

Something Sighted

In March this year 17 birds resembling the highly elusive and endangered Siberian cranes *Grus leucogeranus* were spotted flying over Charsadda in the NWFP. Since the Siberian cranes annual migratory 5,700 km journey from breeding grounds in western Siberia to wintering grounds in central India is along a route which is yet to be discovered, this sighting caused much excitement.

Today it is estimated that no more than 250-350 Siberian cranes exist in the wild. Cranes have a habit of pairing with one partner for life and producing few young. This together with the destruction of wetlands along migratory routes means there are fewer places for the cranes to stop, feed and rest have

brought these magnificent birds to the brink of extinction.

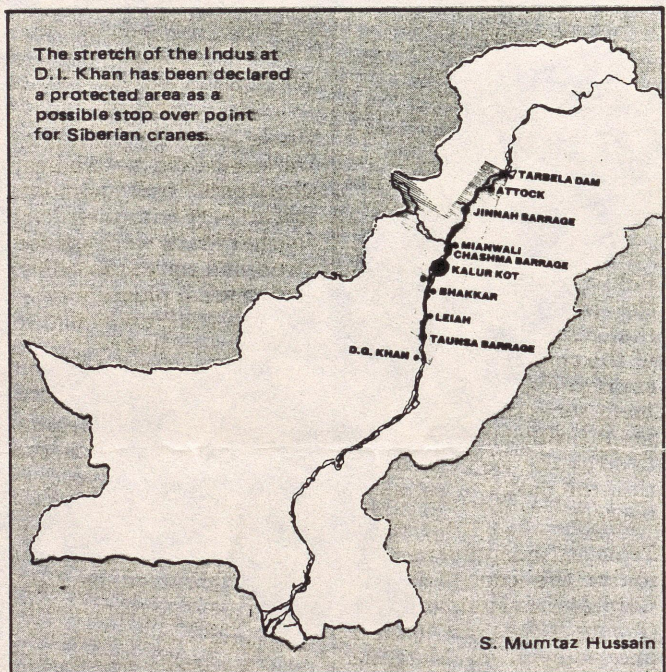
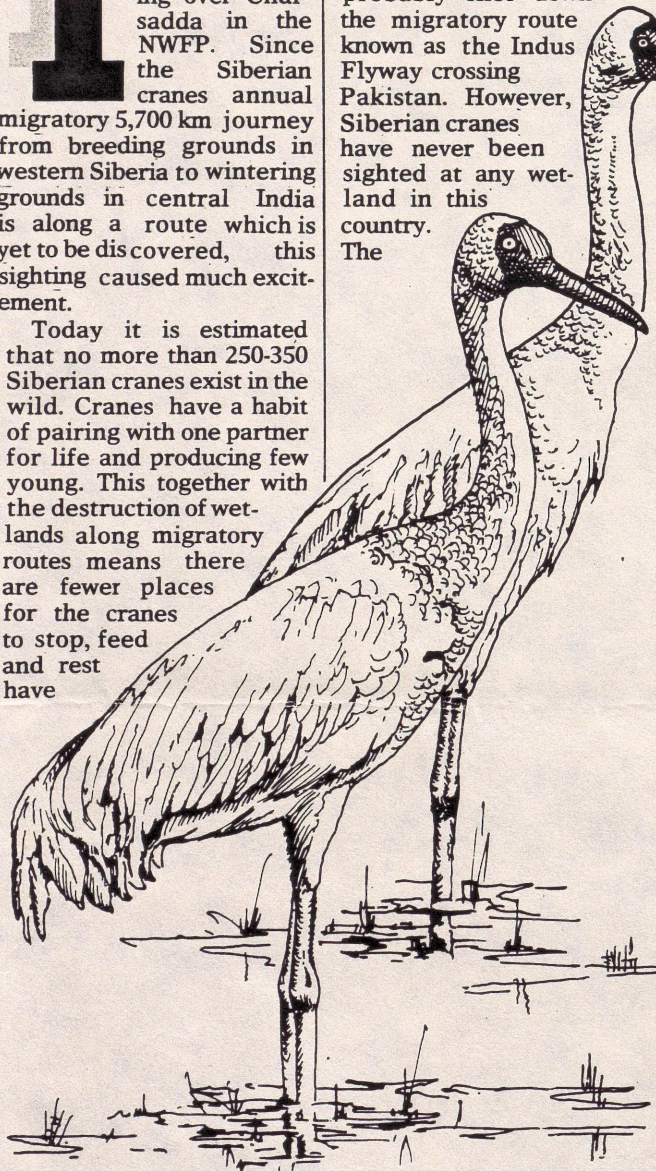
Of the Western Siberian population a flock of 41 birds migrates annually to winter in Keoladeo Sanctuary at Bharatpur, India. To reach India the flock probably flies down the migratory route known as the Indus Flyway crossing Pakistan. However, Siberian cranes have never been sighted at any wetland in this country. The

only known resting point along the Flyway is the wetland of Ab-i-Estada in Afghanistan where unfortunately the birds are hunted for food and sport.

On March 17, Ashiq Ahmed the wildlife management specialist at the Pakistan Forest Institute saw 17 birds flying north of Charsadda. No binoculars were available so Mr Ahmed could not positively identify the birds as Siberian cranes — but he noted that the large greyish white cranes had the black tip

of the Indus at Rohalla.

If the cranes seen were indeed Siberian cranes then their stopover on the banks of the Indus and flight over Charsadda indicate that the migration route may be through Pakistan. The plight of the cranes is such that when the International Crane Foundation's representative Dr. Steven Landfried was in Pakistan in July of this year, he met with the Chief Minister of NWFP Gen (Retd) Fazle Haq. During this meeting he was assured that the wetlands



ped wings characteristic of Siberian cranes. A day earlier, a Game Inspector had reported sighting 13 white cranes which did not look like Demoiselle or common cranes near the left bank of

along the possible migration route would be protected. Accordingly, the stretch of the River Indus at Dera Ismail Khan NWFP has been designated a game reserve.

—Dr. Abdul Aleem Chaudhry

For Prokash
good news

Cranes make spectacular comeback

By MATTHEW FISHER
Toronto Globe and Mail

EDMONTON, Alberta — North American's whooping cranes have staged such a comeback that the huge bird could be removed from the endangered species list within 10 or 15 years.

As recently as 1941, there were only 15 whooping cranes living naturally in marshes along the north edge of Wood Buffalo National Park along the Little Buffalo River. There were two or three mating pairs among them.

Today there are at least 148 and possibly as many as 150 of the red-crowned, white-plumed cranes commuting between nesting grounds in Canada and their winter home 2,400 miles away in the Aransas Wildlife Refuge, near Corpus Christi, Texas, and the Gulf of Mexico.

The flock includes at least 30 mating pairs and 20 new chicks.

"It's all on the up and up," says Ernie Kuyt, a 59-year-old Edmonton-based Canadian Wildlife Service biologist who has acted as northern protector of the world's last wild whooping crane flock since 1965, when there were only 43 birds.

"What has happened with the whooping cranes is unprecedented in the history of endangered beasts. There is good confidence now that the population will flourish."

According to Kuyt, three factors have helped the whooping crane population more than double in six years after four decades of very gradual growth:

- For five consecutive summers the main breeding area just north of Alberta-Northwest Territories border has been blessed with sufficient water to maintain the bog-like habitat which the birds relish.

- Since 1985, Canadian and U.S. wildlife officers have visited each nest in the Northwest Territories to conduct viability tests on the two eggs usually found there. By briefly placing the egg in lukewarm water they can see if it is alive. This process ensures that each pair will have a live egg to take care of.

- The media have made people aware of the bird's struggle to survive. In the past 35 years only one whooping crane has been shot by a hunter.

What brought the whooping crane to the brink of extinction was loss of habitat. As recently as the middle of the 19th century, thousands nested in a narrow arc from Iowa through Manitoba, Saskatchewan and Alberta. As settlers drained and then burned wetlands to establish farms, the cranes retreated to the north and to the west.

The birds grow to a height of five feet and have a wingspan of more than 6½ feet.

To be moved from the endangered species list to the threatened species list the cranes will have to sustain at least 40 breeding pairs for 10 years. Another proviso is that there are two other flocks of at least 20 breeding pairs.

This will be more difficult to achieve since an experiment which began in 1975 with the placement of extra Wood Buffalo Park whooping crane eggs in the nests of sand hill cranes in Idaho has produced 16 birds which apparently do not know how to reproduce.

But the nesting location of most new breeding pairs in the Wood Buffalo flock in an area to the south and east of their parents is an indication that the Canadian birds, which have nested in close proximity for decades, are finally spreading out.

"There is a perceptible expansion of the breeding area in the direction of the ancestral range," Kuyt says.

VVN

Siberian crane spotted in M.P. 1/2/89 Hindu

From Our Staff Reporter

JAIPUR, Jan. 1.

A Siberian crane has been sighted at Karera near Dahelia Jheel in Shivpuri district of Madhya Pradesh. The rare migrant from the USSR was spotted and identified by the trappers of the Bombay Natural History Society (BNHS) in early December.

This was the first time that this bird, whose global population is estimated to be less than 1400, was sighted in India anywhere outside the Keoladeo Ghana National Park, near Bharatpur (Rajasthan) where every year groups of them arrive for wintering. Though many bird lovers as well as scientists generally hold the view that there could be places in the country other than Ghana where the Siberian cranes might be spending the winter, they hitherto have had no conclusive proof as there has been no authentic recording of the sighting of the bird elsewhere.

The spotting of the bird at Karera is a landmark in the two-decade-long tracking of Siberian cranes initiated by the late Dr. Salim Ali and Dr. Ron Sauey and pursued by Dr. Steven Land-fried of the International Crane Foundation with the encouragement of the former Prime Minister, the late Indira Gandhi.

The belief that the Siberian cranes might be going outside the Ghana wetlands strengthened during last winter when a group of three birds started disappearing from the park for a few days between January 26 and February 20. The Rajasthan Forest Department had then sought the cooperation of its counterpart in Uttar Pradesh to track the truant cranes. Efforts made by the BNHS team stationed at Bharatpur to find out the whereabouts of the disappearing birds too proved futile.

Spotting of the bird at Karera is a news for the crane lovers but what saddens the lovers of the unique Ghana wetlands is that the marshland spread over an area of 29 sq.km is soon going to lose the rare distinction of being the only winter abode of Siberian cranes in the sub-continent. Now the park has 22 Siberian cranes of which four are juveniles. The worry of naturalists is all the more as the arrival this winter is considered to be the lowest in the recent history. During the last winter the park had 32 Siberian cranes.