

A Blueprint for Crane Conservation

By Curt Meine
Crane Action Plan Coordinator

What do crane conservationists do? This is always a hard question to answer, since crane conservation is not one thing, but many things, in many places, involving many people. In just the last year, for example, crane conservationists have: flown over remote bogs in northwestern Russia in search of Siberian Crane breeding sites; organized an international conference to discuss development plans for the Mekong River watershed; published the first collection of scientific papers on Africa's cranes and wetlands; and raised Whooping Cranes for release to the wild in Florida. Among other things!

Of course, the needs and opportunities for action always outstrip the available time, money, and personnel. Deciding how to use these limited resources to maximum effect is itself a constant challenge. To help assess the state of the cranes and determine conservation priorities, ICF has supported preparation of a new publication *Cranes: Status Survey and Conservation Action Plan* (for short, the Crane Action Plan, or CAP). The CAP has been three years in the making. It represents the first comprehensive summary of the conservation status and needs of the cranes.

The CAP has been developed under the auspices of the Species Survival Commission of the World Conservation Union (IUCN), and will be published by the IUCN as the latest in a series of conservation action plans. The director general of the IUCN describes the action plans as "practical guides to action to safeguard components of the world's biological diversity."



The Sarus Crane is one of four crane species that may be added to the IUCN Red List of Threatened Animals. In India, the fate of the Sarus Crane depends in part upon maintaining the water quality in small wetlands. Photo by Belinda Wright.

The IUCN action plans are prepared by various "specialist groups." The Crane Specialist Group, currently led by ICF director George Archibald, includes about 70 members. They, along with ICF staff and dozens of others, contributed to the CAP by drafting and reviewing text, providing new data, and recommending conservation actions. The final product provides a blueprint for crane conservation activities around the world over the next decade.

The CAP is divided into three sections. Section 1 provides a basic overview of the conservation biology of cranes. Section 2 includes up-to-date accounts for each of the fifteen crane species. Building on these accounts, Section 3 provides, for the family as a whole and for nine "crane regions" around the world, a list of high priority conservation actions.

The CAP has already yielded substantial dividends. For example, the conservation status of the cranes is being revised based on new information that has been gathered for the CAP. The CAP has been

used at international meetings to define priorities for the East Asian cranes and for the Central and Western populations of Siberian Cranes. The CAP has contributed to other initiatives, ranging from the establishment of new protected areas in Ukraine to the production of improved species range maps.

The state of the cranes and their habitats remains precarious. Their fate will be determined by the daily actions and long-term aspirations of people on five continents, under widely varied circumstances. The Crane Action Plan, through its combination of basic biological information, species status reports, and coordinated recommendations, provides direction in the endeavor to ensure that the cranes will find safe passage into and through the 21st century. ■

For information on receiving a copy of the Crane Action Plan, contact ICF or the IUCN Species Survival Commission, c/o Chicago Zoological Society, 3300 S. Golf Rd., Brookfield, IL, USA, 60513.

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International Crane Foundation

E11376 Shady Lane Rd.
P.O. Box 447
Baraboo, Wisconsin 53913-0447

(608) 356-9462
Fax: 356-9465
cranes@baraboo.com

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