

Russian cranes in China

O. Goroshko

International cooperation

In 1983, the author made a research trip to the national natural reserve at lake Poyang in South China. This trip was supported by the International Crane Foundation, which paid the travelling expenses and helped to contact Chinese colleagues, and it was a step forward to Russian-Chinese cooperation in the study and protection of cranes.

Chinese colleagues from the national nature reserve of lake Poyang and from the management office of the Jiangxi Nature Reserve will visit the Daurkiy Nature Reserve in summer and observe breeding cranes. Further possibilities of Chinese-Russian cooperation will be discussed on this occasion.

The main task of the trip was the search for cranes marked with plastic colour band in the Daurkiy Nature Reserve.

Lake Poyang is a large wintering place of waterfowl, which was discovered in this function in 1981. Only 400 Siberian Cranes were known to winter there before this time. Whereas the territory of the Poyang Lake Nature Reserve is studied comprehensively and censuses are made every year (e.g. 2600 Siberian Cranes lived in the reserve in the winter of 1991/92 - pers. comm. by Mr. Zhao), the number of cranes living in other parts of lake Poyang is unknown. Therefore, the whole territory must be carefully explored and a total census of the cranes at lake Poyang must be made. Researchers of the Daurkiy and the Poyang Lake Nature Reserve are elaborating a joint plan for the study and protection of cranes at their breeding and wintering places.

Cranes at lake Poyang

Large flocks of cranes usually stay on the territory of shallow lakes and mudflats or on grassland. Up to 7000 cranes rested in the reserve in the winter of 1991/92 (personal observation by Zhao Jin-Sheng). White-naped and Siberian Cranes are numerous, whereas Common and Hooded Cranes are rather scarce.

Many cranes also stayed in the reserve in October and November of this winter.

Since December and January were dry, the shallow lakes dried up and the cranes left their common habitats.

Only 36 cranes (4 Siberian, 4 White-naped, 6 Hooded and 22 Common ones) remained in the reserve in the first half of February. Since it began to rain in the middle of the month, the number of birds increased again.

About 100 cranes (7-12 Siberian, 8-23 White-naped, 7-52 Hooded and 30-36 Common ones) stayed on the territory of the reserve in late February.

A motor boat expedition to the eastern remote, insufficiently explored part of lake Poyang was organized between February 16-22, with Mr. Zhao accompanying the author (fig 1). Whereas cranes were not observed at the first, second and fourth places, 39 Siberian Cranes feeding on the mudflat were registered on a small lake during the third stop. According to local residents, the birds stay there every year.

The fifth place was a very suitable habitat for cranes. 620 White-naped and 103 Siberian Cranes were feeding on the shore and the mudflat around al lake. Local residents said that the birds lived there and at an adjoining place every winter. This place, however, could not be visited. The local residents are hunters and fishermen, who may not only catch geese and ducks, though cranes are very shy.

Cranes with colour bands

Many White-naped and some Hooded and Common Cranes were marked with colour bands in the Daurskiy Nature Reserve. During my expedition, I was able to register 220 White-naped, 35 Siberian, 31 Hooded and 30 Common Cranes. Among them were 5 White-naped Cranes marked with colour bands in the Russian Daurskiy Reserve (2.3 % of the marked birds), 4 of which were observed by the author in the eastern part of lake Poyang. Since the cranes were very shy, it was not possible to decipher the figures on the bands. The first adult crane, which had been marked as a juvenile in 1991, had a small white band on the right leg (nearly 3 cm long). The second and third adult cranes observed together in a flock had large white bands on their right legs (nearly 5 cm). They had been banded in 1989. The fifth adult male with a white band on the right leg, which had been marked as a young birds in 1989, lived on the territory of the Poyang Lake Reserve.

Address: Oleg Goroshko
Nizhni Tsasuchey, Box 50
674480 Chita
Russia

Figure 1: Route of the crane expedition on the lake Poyang

