

## **Part II: Summary Report of the Range State Meeting**



# **Report of the Third Meeting of Siberian Crane Range States Ramsar, Islamic Republic of Iran 8-13 December 1998**

## **Agenda Item 1. Opening Remarks**

Mr Seyed Amir Ayafat, Director General of International Affairs of the Iranian Department of Environment, opened the meeting and welcomed the delegates to the city of Ramsar, situated on the coast of the Caspian Sea.

In his opening remarks, Mr A. Najafi, the Deputy Head of Natural Environment and Biological Diversity, described the topography of the Islamic Republic of Iran, which covers 1.6 million km<sup>2</sup> and includes mountains, forests, deserts and coastal areas, with highly diverse climates and ecology. The different natural conditions give rise to different cultural traditions and support a wealth of fauna and flora on land and in Iranian rivers and coastal waters.

Twenty years ago it was feared that the Siberian crane had disappeared and would never be seen again, but in 1973 the species was again spotted in northern Iran and it has returned every year since. Russian and Dutch experts are welcomed yearly and they bring with them the latest satellite technology.

Mr Najafi noted that the Islamic Republic of Iran has over 200 wetland sites, 18 of them listed under the Ramsar Convention, one of the best being in the same province as Ramsar. These sites face the familiar problems of eutrophication, pollution, hunting and other demands on the land. The authorities are working on environmental education programmes and research to improve knowledge, and special efforts are being made to combat oil pollution. The Iranian authorities are grateful for the support received and are aware of the need to control industrial developments close to sensitive wetland sites. There was already a joint venture with UNDP to protect wetlands; with IUCN to protect the Asian cheetah and its habitat; and it was important also to achieve progress with birds and especially migratory species.

The Governor of Ramsar, Mr. Ghanbar Simiari, welcomed the delegates to Ramsar and recognised the importance of such meetings to reach common decisions on globally threatened species, such as the Siberian crane, one of the rarest birds in the world. Most of the 3,000 individuals of the species live in China and they migrate well over 4,000 km from northern Asia to their summer habitat. While Siberian cranes are considered to be a good omen in Iran, increasing the population is a difficult task. The birds lay two eggs per year, but only one chick is likely to survive except in particularly favourable seasons. The Governor concluded his remarks by noting that the Islamic Republic of Iran enjoys a good relationship with the International Crane Foundation. It is an honour to host the meeting and thanks were due to the Convention on Migratory Species for promoting the sacred aim of protecting this species.

The Deputy Executive Secretary of CMS, Mr Douglas Hykle, thanked the Iranian hosts for providing such a prestigious venue with strong historical connections to conservation. The meeting brought together specialists with many years of experience and knowledge of Siberian cranes. He had first become involved in the plight of the Siberian crane at a wetlands conference in Karachi in 1991. Since then, the Memorandum of Understanding had been signed under the auspices of CMS in Kushiro, Japan, in 1993, and further meetings of the Range States had been held in Moscow (1995) and Bharatpur (1996). The decisions of these meetings had translated into concrete actions, and the decline in the western and central

flocks appeared to have been arrested. The next three to five years should see the fruits of the work on cross-fostering, captive breeding and satellite telemetry. The activities for habitat protection and public awareness-raising needed to be continued, and the efforts extended to the eastern population by bringing China on board. Efforts were in hand to try to secure funding from the Global Environment Facility (GEF) for a multi-national project, which would help meet the challenge of rescuing the Siberian crane from the brink of extinction.

Mr Mohammad Roshanzamir, the Director General of the Province of Mazandaran, described the geography of the province, which stretches from the Turkmenistan border to the Caspian and includes the remaining parts of the Caspian jungle, a refuge for a range of wildlife. The region contains mountains, steppes and coastal plains, and the rice growing area has been recognized as an important habitat for birds for over 100 years. One of Iran's finest Ramsar sites is the key wintering area for Siberian cranes, with 14 individuals sighted this year (10 last year).

The Director of the International Crane Foundation, Dr George Archibald, expressed his pleasure to be back in the Islamic Republic of Iran after a long absence, having been involved in crane studies there back in the 1970s. The international co-operation to save the Siberian crane was an example of how things should be, with delegates from diverse countries sitting round the table working together towards a common goal.

## **Agenda Item 2. Adoption of the Agenda and Work Programme**

Mr Asghar Mohammadi Fazel, Director General of the Natural History Museums, was elected chairman of the meeting by acclamation.

Mr Hykle introduced the agenda and the work programme, which was agreed without amendment, as was the suggestion that working groups be established to review progress and consider future priority actions for the Western and Central Populations.

## **Agenda Item 3. Reports of Range States and Co-operating Organizations**

Delegates gave brief reports on activities undertaken the previous two years, including measures to increase the wild populations, research and monitoring activities, efforts to improve international co-operation and information exchange, and public awareness activities.

### **Russian Federation**

Dr Sorokin reported that helicopter surveys had been continued and that 5 Siberian crane eggs (2 from ICF and 3 from Oka) had been placed in Common crane nests in the habitat of the Central Population. Ringing and PTT fitting had been undertaken in Kunovat in August 1998. Twenty hours of helicopter surveys in the western area had unfortunately not resulted in any sightings, so the location of the proposed captive releases was changed.

Ten Common crane nests had been found and four eggs left in the nests. Five individuals were marked and, on one of them, an old Japanese PTT was replaced with a new Russian model. One key site was about to be designated as a regional reserve with the possibility of national status later.

Six captive-bred chicks had been released near Common crane sites. All were fitted with PTTs and appeared to behave as a flock. Unfortunately, two birds from Vogelpark Walsrode

(Germany), due to be released there, arrived later than expected and the Common cranes had already left the area. These birds will be kept at the Oka breeding centre.

Three Russian PTT sets were still working as of December 1998 - one was sending strange signals from Afghanistan and it was feared that the chick may be in trouble or the set was in the possession of a nomadic herdsman (but the altitude and hilly landscape may be affecting the signal); one was attached to a cross-fostered chick and the third had a weak signal. The PTT sets seemed to have a life of 4-6 months (although technological improvements may lengthen this, and ICF knew of 10-month sets which can cover both migrations). PTT data had been useful in identifying key sites in Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan.

Dr Sorokin reported that contact with colleagues in Dagistan (Dr Pishvanov) had been difficult because of civil unrest there. He said the e-mail communication provided by ICF/CMS was very helpful, but that e-mail coverage in remote parts of Russia is still poor. Concerted efforts had been made to secure video coverage of Siberian crane conservation work.

There was no Russian report on the Eastern Population due to the unfortunate absence of Dr Germagenov, who had been unable to attend the meeting at the last moment.

### **India**

Mr Choudhury described recent work in India and the structure of the various authorities playing a part in the conservation effort in that country. The PTT programme faced problems as some feared that the stress of having the sets fitted might frighten the birds and result in them not coming back to Keoladeo National Park again. When clearance was given, it had proved impossible to catch the birds. Two birds had arrived shortly after the meeting in Bharatpur in November 1996.

The Bombay Natural History Society was conducting research. One question was to find out where the birds go if they did not arrive at Keoladeo. PTTs were being fitted to other crane species to establish migration routes, with knock-on benefits for other crane species. The Common crane ringing exercise and subsequent monitoring (difficult with 70-90,000 in the flock) had unfortunately produced no sightings of Siberian cranes.

Records dating back over 60 years indicated that there had been sightings at 28 locations. Of these only one is now frequented, and only another four are suitable for possible reintroduction, the best candidate being in Uttar Pradesh. Staff turn-over in key offices and the small number of agencies actively involved in the conservation work had given rise to some administrative problems. There had been some TV coverage of the Siberian crane work, and leaflets had been produced in local languages as the birds tended to stray from the confines of Keoladeo National Park, and it was important to inform the local people about them.

### **Islamic Republic of Iran**

The most significant site for Siberian cranes in the Islamic Republic of Iran was to be found at Fereidoonkenar. The site covers 200 hectares and is therefore not large enough to accommodate many more cranes, because of the territorial and aggressive nature of the birds. The land is privately owned and managed by farmers and wild duck trappers, and the local people were suspicious of officials taking an interest in their property. Ms. Mirande (ICF) noted that similar problems had been encountered elsewhere, for example in the United States, where local people often associated site designations with restrictions on the use of land. There was a possible role for NGOs in public awareness-raising and clearly a need to be sensitive to socio-economic concerns when promoting conservation issues.

There was increasing co-operation with international organisations, and a particularly constructive relationship with the ICF was developing. Training and developing veterinary expertise were also being improved through contact with outside bodies. A wetlands-related project was being elaborated for submission to the GEF.

It was intended to establish a centre of excellence which could benefit the crane conservation work. The former Shah's palace, currently used as a museum, had the potential to be used also as a research centre for wetlands and conservation issues.

### **Afghanistan**

Mr. Adil (Society for Afghanistan Volunteer Environmentalists) explained that Afghanistan faced a difficult situation, having been in political turmoil and at war for so long. Institutions and infrastructure barely operated, but the United Nations was beginning to develop environmental programmes, which were however not a priority for the national authorities at the moment. Ten key sites (former royal hunting grounds) had been identified for possible designation.

Help of a practical and financial nature was required. WWF Pakistan was already helping monitor the site at Ab-i-Estada, and two other likely migration route sites Zarkol and Koul-e-Chaqmaqin near the Chinese/Pakistan border would be worth examining. The BBC had broadcast messages about the benefits of conservation and the possibility of eco-tourism.

A data exchange co-ordinated by ICF was suggested. Mr. van der Ven (Wetlands International) pointed out that his organisation already operated a database which was currently underused.

### **Azerbaijan**

Sightings of Siberian Cranes in Azerbaijan during their migration to and from Siberia were very rare. Because of the very small numbers of this species, it had been included in the country's Red Data Book.

The State Committee on Ecology and the Control of Natural Resources had been participating in the international efforts co-ordinated by CMS and ICF since the second meeting of the Range States. Despite economic problems, the prospects for conserving two key lake sites seemed good.

### **Kazakhstan**

Two field trips were made possible thanks to ICF funding. In the north, the lake appeared to be in excellent condition with many Common and Demoiselle cranes present. Following up reports of Siberian cranes was disappointing, as one sighting was actually a swan. There was a clear need to educate people so that they could identify the birds accurately. A second expedition to another larger habitat was undertaken in collaboration with Russian experts, and two possible Siberian crane sites were found. The summer of 1998 was very hot and the lakes were very dry. One pair of Siberian cranes which had not been fitted with PTT was sighted.

### **Pakistan**

Some possible migration routes through Pakistan were identified, but the level of protection afforded to the sites was minimal. Hunting continues, but management and conservation plans aimed at habitat and other species are likely to benefit Siberian cranes.

The Siberian crane video had been received, but the English commentary made it unsuitable for wide use. The quality of the translation was not adequate and it would be done again.

The authorities were liaising with the Crane Hunters Association and the clubs were spreading the word to the local inhabitants. All reported sightings were being investigated, but no incentive scheme operated.

No sites for Siberian cranes had been positively identified. Consultation meetings were being held to consider more punitive legislation, but no decisions had yet been made.

### **Turkmenistan**

The Siberian crane was a very rare migratory species in Turkmenistan with only ten sightings in the past hundred years. It had been seen on the eastern shore of the Caspian Sea at Sarykhmaysh Lake, along the Amudarya and Murgap River Valleys and in the foothills of Kopetdag. The most recent information dated from 10 March 1977 when five hybrid Siberian-Common cranes were said to have been observed in the central part of the Badkhyz reserve.

It was likely that the species continued to pass through the territory of Turkmenistan during migration. Other migratory cranes spend a little time in the southern oasis of Turkmenistan (especially in the autumn), but specialists had difficulty in determining exactly which species the high-flying birds were. Financial and logistical difficulties added to the complications for ornithologists to carry out regular surveys of the seasonal migration of cranes in different parts of the country.

### **Uzbekistan**

Uzbekistan had signed the Memorandum of Understanding in India, and had made headway in protecting all cranes. There was a draft action plan, and projects were being elaborated, including analysis of migration routes for Common, Demoiselle and Siberian cranes. Promotional material was being produced regarding the protection of cranes. With ICF support, the State Committee, the Zoology Department and the Ecology Society were undertaking special projects.

Uzbekistan had produced a biodiversity strategy (now approved) which includes provisions for protected areas. CMS would be asked for help in providing material for environmental education.

The Uzbekistan National Crane Plan envisaged close relations with neighbouring countries and networking through the regional offices of the Zoology Society. An ICF-sponsored booklet in Uzbek and Russian, television and radio broadcasts had been the main media effort. Schools had been targeted with a "paper crane" project, but funds were scarce and the promotional programme was incomplete. Crane projects needed to be integrated to ensure best use of resources.

Hunting remained a problem in Uzbekistan. Although illegal, the economic situation was forcing people to hunt birds to eat or sell.

### **China**

With 95% of the entire population of Siberian cranes being present on one site, the species was vulnerable to an ecological disaster. There were human pressures near Poyang Lake, and pesticide and fertilizer use were both issues concern.

The Forestry Authority was taking the lead in monitoring crane population dynamics and habitat and the Government had recognised the need to participate in international organizations, and would consider positively signing the MoU and the Convention on Migratory Species.

### **Convention on Migratory Species**

The CMS Secretariat had continued to organize meetings of the Range States and promote the MoU. The Secretariat would try in future to be more pro-active in soliciting the annual reports from Range States. The Secretariat was working with ICF to draw up the GEF proposal under consideration at the present meeting.

### **International Crane Foundation**

Ms Mirande stressed that ICF was a non-profit organisation struggling to find its own resources and was not able to provide as much funding as it would like, being itself dependent on the generosity of external funders. She mentioned that the Brehm Fund in Germany had supported the work in Russia in 1998.

ICF had sent captive-bred eggs world-wide. It was also helping to provide veterinary expertise, and it was proposed to nominate a focal point for veterinary knowledge about mortality, injuries and diseases. Close contact was being maintained with European captive breeding programmes.

An e-mail network had been established and its use was encouraged. A bibliography service was also available and donations of articles, leaflets and pamphlets were welcome. Ms Mirande and Dr Sorokin (Russian Federation) were working on a new article on the status of the Siberian crane.

The revised ICF/CMS video with international footage would be distributed at the meeting, with commentaries in English, Russian or blank, with cassettes of VHS-PAL or commercial standard. The new versions of the film had cost \$3000 so no revision was likely for two years. T-shirts had also been produced suitable for international use since they had no writing on them.

## **Agenda Items 4. Detailed review of implementation of the Conservation Plan**

The product of this detailed discussion, which took place in the working groups, can be found in the Annotated Conservation Plan, in the column "Progress/Results (1997-1998)".

### **Agenda Item 5. Work programme for 1999**

The product of this detailed discussion, which took place in the working groups, can be found in the Annotated Conservation Plan, in the column "Further Specific Activities (1999-2000)".

The reports of the working groups on awareness/education, scientific knowledge and captive breeding are annexed to this report. A summary of the working groups' main findings is set out below:

#### **Working Group on Awareness/Education** (rapporteur: George Archibald)

Iran and China were particularly interested in the experience gained in India. Lessons for other Range States might be learnt from the solution used at Keoladeo National Park, where



there had been local hostility to the park being enclosed. A partnership approach had therefore been adopted, and the benefits to the local community from eco-tourism had been explained by the local NGO.

There were however no comparable NGOs in China or Iran, and George Archibald and others had been taking the initial steps in the margins of the meeting to set up the MCCA (Mazandaran Crane Conservation Association). Delegates were invited to join as founder members.

The possibility of representatives of the Chinese authorities visiting the Keoladeo National Park would be actively considered.

The representative of the USFWS offered funding to make duplicates of the Siberian crane video, and to produce posters for use in India.

### **Working Group on Scientific Knowledge** (rapporteur: Abdul Aleem Chaudhry)

Inventories of populations and habitats were required, as little was known of the cranes' summer habits, breeding habits, population dynamics or the behaviour and habitat of pre-breeding birds. Studies using PTTs might help answer these questions.

Assessment of threats needed to be carried out, focussing on hunting, human pressures, and lead-poisoning as these were all likely factors.

Greater knowledge of the genetic make-up of both the Western and Central populations was required, to assist in possible breeding programmes, and the efficacy of PTT technology and possible improvements should be assessed.

Dieter Rinke (Brehm Fund) thought that incubation methods needed to be re-examined. In the three institutions, programmes were working well, but ICF had noted a significantly better success rate with surrogate incubation compared with artificial incubation. Robert Lacey's "Vortex" incubation software had proved to be a useful tool; the next Range State meeting should provide for a discussion of population viability analysis.

### **Working Group on Captive Breeding** (rapporteur: Rob Belterman)

Important work was being done by a number of institutions and organisations, eg Chester Zoo and the Nordic Ark.

The Oka breeding centre was now being supported by a local food supplier, which had obvious logistical advantages over the previous practice of importing food from Belgium and the United States. It was expected that a breeding pair from Oka could be sent to Iran some time in 1999/2000 and the elderly Japanese female would be used for breeding.

Claire Mirande pointed out that the annual mortality rate tended to range from 22%-28%, and for the populations to survive, this needed to be reduced to 10%.

### **Summary**

It was agreed that the working groups had made a very useful contribution to the meeting and that on future occasions they might be constituted earlier in the proceedings so that their deliberations could be readily integrated into the Conservation Plan.

To that end, facilitators were appointed as follows for the three existing working groups, and for a fourth new working group, on fund-raising, with a view to monitoring and progressing their activities inter-sessionally as well as organizing the work at the next meeting:

Awareness/Education:	David Ferguson
Scientific Knowledge	Abdul Aleem Chaudhry
Captive Breeding:	Rob Belterman
Fund Raising:	George Archibald

### **Agenda Item 6. Revision of the CMS Memorandum of Understanding**

The Secretariat tabled a draft proposal for revision of the MoU for the meeting's consideration. Mr Hykle introduced the paper, explaining the rationale behind the proposed changes, which were:

- to provide for the inclusion of the Eastern population and the participation of China;
- to change outdated references to the former Action Plan to the new Conservation Plan;
- to modify the provision of the MoU limiting the duration of its validity

Mr Adil asked about the status within the United Nations of the current authorities in Afghanistan and the Secretariat undertook to look into this. After some discussion, it was agreed that the national annual reports should be submitted to the Secretariat by 31 March each year (starting in 2000). Another slight change of wording would enable organizations such as ICF to host meetings of the Range States. ICF expressed an interest in doing so in the future. There was a discussion about opening the MoU to organizations other than the Wild Bird Society of Japan and ICF (eg to the Brehm Fund, Cracids Conservation, and Wetlands International), but it was decided to retain the status quo.

The amendments proposed by the Secretariat and highlighted on the paper tabled were accepted. The amended Memorandum of Understanding appears in Part I of this document.

### **Agenda Item 7. Global Environment Facility (GEF) project proposal**

Initial work had been undertaken by ICF and CMS in developing a draft proposal for review by the UNEP/GEF Co-ordination Unit. There had already been a number of changes in approach, as the original idea of submitting a project proposal for a medium-size GEF grant of \$750,000 had been superseded by a two stage approach with an initial grant of \$250,000-\$300,000 for the development of a much larger project.

The meeting was asked to give its views on the contents of the draft, as the endorsement of the participating countries was important, as well as additional details to complete the application. The deadline for submission was close and finalising the application was a priority. The draft contained a list of all the national GEF focal points (for those countries which had signed the Convention on Biological Diversity -- CBD) and these contacts needed to write in support of the application. A model letter had been drafted by CMS and was distributed to all delegates.

The following comments were forthcoming (arranged by country, organization):

### **Afghanistan**

As Afghanistan was not a CBD country, it would not be eligible for GEF funding although UNDP was trying to obtain a Block A grant for another project. The importance of Afghanistan to the integrity of the project should be emphasized in the application.

### **Azerbaijan**

The draft GEF proposal had been received too late for full discussions to take place internally. There were funding problems for the existing protected sites, so finding matching resources for the project might prove difficult in Azerbaijan.

### **China**

In anticipation of closer co-operation with China, the Chinese sites should be a large component of the project. In that country, most experience with GEF had been with projects confined to China with no international or transboundary aspect.

### **India**

There were already GEF projects operational at some nature reserves but none was relevant to cranes or Ramsar sites. The Ministry of Environment and Forests had funded some projects at the Ramsar sites. It would be necessary to consult with other relevant authorities to seek advice (Forestry Authority and Wetlands Committee). One problem being faced was conflict with the Agriculture authorities who wished to increase production, leading to excessive use of fertilizers and pesticides (particularly important in wetlands).

### **Islamic Republic of Iran**

Iran already had a \$8-10 million project for wetlands in preparation, linked to its sustainable development strategy and consistent with its national biodiversity strategy. This separate proposal raised the question of overlapping funding which would count against the Siberian crane project.

Two sites lay near to national frontiers, so close co-operation between different national authorities was important. It was noted that Iran had benefited from a modest communication grant available from the CBD "clearing house mechanism" to help purchase e-mail equipment, which delegates of other countries might consider worthwhile looking into.

### **Kazakhstan**

The government had prepared a GEF project (\$132,000), in collaboration with Wetlands International through the Ministry of Ecology, with the leading role held by the Ministry of Agriculture. Nine of the fifteen Ramsar sites in central Asia were in Kazakhstan. The objective was to integrate protection measures for all sites. The proposed inclusion in the Government project of the Naurzum site might lead to overlap problems.

### **Pakistan**

Eleven wetlands were potential crane sites. There was no GEF programme, but one was in the pipeline covering four sites, but there was no likely overlap. Finding matching funding might be difficult, although at least some was likely to be made available.

### **Russian Federation**

Russia had 3,000 km of migration route for the Western/Central population, with PTT data providing more and more information about the key wetland sites for Siberian cranes. Ten sites were already protected, but none of the wintering and staging areas received support from international funding except for that at Astrakhan. Some sites on the target list needed to be brought forward to secure adequate protection. It was not clear whether there were already GEF projects in Russia, but certainly none affected known Siberian Crane sites. WWF was active in Eastern Russia.

### **Turkmenistan**

There were no conservation-related GEF projects in Turkmenistan. Unfortunately there had been insufficient time to discuss the papers with relevant colleagues before departure. There were three likely sites in Turkmenistan in the south of the country (one not far from Ramsar). Comments on the draft proposal could be communicated by the end of the year/early January.

### **Uzbekistan**

Uzbekistan strongly supported the principle of the project, but had not received the documents before the meeting and therefore no inter-departmental discussion had been possible.

Uzbekistan was starting to work on a GEF funded project for wetlands, and would therefore need to ensure there was no overlap. The wetlands project was an evaluation study to elaborate proposals for candidate Ramsar sites. Some funds had been provided for this purpose by the Ramsar Convention (SFr 25,000). Uzbekistan was eager to participate in international initiatives and would send comments on the draft to CMS by the end of the year.

### **Convention on Migratory Species**

There was a clear need to identify the scope of existing GEF projects and the Secretariat would collate information provided by national delegates.

### **International Crane Foundation**

ICF noted that the more ambitious proposal meant that the scope of the project had to widen beyond Siberian cranes to other species and habitats and should relate to an issue of global concern. Tangible and measurable targets, inputs and expected outputs were required. As GEF was linked to CBD, non-CBD States would be ineligible for funding, but their contributions in the area of Siberian crane conservation could count towards the matching funding required by this project. There was a need to investigate other funding sources as well, in particular for urgent short-term measures.

ICF suggested that two types of meeting would be required to drive the project through. A small group of national representatives should meet and each participating country should convene local meetings with stakeholders to ensure support on the ground.

On the question of potential overlaps with other projects, ICF pointed out that existing GEF projects in China – although located in the key crane sites – dealt with staff training, rather than practical conservation work and therefore the potential overlap in subject matter might not arise.

It was pointed out that matching funding did not need to relate specifically to cranes, and that any wetland investment could count as matching funding. It was important though to have all the required information as soon as possible, so that ICF could collate the data and finalize the application with CMS.

### **United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)**

Mr Frismark stressed the importance of ensuring that no part of the project was already receiving funding from other GEF sources, as the whole crane project would be endangered. He agreed that the Siberian crane could act as a flag-ship proposal with great knock-on benefits for other species. He was involved with the Iranian project and was aware that the GEF assessors were very sharp, and suggested that contact be established with the relevant GEF official to iron out problems. He suggested strong focus, as the Iranian project initially aimed at 18 wetlands this number would be pared down to five or six.

### **Wetlands International**

Mr van der Ven had some experience with GEF in Asia, and was surprised that ICF/CMS had been advised to go for a large project first, since it was useful to learn how GEF works through the modest scoping programmes first (Block A grants of \$25,000 to hire a consultant). He also advised that contact be established with GEF, not least to keep abreast of changes of procedure.

He felt that the current draft was written too much from the point of view of crane conservation, and was insufficiently geared to GEF's requirements, and should be submitted informally to them as soon as possible. The inclusion of non-CBD states raised issues, and details of activities being undertaken in those countries needed to be clearly set out. He warned that GEF Block A and B funds were quite modest as they were aimed at scoping exercises. Only at Block C stage was there enough money for implementation.

### **Summary**

Claire Mirande reiterated the information requirements for the GEF project proposal (in addition to the letters of endorsement to be sent to UNEP/GEF and CMS by early January 1999):

- a. Details of all relevant sites, including their national or international protection status;
2. Copies and scope of all other GEF projects affecting Range States, in order to ensure that there is no potential overlap/dual funding problem; and
3. Details needed to enable completion of the financial table, showing sources of other funding, existing complementary programmes, and financial requirements.

The meeting concluded that the ICF and CMS should take the proposal forward in conjunction with UNEP, and the following individuals agreed to act as focal points to stimulate follow-up of the project proposal in their respective countries:

Afghanistan	Abdul Wajid ADIL
Azerbaijan	Eldar SARIYEV
China	Qian FAWEN
India	B C CHOUDHURY
I.R. of Iran	Sadegh SADEGHI-ZADEGAN
Kazakhstan	Anatoly KOVSHAR

Pakistan	Ashiq Ahmed KHAN (nominated by A.A. Chaudhry)
Russian Federation	Alexander SOROKIN
Turkmenistan	Djumamurad SAPARMURADOV
Uzbekistan	Adiljan ATADJANOV

### **Agenda Item 8. Any other business**

There was no other business.

### **Agenda Item 9. Closure of the meeting**

On behalf of the delegates, Dr Archibald thanked the Convention on Migratory Species for providing the framework for international co-operation and bringing all the delegates together.

Mr Hykle commented that each successive Meeting of the Range States seemed to more productive than the last, thanks largely to the fact that the Conservation Plan agreed in India had provided a solid foundation on which to base the discussions. He thanked the Iranian hosts for their hospitality, and the working group facilitators and the CMS staff who had contributed to the meeting's success. Finally, he invited everyone to attend the signing ceremony for the revised Memorandum of Understanding.

## Report of the Working Group on Awareness/Education

### *Participants:*

Dr George Archibald (ICF - Facilitator)  
 Mr Hamid A. Ebahrami (Iran, observer)  
 Mr Qian Fa-wen (China, National Bird Banding Centre)  
 Mr Asghar M. Fazel (Iran, DOE)  
 Mr David Ferguson (US, FWS - Rapporteur)  
 Mr Chen Jian-Wei (China, Dept Wild Fauna and Flora Conservation)  
 Mr Ahmad Khan (Pakistan-WWF)  
 Dr (Mrs) Elena Kreuzberg-Mukhina (Uzbekistan)  
 Mr Paiwasta (Iran, land owner)  
 Mr M. Roshanzamir (Iran, Mazandaran DOE)  
 Ms Shruti Sharma (India, Rajasthan Forest Department)  
 Ms Ellen V. Tavakoli (Iran, Observer)

Ahmad Khan represents an NGO in Pakistan working with crane hunters, the provincial wildlife authorities, nature clubs and schools. He depicted how they related to the crane hunters with pigeons, how many cranes came into his area, what pathways they followed, what the hunters did with their finds.

As Mr Paiwasta was a landowner in Iran where the Siberian cranes overwinter at Fereydoonkenar, it was felt that it might be helpful if the members of the group introduced themselves and related their position and role in working for Siberian crane conservation using education as a tool to achieve this.

The Chinese delegates made a presentation on their wildlife and wildlife reserve policies and practices. Their resources were quite meagre and it was found necessary to impose the rigid park management policy of a central core inviolate protected zone, a surrounding buffer zone and a yet larger economic zone .

India on the other hand, in the situation described by Shruti Sharma of the Keoladeo National Park, had developed a committee comprised of volunteers and headed by the District Commission to help the park in its efforts to educate the local communities to the values of the park and to raise revenue for development in the socio-ecological boundaries of the park. The Chinese were very interested in the Indian example and linked up with Ms Sharma to get more information on the specific examples of functions of the NGO supporting the park.

Mr Fazel from the Iranian DOE participated in the discussions, and several options for working on education and protective measures were explored. Mr Paiwasta was interested in approaches to getting local people, especially young people, interested in conserving the Siberian cranes in his "damgah" area. There was discussion of the merits of constructing a tower for use as a guard tower as well as for tourists to observe the cranes. The concept of a local Siberian crane NGO (e.g. the Mazandaran Crane Conservation Association) was introduced and elicited interest from Iranians. He was also interested in the potential of promoting ecotourism activities such as bringing in paying tourists to see the duck-catching operations.

Elena Kreuzberg-Mukhina brought a brochure produced in Uzbekistan showing the various crane species and their ranges, along with information on their status and ecology printed in Russian. It was planned to produce the brochure in a simpler form for use in schools and for the general public.

While the discussions were hampered by the need for numerous delays so that translations could be made from English to Farsi, Chinese and back, there was a high degree of participation and interest in the sharing of ideas for education.

## **Report of the Working Group on Scientific Knowledge on the Biology, Ecology, and Surveys of Siberian Cranes**

The Group discussed the possibilities of collecting and collating information on various aspects of the ecology, biology, population dynamics and the movements of Siberian cranes. The following fields of study were highlighted:

### **I. Summer habitat**

#### **a. Inventories**

It was considered of utmost importance that the wintering and summering populations be inventoried in both the habitats. The exact census of wintering birds in all three populations was especially emphasized. These numbers could be verified on the nesting grounds and if a discrepancy was found, efforts could be made to locate the missing birds. This could take us to new habitats both in the wintering and summering areas.

Inventories of the habitats were equally important both in summering and wintering areas to determine the suitability of habitat both in the short term and long term. This would be even more important to identify alternative habitats. Also important would be the determination of the cranes' diet and the feeding habitats.

#### **b. Nesting Biology**

Little information is available on nesting biology of the cranes. The important points to study would be the age at which the pairing starts. It might be different for females and males.

#### **c. Juveniles' Habitat**

A concern was expressed that the juveniles' whereabouts were not known, and it was important to find out where they passed their time until they joined the migrating cranes. PTT data would be helpful to obtain this information.

#### **d. Time Budgeting**

Another important area of study not only on summering and wintering areas but also for staging areas - how do the cranes distribute their time amongst various activities?

### **II. Migrating Cranes Data**

It would be important to collect data for staging areas along the migration route. This could however be done with the help of agencies putting PTTs on migrating birds. On receiving information, the host country would arrange to locate the bird at the earliest and collect information on the following, besides relevant times/dates and climatic conditions:

- The detailed description of the wetland including the hydrology, flora, fauna, human factors, disturbance factors;



- The possible impacts of disturbance factors on the birds;
- Local influences;
- Home range of the bird and safe limits for disturbance;
- Inter-relationship with other birds/cranes/animals;
- Hunting practices not only on cranes but also on the species sharing the habitat;
- Socio-economic conditions/activities in the area which might effect the cranes; and
- Identification of similar habitats in the vicinity which might be used alternatively in case the original habitat stops being a suitable habitat or inclement weather or some other calamity hinders their use.

### **III. Wintering habitats**

Besides recording the dates and times of arrival or departure and use of the wintering habitat data required to be collected are:

1. wetland characteristics not only of the wetland visited by the cranes, but also identical wetlands in the vicinity.
2. Any interventions in ecology of the wetland whether natural or artificial. This would also include:
  - i) the contamination of water with pesticides, herbicides or even with fertilizers and resulting eutrophication;
  - ii) hunting data/impacts not only on the cranes but also on the species sharing the habitat;
  - iii) local influences including socio-economic pressures on the habitat;
  - iv) climatological influences; and
  - v) identification of alternative sites which could be used in case the habitats becoming unsuitable temporarily or permanently

### **IV. General**

1. Limiting factors may be determined for all the populations in their different areas. These might include the impact of hunting, predation, lead-poisoning, pollution, disturbance, inter-relationships.
2. Data on "genetic" make-up of 2 different populations should be collected.
3. Diet and feeding behaviours in all different areas should be studied.
4. Complementary studies on Common cranes especially with a view that they be used to lead Siberian chicks while migrating

## **V. Priorities identified by the working group**

1. Exact inventory of numbers in the Iran western wintering population as it is not possible to locate all the birds in their summering habitat.
2. Juveniles' whereabouts until they reach nesting grounds and start to breed - this could be done by putting PTTs in wintering areas.
3. PTT technology should be studied thoroughly and further improved.
4. The technique should be standardized for all the study groups.
5. The incubation process should be studied, described and standardized for improved captive breeding.
6. The results may be shared with breeders.
7. Study of chicks from the day of hatching to fledgling stage in the wild.
8. All growth parameters to be recorded in the wild (special techniques might have to be developed).
9. Common crane migration pattern as it is to be used to lead to Siberian cranes

## Report of the Working Group on Captive Breeding

Not all of the following was discussed within the working group, but this report integrates also the ideas and results of earlier and later discussions with members.

### ***Overview of the captive population in cooperative breeding institutions and institutions who expressed their willingness to take part in the breeding program:***

Location	Current Birds	Laying Females	Target Pairs
Oka	12.9.5	6	8
ICF	8.8	4	6
Walsrode	4.3	2	3
Cracids BCC	6.6	2	10-15
Parc Paradisio	3.3	2	5
Boston	2.2	2	2
Nordic Ark	--	--	5
Detroit	2.1	0	2
Cincinnati	1.1	0	1
Tama Zoo	2.2.1	1	2
Chester	--	--	1
Berlin TP	2.2	2	2
<i>Totals</i>	42.37.6	21	47-52

Chester Zoo offered to keep at least 1 pair of Siberian cranes and will provide financial support and send eggs and/or chicks for the release program in the future. Chester is ready to receive a pair of Siberians. Timing and selection of birds has to be discussed with the studbook keeper.

Rob Belterman will check at Nordic Ark when their facilities are ready.

Chinese zoos are not included in the list since they did not send their data to the studbook keeper. Rob Belterman will contact the Chinese Association of Zoological Gardens for their data. Exchange of birds between China and the other breeding institutions has to be considered of high importance to the captive populations in and outside China.

Oka made an arrangement with a German private breeder. Oka will send 2 pairs to Germany in exchange for financial help and, as the German breeder has a food agency in Moscow, it will be easy to supply Oka with Crane Food on a regular base. First delivery will be in January 1999. Rob Belterman will ask for analyses of this food and, if necessary, contact Julie Langenberg (ICF).

Chicks have to be raised for educational programs in India, Iran and Pakistan. This would be done with birds of no genetic value.

India: An architect will design a large moated wetland exhibit and India will receive a young pair from Boston Zoo in 1999 or 2000.

Pakistan: WWF will work with Lakki Refuge to build an enclosure and Pakistan will receive a pair in 2001 or 2002. Source of this pair has to be determined.

Iran is planning to establish a new safer wintering area in Iran. They told that Mian Koleh Wildlife Refuge would be an ideal place. The refuge is located at the eastern part of the Caspian Sea and there is no duck hunting. The area is about 60 km long and there is a peninsula of 30,000 ha, several islands and about 40,000 ha of shallow water. Iran offered to establish rice fields as a feeding place. One pair of semi-wild Sibes could be placed on one of the larger islands to attract wild Siberian Cranes. Yuri Markin will go there after the meeting and check if this area is suitable as a wintering area and Iran could get a pair from Oka in 1999 or 2000.

In Hirakawa Zoo there is a still an 18 year old lonely female (Lazarus). This bird should be exchanged for a new breeding pair from Oka. Lazarus is an unrepresented founder and very important for the program so it is important to bring her to Oka and breed her.

In Oka there are still a few unrepresented founders and some founders who are represented in the released population but not in the captive population. Rob Belterman will make a list of these birds and discuss it with Dr. Panchenko (Oka) during his next visit to Russia.

### Financial Support

For several years now Cracids Breeding & Conservation Center has supported the breeding and release program for Siberian Cranes. Food and materials were sent to Oka and money brought there, and all costs of travel made by Rob Belterman the last years to participate in the Siberian crane meetings were covered by the Cracids Breeding & Conservation Center.

Together with Parc Paradisio, the Cracids Breeding & Conservation Center offered to continue financial support for Oka. They will raise funds to support Oka on a yearly basis, so Oka can continue their important work for the breeding and release programme.

Oka will make a list of the money needed yearly for maintenance, crane diet, staff, and costs of survey and releases, and will present a yearly overview how the received funds were used.

Captive born, unreleasable birds should be placed within the managed programme. This is highly important to the credibility of the program and consequently ability to raise funds. So no Siberian cranes should be sold to private holders who do not make long-term commitments for financial and/or material support to the Oka Crane Breeding Centre.

Rob Belterman (European Studbook Keeper) has been recommended to coordinate the placement of surplus animals in Western Europe and will make long-term commitments with new holders for financial support to the breeding and release programme. Placing birds should be done after consultation with the Studbook Keeper and/or the Species Committee (still to be formed). ICF and Walsrode have recommended (and this was discussed with the Oka representatives) that the two birds, unfortunately not released in 1998 (from ICF eggs, hatched and isolation-reared in Walsrode) should be send to CBCC for fundraising.

Another conservation project financially supported by CBCC (and one of the board members of this foundation) is the that for the eastern population of the Siberian cranes in China.

Rob Belterman  
Cracids (& Crane) Breeding & Conservation Centre

## Opening Statements

### **Mr. Ghanbar Simiari, Governor of Ramsar**

Today we welcome you all who are taking part in this meeting. I hope that the fact that this meeting is taking place will assist the protection of the global environment and maintaining its vital balance. It is my pleasure to express many thanks to the authorities who have organised this useful meeting.

According to the available information regarding the Siberian Crane, please be informed that due to the limited numbers of these migratory birds, protection of them is very significant and essential. They number slightly more than 3,000. The habitat of 3,000 of them is in China. The remaining population migrates from Siberia to Iran, India and other countries of Asia, and Europe.

During the last year 10 Siberian Cranes, and during this year 14 of them, have migrated to Iran. Their habitat in Iran is Fereydoonkenar region in Mazandaran Province.

The people of the region, due to their religious beliefs, try to protect this species of bird. They believe that the appearance of the Siberian Cranes brings other birds to the region and this is to the advantage of the hunters. This belief, better than any law or regulation, leads the people of the region to try to protect the Siberian Crane species. Dear guests, you will have an interesting visit to the Fereydoonkenar region. In this visit you will see for yourselves evidence of the above-mentioned fact.

These birds lay two eggs each year. One of these eggs will produce a chick. In addition to the expressed reasons, storms, contact with electricity wires and also urban development will reduce the number of these migrant species.

The Islamic Republic of Iran works in close collaboration with International Crane Foundation (ICF). This conference is held in the member countries biennially. This year, Iran has the honour to be the host of this conference, in this beautiful Iranian city of Ramsar.

Once again, I bid you welcome and I express many thanks to all respected participants and the founder of this conference (CMS). I hope that the results of this conference can assist us to reach our sacred goals on this significant issue.

**Mr. Mohammad Roshanzamir, General Director,  
Department of Environment, Mazandaran Province**

Mazandaran Province is located on the southern coast of the Caspian Sea which has a coastline of about 300km. It is important to mention that the Caspian Sea is the biggest lake on earth. The neighbours of this province are: Turkmenistan in the north; Tehran and Semnan Province in the south; Golestran Province in the east; and Gilan Province in the west.

Environmental features of this province include coastal plains and steppes, and mountains. The capital of this province is Sari. The most significant areas which are under the direct control and protection of Mazandaran Environmental Directorate are:

Miankaleh Wildlife Refuge: With the area of about 68 km<sup>2</sup>, this region is one of the 9 most important places for the above-mentioned purpose. We have a joint program with the U.N. under the name of "MAB".

Miankaleh wetland: This is one of the 18 International wetlands designated under the Ramsar Convention. This region is the winter habitat of hundreds of thousands of waterbirds and also native and local birds like pheasant and a number of mammals.

Dasht-e-naz Wildlife Refuge: With an area of 55 hectares and with the ecosystem of Caspian forests, this is the habitat of Iranian yellow deer.

Semskandeh Wildlife Refuge: With an area of 937 hectares this refuge is located the 3km from Sari Center which is the remaining parts of the Caspian forests. This area is covered with trees and enjoys total protection as a genetic reservoir.

Dodangeh Wildlife Refuge: With an area of 1600 hectares, this includes rich communities of trees and biodiversity. As an example, we can mention some examples as follows: Goats, Leopards, Brown bear, Wolf, Pheasant, etc.

Northern Alborz protected area: With the area of 230,000 hectares, it is located at the west of province and boasts sights of great natural beauty, cascades, springs, forests, and a vast variety of wildlife, for instance, goats, leopards and brown deer.

Khoshkehdaran region: With the area of 264 hectares, this is the remaining part of steppe jungles with Tusca tree communities. The age of this jungle is about 100 years and the natural history museum is always open to the public.

Fereydoonkenar Wildlife Refuge: With an area of 200 hectares, the refuge includes vegetation, rice cultivation regions, strip-like jungles, and three rivers.

Each year, from 23rd of October to the beginning of February it hosts Siberian Cranes together with the hundreds of thousands of wild birds. Meanwhile, studies show more than 300,000 to 350,000 birds come to this habitat. In the current year, census shows that 14 Siberian Cranes are present. In the last ten years, 10 of them were seen. We hope that the International Crane Foundation (ICF) establishes a research centre for Siberian Cranes in this refuge to obtain further information, particularly regarding the habits and nutrition of Siberian Crane. We are also prevent detrimental effects of inappropriate, unsustainable development.

**Douglas Hykle, Deputy Executive Secretary,  
Secretariat of the Convention on Migratory Species**

It's a pleasure to be back in Ramsar – it is my second visit in the space of about four months. I had the opportunity to go *through* the mountains on my first trip, which was quite memorable, and I have now been able to fly over them. Yesterday the view from the air of the snow-peaked mountains and the coastal lowlands was truly spectacular.

Ramsar, as many of you will know, is a historic city – the birthplace over 25 years ago of the Convention on Wetlands. Today, the name Ramsar is in common usage among all those individuals and organizations concerned with the conservation of wetlands around the world. We are honoured to have been invited to convene our meeting here, in this prestigious venue.

Many of you present today have been associated with the protection of Siberian cranes for a very long time – some have even devoted decades of their lives to the cause. My own involvement dates back about 7 years to a wetland conference in Karachi, Pakistan, where I was introduced to the problems facing these cranes. We all have something in common – a passion for ensuring that these magnificent birds not only survive during our lifetimes, but that they recover to sufficient numbers so that future generations may also enjoy their presence on earth.

As many of you will know, this is the third meeting organized by the Secretariat of the Convention on Migratory Species to bring together all of the countries directly concerned about Siberian cranes. Following the adoption of the Memorandum of Understanding in 1993, in Kushiro, Japan, the first such gathering was held in Russia in May 1995. I am pleased to see that many of our colleagues from Moscow and from the breeding centre at Oka have been able to join us here today.

This initial gathering was followed by a very successful meeting hosted by our Indian colleagues in Bharatpur already 2 years ago now – ample proof that it is not only Siberian cranes that fly -- time flies as well!

Looking back, I think we have made some real progress since 1993 -not only on paper, but where it counts -- in the field:

- The countries with populations of Siberian cranes have a common, co-ordinated framework within which to carry out their activities.
- The dramatic decline in numbers over recent decades appears to have stabilised, and there is good reason to believe that in the next 3-5 years, efforts in the field to reinvigorate the western and central populations will begin to pay off.
- Since our first meeting, important information on migration routes has been gathered thanks to satellite technology and the application of PTTs.
- Innovative Russian efforts to substitute eggs into nests of common cranes, and to release captive-reared birds are showing signs of progress. Hatchery success has greatly improved.
- Last, but not least, the birds keep coming back in consistent numbers -- to Bharatpur and Fereidoonkenar!

The work this week will look into the past, to what has been accomplished over the previous year or so, and will also consider what changes need to be made to the programme of work agreed at Bharatpur through to the end of 1999.

So, what is on the horizon? The field activities I have just mentioned need to continue, to be strengthened and expanded. Identification and protection of critical wetland habitats throughout the migration routes is a top priority. Our efforts to increase public awareness of the problems facing Siberian cranes, and of our work, need to be intensified.

We must also look at the *broader* picture, which means taking into account what is going on in the Eastern Population, and engaging conservationists there in our activities. In that regard, I would like to extend a special welcome to our colleagues from China, whose participation in this meeting was unanimously endorsed at our last gathering. I hope that the Government of China will be prepared to join us in our efforts as soon as possible.

The activities outlined in our ambitious Conservation Plan, will cost a lot of money -- money, which we all know, is very hard to come by. That is why another important task facing us will be to examine how we might tap into a substantial funding resource in the form of the Global Environment Facility. Colleagues at the International Crane Foundation and at UNEP have been working very hard with CMS over the past couple of months to prepare a first draft of a project proposal which now requires the input of everyone here.

Despite the magnitude of the challenge before us, it gives me great personal satisfaction to be associated with this initiative. I think all of us are motivated, not only by the challenge of bringing a population back from the brink of extinction, but also by the knowledge that the people we are working with all share a common passion and are inspired for the same reasons. It's a real honour to be part of this great adventure.

Before closing I would like to acknowledge our Iranian hosts, who have worked tirelessly in recent weeks to ensure that this meeting would take place. Although it is perhaps premature to be giving thanks, it must be said that our good friend, Mr. Seyed Amir Ayafat, and his colleagues in the Department of the Environment and Foreign Ministry, have been instrumental in getting us to this point.

Now the real work begins, and it is up to *all of us* to make this meeting a success. I couldn't help but think yesterday, as we flew along the coast, probably not far from where the Siberian cranes are currently wintering, that it is a miracle of nature that these birds are able to locate, with precision, the same tiny wetland year after year. We owe it to them, as custodians of nature, to fulfil our small part of the arrangement, and to protect the wetlands everywhere that are so vital to their survival.



## Agenda of the Meeting

1. Opening remarks (Host Government and Secretariat)
2. Adoption of the agenda and work programme
3. Reports of Range States and Co-operating Organizations (brief overview)
  - a) Breeding area Range State: Russian Federation
  - b) Wintering area Range States: Islamic Republic of Iran, India
  - c) Range States along the migration routes: Afghanistan, Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Pakistan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan
  - d) Range States for the eastern population: China, Russian Federation
  - e) Co-operating organizations: UNEP/CMS, International Crane Foundation, Wild Bird Society of Japan
4. Detailed review of implementation of the Conservation Plan for 1997-1999

Main objectives: 1) Reduce mortality  
2) Increase numbers and genetic diversity  
3) Enhance international co-operation
5. Work programme for 1999
  - a) Survey requirements
  - b) Releases
  - c) PTT monitoring
  - d) Related studies on common cranes
  - e) Education needs
  - e) Co-ordination of information exchange
6. Revision of the CMS Memorandum of Understanding
7. Global Environment Facility (GEF) project proposal
8. Any other business
9. Closure of the meeting



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