an important Iranian GEF Project site and the area that was selected for hang glider experiment). In Bujagh, staff of the Iran Department of Environment built a 144 m² pen and placed these two "hang glider" birds into the pen to be used in the future project.

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WINTERING 2002/03

EASTERN POPULATION

Siberian Crane wintering in China in 2002/03

By Qian Fawen

Cooperating with Jiangxi Wildlife Conservation Bureau, National Bird Banding Center of China has been conducting Whole Poyang Lake Wintering Waterbirds Survey for three years. In 2003 the field work was conducted in early January. The numbers of Siberian Crane we counted are as follows:

Table 1. Estimated numbers of Siberian Cranes in wintering area at Poyang Lake in 1999-2003

| Date | 7 January 1999 | 8 January 2001 | 9 January 2002 | 9 January 2003 |
|---------------------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|
| Number of Siberian Cranes | 2536 | 1791 | 3404 | 4004 |

The number for January 2003 is likely to be an overestimate. Flocks of Siberian Cranes move frequently in the winter at Poyang Lake and it is possible that some birds were counted more than once by observers at the different counting sites.

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SPRING MIGRATION 2003

WESTERN POPULATION

Iran

According to information from local trappers, on 2 March 2003, around 10.30-11.00 a.m., four Siberian cranes (the three wild birds and the parent-reared juvenile Siberian Crane called Angara) took off from Sorkh Rud Damgah, circling the damgah and calling loudly, while climbing higher and higher in the air. Last year the Siberian Cranes left their wintering grounds in Iran on 2 March. The Siberian Cranes took off on the first sunny day, although the weather was still cold. Although there was some shooting in the area, so far no birds were scared away by hunters' activities.

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As well as in previous years, in the spring 2003 searches for migrating Siberian Cranes were carried out in the Kostanay Region in Naurzum State Reserve. Since usually in spring low lying basins of the majority of lakes are inaccessible because of thick mud, only a small part of wetlands was covered by this survey. In the end of April a survey in the south of Kostanay Region was also conducted along the following route: Kostanay - Amantogai - Amangeldy - Sarykopa - Turgai - Akshiganak - Kobyrqa - Shili - Bestau - Naurzum.

Comparing to the last spring, this year in most parts of the Kostanay Region there were practically no areas with high water. It was caused by late and slow spring; small heaps of snow sustained all over the region for an unusually long time. Night frosts and intensive snow melting in day time proceeded up to mid April and, as a result, almost all the water was absorbed by soil and froze. Even on Turgai River and its inflows the floods were minimal. Only in the northeast areas adjoining to Kurgan Region of Russia and Northern Kazakhstan, where numerous snowfalls happened this winter, the water was high and even exceeded the last year level.

Despite the unusual course of spring, conditions for waterbirds were favorable on the lakes between Ubagan and Ishim Rivers and Turgai shallow gully, with an exception of Kushmurun Lake. Huge volume of water accumulated in 2002 in combination with humid and cool summer helped to preserve high to average water levels in these lakes.

Unfortunately, no Siberian Cranes were sighted during this spring surveys, neither were they seen by hunters and shepherds interviewed by our team. Sightings of Siberian Cranes during spring migration, however, have been rather typically extremely rare in this area even in the past, before their number has drastically declined. This phenomena can be explained by the fact that in the spring cranes pass this region non-stop; besides, the spring impassability of roads makes it very difficult to survey this area. In the fall, however, the floods allow cranes to stop on crop fields where it is easy to spot them. Among the polling data, the information from G. Alejnikov, the Chairman of the regional Hunters Society of Amangeldy Village, is of interest: he reported on a Siberian Crane seen in the first half of September, 2000 in 70 kms east of the village. The bird was observed in a flock of Eurasian Cranes in the wheat stubble field. This information is in line with extremely rare sightings of Siberian Cranes south of Naurzum reported during the last decade; these birds are probably flying to the winter grounds in India.

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Russia

There were no sightings of the migrating Siberian Cranes in Astrakhan Nature Reserve in spring 2003. In the 3rd decade of March, when Volga tributaries became free from ice, we began our observations at Obzhorovo and Damchik sites (where Siberian Cranes had stopped during their migration in the past), but there were no Sibe sightings so far. Weather conditions this spring are favourable but water level is slightly above average.

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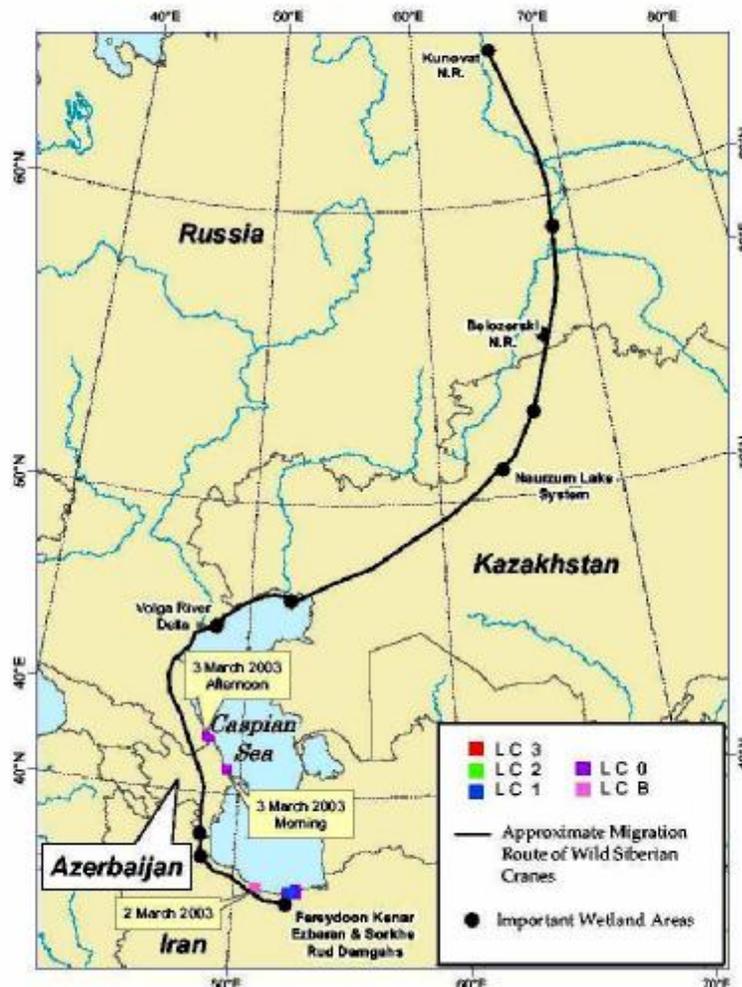
BANDING

SIBERIAN CRANE MIGRATION ACCORDING TO PTT DATA

By Elena Ilyashenko

A female Siberian Crane Angara, reared by parents at OCBC, was released in Iran in January by Yuri Markin and Sadegh Sadeghi Zadegan. This bird joined a wild Siberian Crane and a young Eurasian Crane at their wintering site. She began her spring migration together with wild Siberian Cranes (one pair and a lone bird) on 2 March 2003. Before the release Angara was marked by satellite transmitter # 15417 attached to yellow plastic ring and black number 77. Prior to migration, Angara's movements between damgahs at the wintering site were monitored. When Angara took off from Sorkh Rud Damgah, her passage through Ardebil Airport in Iran to Azerbaidjan and further to Russia (Daghestan) was tracked (see map).

Northern Migration of Siberian Crane (PTT 15417)



Analysis of PTT data from 10:00 on 03.03.03 (Universal Time Zone/Greenwich Mean Time) to 23:46 on 04.03.03 is presented below:

- 03.03.03 10:00** – The first information about migrating cranes was received from Azerbaijan. The nearest towns are Nasosny and Sumgait, the nearest villages are Shuraabad and Sitalchai. This is in the area of Samur-Apsheron Channel. This time the cranes flew mostly along the Caspian Sea coast in Azerbaijan.
- 03.03.03 12:49** – This location is over Caspian Sea but close enough to the coast in Azerbaijan. The nearest villages on the coast – Khudat and Mukhtadir.
- 03.03.03 13:55** – This location is in Daghestan, Russia, not far from the border between Azerbaijan and Russia (Daghestan). The nearest town is Beliji, to the south of town of Derbent. This place is at the confluence of the small river Gyulgerygai and bigger Samur River.
- 03.03.03 14:29** – This location is also in the outskirts of Beliji town, but slightly north of it on the Caspian Sea coast. The nearest village is Aglobi, the nearest river Rubas.
- 04.03.03 22:08** – This PTT data was received almost 32 hours after the previous PTT data. The cranes (possibly Angara alone) were in the outskirts of town of Derbent. The nearest village is Sabnova.
- 04.03.03 23:46** – This location is between the town of Izberbash and villages of Leninkent and Karanai-Aul.

All locations lie along the Caspian Sea Coast. Probably the cranes spent the night of 3/4 March in the outskirts of Beliji. According to Gadzhibek Dzhmirzoev, an ornithologist from Daghestan, there are numerous sea lagoons in the outskirts of Beliji in March.

Since 4 March 2003 the receiving of PTT data stopped and on 28 April 2003 (after nearly two months!) they recommenced from almost the same territory as on 4 March.

PTT data continued to come throughout May and until 10 June 2003. According to Gadzhibek Dzhmirzoev and Sergei Bukreev, these PTT signals did not overlap (see below).

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Survey of the Siberian Crane Stopover in Dagestan (PTT data)

By Gadzhibek Dzhmirzoev and Sergei Bukreev

On 2-3 April 2003, we visited towns of Kayakent and Izberbash, from where PTT data were received on 4 March 2003. We interviewed the Chair of the Wildlife and Fish Society of Dagestan who had no information about Siberian Cranes.

On 28 April 2003, the receiving of PTT data recommenced and continued to come from nearly the same place as on 4 March. Therefore on 13 May we surveyed this territory for the first time and tried to find the Siberian Crane or its remains.

This site on the Caspian Coast Plain is covered with semi-desert vegetation. The location of the PTT data is right on the edge of a pasture where cattle graze constantly turning into a shallow 25-m wide ravine with reed thickets and a stream that flows into the small Darvagchai River. There are five sheep barns within a 3-km radius, with a vineyard nearby and a winter crop field in 1 km. The nearest town of Dagestanskie Ogni is in 3 km, the nearest sheep house – in 500 m from the site. Distance from the PTT location to the sea is 4 km. On the coast there are several sand quarries with heavy machinery working during the day.

We searched the place of the PTT signal origin within 100 m radius with a hope to find the satellite transmitter. In three places we found a bunch of large white feathers (probably secondary and covert feathers from tail or wing). The ends of feathers have been gnawed by some animal. Within a 2 m radius there are two fox holes, one of them is living.

The herders from the two nearest sheep barns told us that they saw large white birds in the area in March, but after a few specific questions we suggested that those birds were egrets. It was

clear to us that the herders knowledge of and interest toward birds are close to zero. For example, they didn't notice a White Stork, which we met in just 1 km from the sheep barn.

According to the herders, spring hunting is very intensive in the area (hunters come mainly from the town of Dagestanskie Ogn). These hunters shoot all birds without discernment. We found around numerous feathers of ducks and of the Lesser Bustard.

On 6 June 2003 we returned to the area since the PTT signals continued to register from there. We made a preliminary map, on which we put coordinates of the last signals with accuracy radiuses. The area of our search is shown on the map by a dotted line. It is quite an extensive territory, approximately 1 x 1.7 km. The area represents a pasture crossed by several shallow ravines with narrow (up to 20 m wide) streams in the bottom lined by reeds.

As it is clearly seen on the map, the zones of probable presence of the PTT did not overlap in different days. This can be explained only by the transmitter somehow moving around. The possibility that the crane (maybe wounded or injured) is still in the area is very tiny since the area is wide open (no place to hide), with cattle grazing here all the time, so the bird could not have remained unnoticed. Also, feeding conditions in the area look quite poor for Siberian Cranes. We interviewed all the shepherds in the area and no one has seen a crane.

Another possible explanation of the pattern of the dots on the map reflecting the locations of the PTT signal could be that some person (such as a herdsman) picked up the transmitter and is carrying it around this limited territory. But there are no sheep barns within the zone of PTT signals. The nearest sheep yard is in 600 m from the border of this zone. Besides, all the signals were coming from the pasture where only the sheep from the nearest sheep barn can graze (all pastures here are strictly divided between various sheep holders, and no one would allow strange cattle to come to their own pasture). However, if our assumption is true, it is not clear why no signal has come from the nearest sheep pasture (even the night signal from 22 May 2003 came from beyond its limits).

During the last visit we talked with the shepherd from this sheep operation, telling him about the Siberian Crane and how we study its migration. The old man promised to let us know if he learns something or finds a bird or a ring. When we recently returned for another visit this shepherd was not there but we had a long conversation with his adult son who told us that neither he nor his father found or seen anything of interest to us. We explained to him that the PTT signals continue to come only from their pasture. We emphasized in every possible way that we are not from the regional nature protection bodies and are engaged only in pure science and that there will be no trouble to those who found a dead crane or a ring with the PTT. We also mentioned that the bird might have lost a ring and flew further north without the transmitter, etc. During these two meetings with the herdsmen both the old man and his son talked to us in a friendly manner, expressed willingness to help but claimed that they do not know anything about cranes in the area.

Our last inspection of the territory carried out on 11 July has not brought any results. Now we had two tasks: 1) to visit the shepherds from the nearest sheep yard once again; 2) to examine the location of the night signal from 8 June that came with a good accuracy and to survey in detail a zone where the last signals overlap.

The herdsmen could not tell us anything new. They were nice to us and looked quite sincere. It was obvious now that they do not perceive us as regional or federal officials and did not have any reason to conceal something from us.

Detailed inspection of the location of the 8 June night signal has changed our opinion that the crane could not stay in this place. It is quite far from all sheep barns and is located in an area of shallow ravine stream with reeds. We closely surveyed the territory within the radius of 150-200 m from the signal origination location, both its open steppe part and a strip of reeds along the stream. Absolutely no crane remains or feathers were found at this site. Of course, if the bird has dropped off the transmitter there (especially in the thick reeds), it would have been extremely difficult to find.

A search of the reed thickets revealed small patches (10-100 m²) well hidden inside the widest reed strips (up to 20-25 m wide, in some places 30-40 m) where the reeds grow thinner, even creating small openings with grass and blackberries. These tiny "islands" could provide a crane with shelter, roosting place and even food (mostly animals - frogs, snakes, various water invertebrates, ground insects such as locusts and dragonflies, etc.).

Inspection of reeds gave us an idea that we cannot completely rule out the possibility of the bird staying here all this time, feeding and moving from one strip of reeds in the ravine stream to

another and remaining unnoticed by people. At least, this assumption could explain why no PTT signals came from places close to sheep barns (the bird was staying as far away from sheep and shepherds as possible). Also, it would be difficult for a crane to leave this area since outside this ravine system practically the entire plain is developed into farm land; there are large settlements on the south and on the north of this area, and the sea coast on the east where there are no wetlands suitable for cranes. Besides, the nearby sand quarries create a high level of disturbance. Nevertheless, we have not found any reliable traces of crane staying in this area for a long time (such as excrements, feathers, etc.). It means that the probability of finding a live Siberian Crane here is very insignificant but still possible.

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FIELD WORK

FIELD WORK IN KUNOVAT RIVER BASIN, RUSSIA

By YURI MARKIN, YURI ZATSEPIN AND ALEXANDER ERMAKOV

Plans for field work in Kunovat River Basin from 4 June till 13 June 2003 were as follows:

- Conduct number monitoring and study distribution and seasonal biology in small flocks of Siberian and Eurasian Cranes near Burovaya Camp in Kunovat Reserve (Shuryshkarsky Region of Jamalo-Nenetsky Autonomous Region);
- Release three one-year-old Siberian Cranes reared by parents and in isolation at Oka Crane Breeding Center (OCBC) into the nesting site of wild Siberian Cranes. Replace two eggs from a wild Siberian Crane nest at Burovaya Island with two Siberian Crane eggs from OCBC with a goal to diversify genetics of the wild Siberian Crane populations. One egg was supposed to be brought to OCBC to check the genetic viability of this pair, the second - to place in a wild Eurasian Crane nest.

The 2003 expedition was sponsored by the Sterkh Foundation.



Member of expedition in Kunovat Refuge. Photo by A. Ermakov

On 4 June 2003 three employees of Oka Biosphere Nature Reserve (Yu. Markin, V. Borisov and Yu.Zatsepin) arrived in Salekhard, having delivered there three one-year-old Siberian Cranes and two Siberian Crane eggs placed in a special transport container. Two of Siberian Cranes (males Tsna and Moksha) were reared at OCBC by their parents. Yenisey, a female, was reared in isolation. In 2002 she participated in an experimental project on leading Siberian Cranes along the flyway behind a hang-glider (Information Newsletter of CWGE, # 4-5, 2002). At that time, however, Yenisey was not ready to be released into the wild and was returned to OCBC where she was kept in visual and sound isolation until June 2003.

In Salekhard the expedition participants were met by employees of the "Sterkh Foundation." Young Siberian Cranes were placed in a hangar belonging to the Foundation for two days.

On 5 June 2003 the Sterkh Foundation hired a helicopter MI-8 but the take-off was delayed due to poor weather conditions.

On 6 June the expedition team including Yu. Markin, V. Borisov, Yu. Zatsepin and A. Yermakov was trans-ported by helicopter to the Burovaya stationary camp located in Kunovat Nature Reserve, near the nesting site of the Siberian Crane "last hope pair."

In the camp, the crates with birds were unloaded and moved from the helicopter by 100 m to the small old outdoor pens where the cranes were kept in previous years. As the helicopter took off, the downwash from the rotating blades broke the rack to which the crates were attached and knocked over the crate sides. As a result one of the cranes, Moksha, has left and was not seen again on this day. Two other cranes (Yenisey and Tsna) were put in the constructed outdoor pens in a bog.

In the morning of 7 June Moksha was seen feeding in an open bog near the camp, then close to outdoor pens where the other two cranes were kept. Attempts to catch the bird were not successful - he allowed us to approach as close as by 10 m, then flew in the direction of the wild Siberian Crane pair nesting territory.

On 8 June 2003, Tsna and Yenisey were released from the outdoor pens, after being marked with color plastic rings (Table 1). Tsna flew away to Moipar Lake right after the release; Yenisey remained near the outdoor pens. Late at night on 10 June all three released birds were seen feeding; they kept separately from each other but within mutual visibility: Yenisey stayed near the outdoor pens, Tsna on Moipar Lake, Moksha - near Perekhodny Lakes. On 11 June, at 2 a.m. Tsna was found sleeping in 2 m from a sleeping adult Eurasian Crane on a bog near Perekhodny Lakes. By 13 June, only Yenisey stayed near the pens.



Young Siberian Crane Tsna was released to the wild. Photo by A. Ermakov

On 6 June, a 2-hour aerial survey was conducted over open bogs using a helicopter MI-8 with a purpose to locate the wild Siberian Crane pair. The search covered the area from Ovysyushlor Lake to Ruvagortskih Lake in the west and from Kunovat River to Aikalanglor Lake in the east. The helicopter flew several circles over each of the 10 previously known territories of Eurasian Cranes and a nesting place of Siberian Crane pair. **For the first time in many years of field work in Kunovat River Basin Siberian Cranes were not found in this territory.** The nest of the Eurasian Crane pair was found in previously unknown to us place near Atymlor Lake. As there was no Siberian Crane nest, two eggs of Siberian Crane from OCBC were placed into a newly found Eurasian Crane nest. Eurasian Crane eggs were taken and delivered by V. Borisov to the Russian Falcon Centre in Moscow for incubation and use in the project in the future.

In one territory, which was previously occupied by a pair of Eurasian Cranes, cranes were not found. It is necessary to note that searches of Eurasian Cranes from the helicopter are extremely difficult; in some years, when we found no nests from a helicopter, our ground searches discovered crane nests in exactly the same places.

Table1. Banding of Siberian Cranes released into the Kunovat Reserve in 2003

| Name | Left shin | Right shin |
|---------|--|---|
| Moksha | No | Blue narrow spiral plastic ring with black number 58. |
| Tsna | Standard aluminium ring with number A 145968 | White wide plastic ring consisted from two bolted together parts: on one part a radio transmitter with frequency 150.200-360 was fastened; on the other part - a black number 03. |
| Yenisey | Standard aluminium ring with number A 145969 | Green narrow spiral plastic ring with black number 41. It is not possible to use wide plastic ring because of curved legs. |

During 6 days, from 7-12 June, ground surveys of Siberian Crane and Eurasian Crane breeding sites were carried out. Unfortunately the cloudy and windy weather prevented us from conducting

long-distance flights. So far the surveys have not revealed any signs of wild Siberian Crane presence. As to the Eurasian Crane, ground surveys have shown that the former nesting territories of three breeding pairs have been taken by single cranes. For the first time in many years of our annual field work in this area we never heard calls of Eurasian Cranes from the camp. Usually from this place we could hear calls of five pairs of Eurasian Cranes.

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EDUCATION

PROMOTING CRANE CONSERVATION THROUGH EDUCATION AND COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION

By Sara Moore

The International Crane Foundation (ICF), in partnership with Chinese educators and conservation authorities, is undertaking a three-year project funded by the Luce Foundation to develop environmental education programming for six nature reserves in China and Russia. Key to the project is community involvement in the development of the programs, with the goal of involving local populations in the protection and management of wetland resources within the reserves.

The five Chinese sites are all national level nature reserves of critical importance to cranes and other migratory waterbirds, and three sites are listed as Wetlands of International Importance under the Ramsar Convention. The sites protect breeding and migratory stopover habitat (Zhalong, Naoli, and Xianghai), as well as wintering habitat (Poyang and Cao Hai) for several species of cranes and other waterbirds. The sixth site, Muraviovka Park in Russia, is widely known as that country's first privately protected reserve since 1917, and has the densest population of nesting Red-crowned and White-naped Cranes, with three other species resting on migration.



Children bird watching at Zhalong Nature Reserve, Heilongjiang Province, China.
Photo by Otto Pfister

The project will include training for reserve staff in participatory methods, involvement of local people in identifying education needs, and collaboration with local teachers in designing activities and materials. Education programs at the Chinese sites will include summer/winter camps for children from villages surrounding the protected wetlands, school curricula for use by teachers in local schools, and strategies for student and adult conservation action. These programs will be closely integrated with management, research, and community development activities at the reserves.

This project dovetails with a six-year project undertaken by ICF and China's State Forestry Administration with support from GEF, the Global Environment Facility, to develop management plans and sustainable development activities at the Zhalong, Xianghai, and Poyang reserves, which form part of the flyway between Russia and China for the endangered Siberian Crane. Through these and similar projects throughout the world, ICF and their partners hope to increase local awareness and capacity to address the challenges of nature conservation and human development needs.

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CONFERENCES

UNEP/GEF SIBERIAN CRANE WETLANDS PROJECT MEETINGS IN MOSCOW AND TEHRAN

By Crawford Prentice

Following an extended period of preparation, implementation of the UNEP/GEF Siberian Crane Wetlands Project (SCWP) commenced in April 2003. The process for project start-up included the signing of the UNEP/GEF Project Document followed by the establishment of agreements between ICF and each of the National Executing Agencies (NEAs) for China, Kazakhstan (still pending) and Russian Federation and a separate sub-project document between UNEP and the NEA for the Islamic Republic of Iran.



A. Sorokin, National Project Coordinator for Russia, and Anastassia Shilina, Technical Project manager. Photo by C. Prentice



Claire Mirande, Project Director, and Elena Ilyashenko, Siberian Crane Flyway Coordinator. Photo by C. Prentice

A first full meeting of the Project Steering Committee was planned for late April 2003 in NE China, but was postponed due to the risks posed to travelers by Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS). With SARS still affecting travel to and from China in June, a decision was taken to convene separate meetings for each country, with the results to be formally endorsed at a full meeting of the Project Steering Committee in September 2003. The first meeting was held in Moscow from 4-6 June for participants from the Russian Federation and Kazakhstan. The second meeting was held in Tehran from 10-11 June for the Islamic Republic of Iran. A third meeting is planned for China in early August.

The participation at the meetings mainly included national project coordination unit staff and other representatives from the NEAs, although some external organizations (WWF, Wetlands International) were also present for part of the meeting in Moscow. The meetings aimed to confirm the memberships of the National Project Management Groups, National Project Advisory Groups and staffing of the National Project Coordination Units and other project offices. Ministry of Natural Resources of Russian Federation has approved All-Russian Research Institute of Nature Protection (ARRINP) as Russian executing agency for the GEF project

International project staff roles and the Project Advisory Group were also reviewed. Confirmation of the status of MoUs between the NEAs and ICF was also sought for Russia and Kazakhstan. The MoU for Russia was signed shortly after the meeting, while ongoing changes within the government structure of Kazakhstan continue to delay the completion of an MoU, consequently project implementation in Kazakhstan cannot begin. The sub-project document between UNEP and the NEA for Iran was signed before the meeting.



Valery Orlov, representative of Ministry of Natural Resources of Russian Federation. Photo by C. Prentice.

The procedures for project implementation were presented at the meetings, including clarification of roles, financial, administrative and reporting arrangements (draft Operations Manual materials), the development of detailed annual workplans, and the organization of national project inception workshops. Issues relating to the ownership and sharing of information, and monitoring and evaluation were also discussed. The preliminary schedule for Project Steering Committee meetings was agreed as follows:



Sadegh Sadeghi-Zadegan an ornithological expert with the Iranian Department of Environment is National Project Manager for the GEF project in Iran. Photo by C.Prentice

SC 1 – Russia Sept 2003 (+CMS MoU mtg)

SC 2 – China 2004

SC3 – Kazakhstan 2005 (+CMS MoU mtg) [subject to confirmation]

SC4 – Iran 2006

In Iran, national research funds are available for studies that can support the UNEP/GEF SCWP, such as the feeding ecology of Siberian Cranes or habitat management. The secretariat of the Caspian Environment Program is being moved to Tehran in 2003, which will facilitate coordination of activities. It was proposed that an international email forum for the project should be established in order to share information. This has been done very successfully for the Zagros Mountains GEF Project in Iran.

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5TH SESSION OF INDIAN-RUSSIAN WORKING GROUP ON THE ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION AND NATURAL RESOURCES (PROTOCOL)

Indian-Russian Working Group on the Environmental Protection and Natural Resources was held on 12-13 May 2003 in Moscow.



Participants of the Fifth Russian-Indian meeting in Moscow.
 Photo by A. Solokha

The Russian delegation was led by Mr. A.M. Amirkhanov, Head of the Department on the specially protected nature areas and biodiversity protection of the Ministry of Natural Resources of Russian Federation. The Indian delegation was led by Mr.M.K. Sharma, General and Special Secretary of the Ministry of the Environment and Forest.

The Parties considered the status and perspectives of the joint activity that has been performed within the framework of the Protocol signed on 6 February 2002 in New-Delhi. The Parties recognized that the bilateral Russian-Indian cooperation is in progress and under the supervision of the national governments.

The Parties considered the status of implementation of the joint Project on Conservation and Restoration of the Siberian Crane Population and noted that currently the activities regarding the population monitoring and introduction of young cranes at the sites of wild cranes breeding in West Siberia are progressing well, including the hang-glider experimental project. It was agreed

that in addition to the above activities, a study on migratory pattern of the Eurasian Crane will be initiated as a collaborative program. This will be useful in establishing new sites for the Siberian Cranes in India. The expert group of each country will take further action to achieve the objectives.

The Parties recognized the importance to perform the activity on conservation and studies on the migrating birds within the Central-Asian Indian Flyway on a continuous basis. It was agreed to develop cooperative activity within the existing expert groups on Anatidae (geese, swans and ducks), cranes, and waders in Russia and India.

The Parties stressed the significance of coordinated action addressed to the development and implementation of the Plan of Action for the Central Asian-Indian Flyway. It was agreed that the name of the flyway should be as Central Asian-Indian Flyway. The Parties agreed to hold the next Second CAIF Workshop in India, where a comprehensive Plan of Action will be finalized. The Wetlands International and other international and national organizations are encouraged to provide necessary support.

The Parties appreciated the preparatory work done by Russian experts on assigning the status of the Ramsar sites to the valuable wetlands located within the flyways. It has been recognized important and feasible to launch joint research projects on conservation and restoration of the endangered wetland sites.

The Parties agreed on the need and importance of the long-term study on conservation of migratory birds along the Central Asian-Indian Flyway between India and Russia. It was agreed that the Russian Party will incorporate its components into the Indian project proposal. The comprehensive and collaborative project will be placed before GEF and other international organizations for funding support.

The Parties agreed to hold the next meeting of the Working Group in New Delhi in 2004.