

Erratic cranes in Kamchatka

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Abstract

This paper summarizes the knowledge about cranes in Kamchatka.

The Kamchatka peninsula lies outside the distribution area of most Palaearctic crane species. Only the Sandhill Crane breeds near its northern border. This species has expanded its area in recent years, it has been observed more frequently there and it may be an occasional breeder in the peninsula. The scarce data in the works and archives of explorers, naturalists and scientists, who were the first to visit Kamchatka, as well as in surveys of other authors (Steller, Krasheninnikov, Pallas, Bormanotov etc) may refer to the flights and even the migration of the Sandhill Crane. We could not find any reliable data on the occurrence of other crane species in old sources.

We have not found any crane bones in the course of archaeological excavations. The human food remains of neolithic settlements (Cape of Lopatka, settlement of Zhupanovo, Lake Ushkovskoye), dating back to 3000 years ago, do not contain any crane bones (Verescagin & Nikolaev 1979, Burcak-Abramovic et al. 1987).

This can be explained by the geographical relationships between the avifauna of Kamchatka and its historic development. The development of Kamchatka in the late pleistocene and holocene proves that the present fauna of the tundra and the boglands has mainly been formed from the north influenced by the semiarctic and hypoarctic fauna of continental areas (Koryaki highlands, Parapolski dol plain, the river basin of the Anadyr). This was due to the insular isolation of Kamchatka from the south and to a definite inversion of natural zones in the coastal areas of the Bering Sea where associations characteristic of the tundra spread farther to the south. Therefore, no other crane species than the Sandhill Crane was able to reach Kamchatka from the north.

Therefore, the occurrence of the following crane species in Kamchatka is of particular interest:

The Japanese Crane

On June 19, 1988, an individual of this species was recorded in the volcanic calder of Uzon (eastern Kamchatka, 650 m above sea level) (Nikolayenko and Shilnikov, pers. comm.).

Probably the same bird had been observed on the shores of the Shumnaya and Tikhaya Rivers a few days earlier. This is the first record of the species in Kamchatka.

The Demoiselle Crane

On September 25, 1987, a solitary bird was observed on a meadow in the estuary of the Kamalnaya River, in the extreme southern part of Kamchatka. Besides, there is a published note (Rakhilin 1965) on the occurrence of the species in the north-western part of the peninsula, but this record does not seem reliable.

The Siberian Crane

In the autumn of 1987, the editorial board of the "Kamchatskaya Pravda" asked the research workers of the Kronotsk nature reserve to comment on a letter by A. Kozyrev, a member of a geological team, who wrote that at the beginning of August, 1987 he had observed an individual of the species feeding in the mown fields near the village of Lazo (in the middle course of the Kamchatka River) during a few hours at the beginning of August, 1987. The author of the letter was sure that it was a Siberian Crane since this species could not be confused with any other crane species. However, none of the local residents had seen a Siberian Crane whereas an individual of the White Heron, a rare species in Kamchatka, had been observed by a number of people. It is quite possible that the inexperienced observer might have been mistaken.

Thus, not only nowadays, but in the past as well, (at least for a few thousand years), the Kamchatka peninsula was and is outside the distribution areas of most Palaearctic crane species. Only individuals of the Sandhill Crane were recorded in the area until recently. More waterfowl and shore birds have also occurred in Kamchatka during the last years.

References

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