

CRANES OF JILIN PROVINCE

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ABSTRACT

There are six crane species in Jilin Province. They are common crane *Grus grus*, hooded crane *G. monacha*, red-crowned crane *G. japonensis*, white-naped crane *G. vipio*, Siberian crane *G. leucogeranus*, and Demoiselle crane *Anthropoides virgo*. Common, hooded, and Siberian cranes are migrants, that were found at Xianghai Nature Reserve and Momoge Nature Reserve in Baicheng District in Jilin. The migratory population of Siberian crane is the largest and its stopover period is the longest of the migratory cranes. The second largest migratory population is the common crane. The hooded cranes are few and also stop a short period. Red-crowned, white-naped, and demoiselle cranes are breeding birds in Jilin Province, but most of the birds are migratory. The breeding populations of these birds are distributed in the valleys of the Houling and Nen Rivers in Baicheng District; migratory populations are distributed mostly in Baicheng and Yanbian Districts. Red-crowned cranes were also found in Jilin District. The red-crowned crane is a widely distributed bird in Jilin Province. The breeding population of the red-crowned crane, which has about 20 pairs, is the largest breeding population of crane. The second largest is the demoiselle crane. The breeding population of the white-naped crane is the smallest.

Jilin Province is in the middle part of northeast China, 40° 52' 46" 18' N and 121° 38' 131" 19' E. With many rivers and lakes, open water covers an area of 10,422 km². The province affords suitable habitat and breeding grounds for cranes.

During 1982-83, we did a bird survey covering all of Jilin Province; during this general survey, we recorded the distribution of cranes in Jilin. In 1984-86, we studied the distribution and number of cranes in Jilin again. This paper reports the results of our surveys.

There are six crane species in Jilin Province: common, hooded, red-crowned, white-naped, Siberian, and demoiselle cranes (Figure 1).

COMMON CRANE

Common cranes pass through Jilin. They can be seen in Baicheng District, in such places as Xianghai Nature Reserve in Tongyu County, Momoge Nature Reserve in Zhenlai County, and Yueliangpao in Daan county. In Yanbian District, they can be seen at Jingxin in Hunchun County. Most of the cranes are seen in Baicheng District, a major stopover area in the province during migration. At this time, flocks of 50-60 are usually observed, but the largest groups number as many as 200 birds. Cranes in Yanbian District are much fewer and more scattered (Fu et al. 1964); only a few birds to a dozen or so now are seen. Common cranes pass through Jilin from late March to late April, and from late September to early November (see Figure 2).

HOODED CRANE

The hooded crane also passes through Jilin. Its distribution in the province used to cover Baicheng, Changchun, and Siping Districts (Fu et al. 1981; Zhao et al. 1984), but

in the recent years only small groups of 7-11 birds have been seen in the marshes in Tongyu, Zhenlai, and Daan Counties in Baicheng District.

RED-CROWNED CRANE

Red-crowned cranes are widely distributed in Jilin Province: mainly in marshes along the Huolin and Nen Rivers in Baicheng District; in areas along the Songhua River in Jilin District, and in lakeside marshes in Hunchun, Wangqing, Dunhua, and Antu Counties; as well as along the Mudan and Tumen Rivers in Yanbian District (Fu et al. 1981; Zhao et al. 1984). Among these districts, Baicheng has the highest concentrations of red-crowned cranes. Groups of about 40 birds can be seen here during migration. While some birds will stay and breed in Baicheng, most will continue migrating northward. Results of our investigation in 1982 showed that some 20 pairs stayed to breed at Xianghai Nature Reserve in Baicheng District. In the past two years, the number of breeding pairs has increased slightly. Also in recent years, it has been found that red-crowned cranes build their nests at Momoge Nature Reserve. Fewer red-crowned cranes, usually no more than 20-30, are seen in Jilin and Yanbian Districts. Scattered, these are migrating birds, never seen at any other time and never observed to breed there.

In spring red-crowned cranes usually migrate through Jilin Province between late March and early May; fall migration occurs between early October and mid or late November. The breeding population stays in Jilin Province from the end of April to early October. Unlike common and Siberian cranes that migrate in large flocks, red-crowns migrate in small groups of 2 to 10 birds, which can be seen in scattered places.

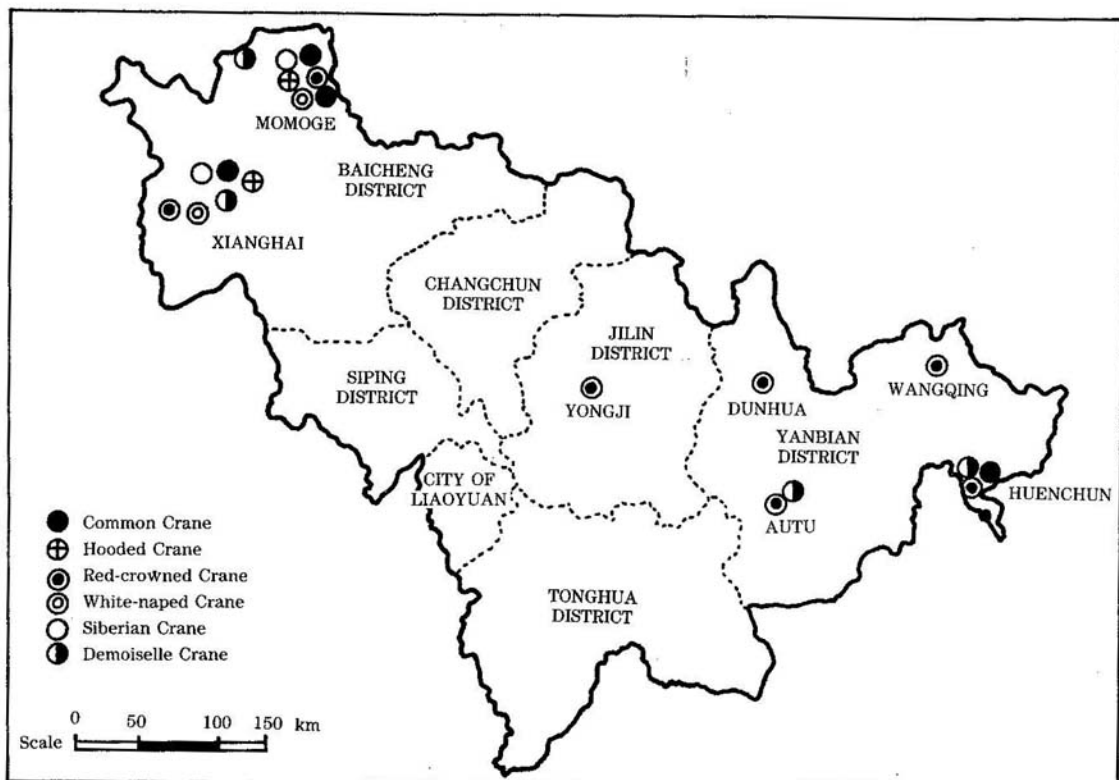


Figure 1. Crane distribution in Jilin Province.

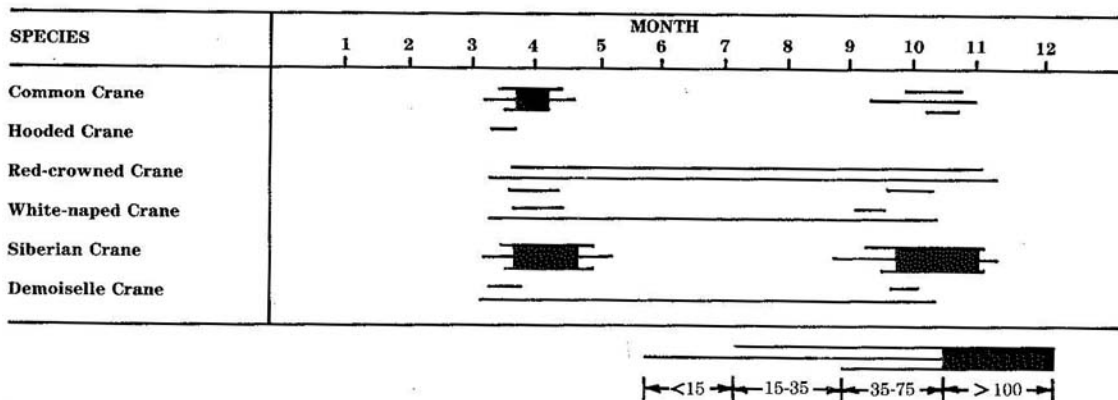


Figure 2. Monthly number of cranes in Jilin Province.^a

^aNumbers of cranes are indicated by lines.

WHITE-NAPED CRANE

White-naped cranes are seen mostly at Xianghai Nature Reserve in Tongyu County and Momoge Nature Reserve in Zhenlai County, both in Baicheng District. They also were seen in Changchun and Siping Districts in the past (Fu et al. 1981), but have scarcely been observed there since the beginning of the 1980s; they were reported by local people in these areas but not seen by us during the survey. In Jilin Province, white-naped cranes are mainly migratory birds. Small numbers breed in Xianghai, coming between the end of March and early April, and leaving between the end of October and early November. There are fewer white-naped cranes than red-crowned. In the past two years, about 30 birds have often been seen coming to Momoge Nature Reserve between late March and mid April; some individual birds have also been observed in the reserve during breeding season.

SIBERIAN CRANE

The Siberian cranes can only be seen in Baicheng District, at Momoge Nature Reserve in Zhenlai County and at Xianghai Nature Reserve in Tongyu County. Large numbers of this species are found in Jilin Province where migrant birds pause longer than migrants of any other species. Over 10 small groups were found in 1981 and 1982. The results of our three-year study from 1983-86 indicated that the

number of migrating Siberian cranes stopping over at the Momoge Nature Reserve usually reached about 300 both in spring and in autumn, with as many as 425 birds in the spring of 1985. During migration Siberian cranes form large flocks of 60-70 birds, consisting mostly of families. Both in spring and in autumn we have observed individual flocks of 200 birds, before take-off. Small groups of over 10 were also found in Xianghai Nature Reserve.

Siberian cranes are migrants in Jilin Province, passing through between late March and early May in spring and between mid September and early November in autumn. The usual duration of their stay in Jilin Province is about a month, although they have been observed to stay more than 50 days.

DEMOISELLE CRANE

Demoiselle cranes are seen only in Baicheng and Yanbian Districts. We did not find any in Siping District, but in 1982, we saw the skin of a demoiselle in a local person's house. Demoiselle cranes breed in Baicheng, only migrating through Yanbian. Momoge and Xianghai Nature Reserves in Baicheng District contain their major habitats. About 40-50 birds make up the population, slightly larger than the red-crowned crane population there. Only a few demoiselles are seen in Yanbian District: one bird in Antu County in 1980 and two birds in Hunchun County in 1983 (Zhao et al. 1985).

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