

Birds of Western Siberia: Grues. 1961. by Hans Johansen.

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*Grus grus* L.--Sseryj shurawlj

In its eastern, lighter colored form *lilfordi* Sharpe (which extends eastward from about the Volga River), the common crane is present throughout western Siberia with the exception of the tundra.

The northern border approximates the timber line and lies at about 66° N. According to Derjugin the crane nests on the Objnear Pitljar (65° 45'); Schostak lists flocks up to Obdorsk (66° 30') and Skalon refers to it as a rare breeder along the Tass between 64° and 67°; on the Jenissei the range extends to 66°. More recently cranes were also seen at 68° (Rogatschewa).

To the south the breeding range of the crane extends into Mongolia and Turkestan, however in the drier steppe regions south of Ssemipalatinsk and in the Turgai-Irgis region it is rather rare. Other than these areas, its frequency is rather uniform but dependent upon the biotope. In heavily wooded areas it is rarer, more common in the wooded steppes.

Ecology and Life Style. In Siberia too the crane avoids man and settles in the most inaccessible yet still open areas. In woodlands it prefers the large high moors, in the wooded steppes it generally nests in the extensive "Saimystschi"--the reeds or in the larger swampy lowlands covered with hummocks. In the dry steppe it lays its nest in completely open areas if they are out of the way and undisturbed. In the Altai mountains it also nests in the high steppes and in the subalpine zone of the mountains.

In spring the crane arrives early and in general at a rather constant time (see Table).

Arrival Dates of the Crane

Place	Year(s)	Average	Earliest	Latest
Ssemipalatinsk	4	Apr. 9	Apr. 3	Apr. 18
Gurjewski Sawod (Kuznezker Steppe)	11 (1893-1914)	Apr. 15	Apr. 1	Apr. 24
Tomsk	16 (1910-1924)	Apr. 22	Apr. 18	Apr. 26
Tobolsk	4	Apr. 23	Apr. 16	Apr. 30
Konda area	4 (1941-1944)	May 2	Apr. 24	May 11

Breeding begins at the middle to end of May. The nests are generally very well hidden and contain two, or rarely three, eggs. These are found at the end of May--beginning of June. Downy chicks are found in mid-July near Tomsk.

As soon as the chicks are grown, open spaces, fields, and meadows are frequented. In August the cranes gather often in large swarms and then become a nuisance for the farmers; millet fields are especially heavily used. The migration begins at the end of August, however the main body from the woodlands migrates at the beginning of September and gather in the southern portions of the steppes toward the middle and end of September. Here the migrating birds gather for a few days in enormous masses. According to a description of Suschkin's, such gigantic flocks along the upper Irgis were flying on September 26, 1898, that they were one after another as far as the eye could see, from 9 a.m. until 4 p.m.

There is also migration via the Altai mountains, whereby high mountains are crossed.

*Grus monachus* Temm.--Tschornyj shurawlj

The hooded crane is one of the most peculiar of the Siberian birds. Its range is even yet a complete mystery. It is rare everywhere and only occurs in isolated forms but it is by far most frequent in eastern Siberia. During the breeding season it has only been determined on the upper reaches of the lower Tunguska, in the Baikal area and on Lake Tarei-Nor (Koslowa). All other references (Baraba steppe, Tomsk, Minusinsk area, Amur, Ussuri) are outside of the breeding season or obviously refer to non breeding birds.

Most frequently (8 times) the hooded crane in western Siberia has been found near Tomsk, but with only one exception (June 2, 1893) only in spring (May 2-18) and in fall (August 20-September 8). Because there are also fall and spring observations from Tschulym, Nowossibirsk, and from the area around Minussinsk, we can speak of a rare but almost regular migration in the area between the Obj and the Jenissei.

Whether or not the hooded crane nests in the western Siberian Taiga region is yet unclear. According to the report of a native hunter it is said to only migrate near Tschulym; at Ketj it was once seen in 1921, but the date was not given. Perhaps the spring finds west of the Obj in the Baraba steppe indicate nesting in the Taiga. Thus in April-May 1917 I observed a pair for several days in a row southeast of Kainsk and according to the reports of an absolutely credible hunter it is not so rarely seen here.

Nesting near Tomsk and in the Baraba steppes as reported by Hermann Johansen (Beiträge zur Fortpflanzungsbiologie der Vögel 1930, Heft 4) from an egg find is very problematical. There were no hooded crane eggs available for comparison. Both the eggs in question (one purchased at the Tomsk market, the other found in the Baraba steppe) are, as M. Schönwetter indicated (Beitr. z. Fortpfl. biologie 1942), much more likely eggs of *Grus leucogeranus*. They are much too large (106 x

60 mm - 19.5 g and 103 x 62 mm - 22.5 g) for *Grus monacha*. Eggs of the hooded crane in captivity measure an average of only 91 x 59 mm - 16.10 g.

The bird killed near Tomsk on June 2, 1893, can be seen as a late migrator. Salesski reported a non-breeding hooded crane amid a flock of common cranes in the Minussinsk region on June 19. For the Baraba steppe there is only the claim of the non-ornithologist Krochalew that occasionally the hooded crane breeds on islands in Lake Tschany. Of the many ornithologists who have worked on that lake however, none has been able to confirm this. Thus the nesting in western Siberia is not proven; the migration however indicates that it could be breeding in the eastern woodlands. That is all the more plausible since it is said to be a breeding bird on the lower Tunguska. Concerning its life in western Siberia not much more can be said but that it migrates in May and at the end of August-early September. The observed and killed birds are most commonly seen together with the common [European] crane, sometimes singletons, sometimes in small groups of from 3 to 4 individuals. There are but sparse reports of its migratory path to the south. Jablonskij<sup>1</sup> lists it as a very rare migratory bird

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<sup>1</sup>Jablonskij. Durch den Altai und der Altai, Vögel Jagd-zeitschrift "Priroda i Ochota" 1904 and 1907.

on the junction of the Kurtschum at the upper Irtysch. Otherwise the wintering grounds are merely listed as China, southern Japan and eastern India (rare).

*Grus leucogeranus* Pall.--Sterch

The range of the Siberian white crane resembles that of the hooded crane in many respects, however it occurs more frequently in western Siberia and nesting is known for certain.

Apparently it has two separate breeding grounds. One lies in eastern Siberia where it appears in the north in the tundra of the Jana and Indigirka region and in the south in Dauria and in the Ussuri region. The second area lies in west Siberia where it likewise nests in the north and in the steppes of the south. No summer sightings are known for the entire mid Siberian area in between, nor even from the eastern portions of west Siberia.

In west Siberia it is distributed very sporadically and is in general rare. The northern boundary must lie in the vicinity of the timberline as it nests according to Tarunin, among others, on the Obj near Jurty Tschuilskije (64° 30'). According to Derjugin large white crane like birds are observed each spring in migration by the hunters of Beresow. Skalon (pers. comm.) found it as a breeding bird in the Konda area. It has, although rare, been shown to be a migratory

bird near Tobolsk. The westernmost find is in the Sinara valley in the eastern Urals where one specimen was shot in 1916.

In summer this crane has been found on the lower Ural River as well as in the Syrdarja region of Turkestan. To the east the distribution in west Siberia stretches to the Obj; it was determined here in the Kolywan area at breeding time by Iwan Salesski. The crane egg which Hermann Johansen bought at the Tomsk market and described as a hooded crane egg should be mentioned here; however, according to Schönwetter (Beitr. Fortpfl. Biol. 1942) this is certainly *leucogeranus*.

The Siberian white crane appears to have nested most frequently in the Baraba steppe, where definite breeding is known from lakes Tschany and Sartlan; however it is seen every year in other locales. In earlier times it was not rare here and was known to all hunters. In the vicinity of Lake Sartlan it is even represented in the place name "Sterchowa Griwka." Today it is very rare if indeed it nests here at all. From the southern edge of the Taiga it was listed by Uschakow as nesting in the Taiga area. Slowzow lists it as a breeding bird in the Tjumen area as well up to the year 1886.

The Siberian white crane has without doubt nested in the treeless steppe, however rarely and sporadically. On Lake Kriwoi, north of Slawgorod it was found by G. Welishahin, by Hermann Johansen near Akmolinsk. In the vicinity of the

Naursum wildlife refuge south of Kustanai, chicks were observed at the beginning of August. Suschkin reports nesting on the Turgai River. In the Saissan area it is missing, as throughout the eastern portions of west Siberia. In a recently published work "Die Vögel Kasachstans" [The Birds of Kazakhstan] vol. 1 (Alma-Ata, 1960), I. Dolguschin says that nesting in Kazakhstan and in the west Siberian steppes is today very unlikely.

We know very little about the life history of this exceptionally shy and cautious crane. It always nests in separate pairs in the most inaccessible and farthest distant places in forests of reeds and rushes "Saimystschi" and in the dangerous rolling moors. During the breeding season it leads a very hidden life and is only rarely seen. In mating season the trumpeting sounds are said to sound very melodious (Skalon, pers. comm.). The few nests which have been found contain two eggs at the beginning of June; at the beginning of August families are seen flying about. Now and again they appear together with common European cranes in the fields.

In spring the Siberian white crane generally migrates only in pairs or threes, also alone. In the southwest, in the Turgai-Irgis region it migrates already the first few days of April, near Tobolsk at the end of April/beginning of May. Near Tomsk one specimen was shot April 26. In the Konda region they are observed in mid May (Skalon.)



The fall migration begins near Tobolsk about the end of August, but extends to October in the steppes. Thus from mid September to the end of October Micheew observed migrating flocks with 7 to 25 birds each at the Naursum wildlife refuge near the half dried out Lake Ak-Suat. During this time up to 100 birds gathered at this lake, however mostly only adult birds. The young birds who are easily distinguishable by their yellowish feathers were only occasionally present. The relatively large numbers would indicate that the Siberian white crane is more numerous as a breeding bird in west Siberia than the rare observations might imply. However it belongs to the birds in danger of extinction.

The wintering grounds lie partially on the southern shores of the Caspian.

*Anthropoides virgo* L.--Shurawlji-Krassawka

Range: The Demoiselle crane goes much farther north in Asia than in Europe, yet its regular appearance in west Siberia is limited to the mountain and steppe regions. The northern border runs, according to recent studies, at about 52° in the western Kirgis steppes (as against 49°-50° in European Russia), thus farther north than Suschkin reported in his day. In the east the border moves to the south somewhat to Lake Tengis-Kurgaldshin (50° 30'), and rises again

to about 53° near Slawgorod and in the southern Kulunda steppe. As a definite bird of the steppes, it is missing right east of the Obj and does not reappear until the Jenissei steppes at Abakan, again up to above 53°N.

Outside of this normal range there are several instances of breeding much farther north which have been confirmed. Thus Schastowski in 1903 found a nest with two eggs near the village of Budashki near Kainsk, that is above 55° and hunters in 1917 told me that Demoiselle cranes were present here, now seen only occasionally. Furthermore it is seen on the Obj about 80 km north of Nowossibirsk in summer.

Ecology and Life History: The Demoiselle crane prefers the dry *Stipa* and *Artemisia* steppes with salt outcrops. In the western Kirgis steppes its presence is even limited to this vegetation, according to de Livron. For its nest it chooses however the vicinity of lakes or streams. In the Altai mountains it goes up to 1900 meters altitude and likes stony high steppes.

A little depression<sup>in the gravel</sup> serves as a nest, or the eggs are also laid directly on the stony ground. The clutch is laid in mid May in the Kirgis steppe; near Kainsk in the Baraba steppe fresh eggs were found May 24. Flight capable chicks are seen already at the beginning of July in the

Kirgis steppe; in the Abakan steppe the chicks cannot yet fly at the end of July, but know how to hide themselves astonishingly well in the completely open steppes. Grote already reported the breeding behavior in southern Russian.

In the Kirgis steppe the Demoiselle crane arrives about mid April, thus a bit later than the common crane. It reaches the Altai mountains the beginning to middle of May.

The Demoiselle cranes begin to band together in smaller or larger flocks already at the end of July and beginning of August and soon after that they migrate. Suschkin saw the last birds in the Altai on August 17.

At the end of August in 1919 on the lower Tschuly-schman I observed the birds that nested there and Folitarek reports the migration from the same region at the beginning of September.