

Census of Cranes and Geese in Dalai Lake and Huihe Nature Reserves in Inner Mongolia, China, 2004

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During July 2004 we observed Dalai Lake National Biosphere NR and Huihe National NR, which are one of the most important habitats for waterbirds in northern Inner Mongolia. Information about the number and distribution of birds there is very limited. Dalai Lake NR is part of Dauria International (Chinese-Russian-Mongolian) Protected Area (usually named as Dauria International Nature Reserve).

We counted birds by detailed observation of all the lake's shores. In Dalai Lake NR we visited all wetlands suitable for cranes and geese. We observed the entire shore and water area of Ulan-Nur Lake (the center of the lake is about N 48°19', E 117°27'), about 80% of the shore of big Dalai (Hulun) L. (about N 48°58', E 117°27'), about 70% of New Dalai L. (about N 49°04'; E 117°57'), 9

500 km² (it is about 50% of the total area of wetlands in the reserve). The Huihe River (a tributary of Yimin R.) was very wide (more than 10 km in places). It had a very wet valley, which was covered by reeds, cereal and sedge meadows and included a lot of small lakes.

In Dalai Lake NR, almost all the geese and cranes were recorded at Ulan-Nur. We counted 40 broods of Swan Geese (*Anser cygnoides*) and 7 broods of Greylag Geese (*Anser anser*) (table 1). The big flock (about 2380 birds) of non-breeding moulting Swan Geese was recorded there. We also saw 5 non-breeding White-naped Cranes (*Grus vipio*) and 1 Red-crowned Crane (*Grus japonensis*) with 1 baby (second parent probably hid in high reeds). Only 3 broods and 23 non-breeding Swan Geese were counted at Dalai L.,

Table 1. The number of cranes and geese at Dalai Lake NR, 14-18 July 2004

Species	Number counted			Number estimated		
	Ad	juv	ad+juv	ad	juv	Ad+juv
Red-crowned Crane	1	1	2	2	1-2	3-4
White-naped Crane	5	-	5	5	-	5
Demoiselle Crane	38	5	43	78-110	9-15	87-125
Swan Goose	2562	147	2709	2360-2870	147-170	2507-3040
Greylag Goose	56	28	84	60-73	30-36	90-109

small steppe lakes, the lower part of the valley of the Kerulen and Orchun-Gol Rivers. We did not observe some territories at Dalai L. which were unsuitable for birds. Water level in all the lakes (except Ulan-Nur) significantly fell because of the drought. Many of the small lakes were completely dry. Dalai and New Dalai Lakes had wide, bare sandy and muddy shores, the shore of Ulan-Nur was covered with grass and reeds. In Huihe NR, we only partially observed the northern part of the territory (from about N 48°49', E 119°23' southward along the eastern border of the wetlands to N 48°26', E 119°08' and to N 48°42', E 118°49' along the eastern border) that covered an area of about

at New Dalai L. – 2 non-breeding Swan Geese. Demoiselle Cranes (*Anthropoides virgo*) inhabited different steppe sites near the lakes and rivers. During July 2004, Dalai Lake NR reserve supported more than 4% of the world population of globally threatened Swan Geese. The reserve is an internationally important breeding, moulting and also gathering site for geese. Between 20-23 August 2002, 3982 Swan Geese were counted there and an estimated number was 4500-5700 individuals (Goroshko & Songtao, 2003).

Wetlands in Huihe NR are difficult for counting waterbirds because of vast, high reeds covering the wide river valley. Therefore our census at the

Table 2. The number of cranes and geese at Huihe NR, 21-23 July 2004

<i>Species</i>	<i>Number counted</i>			<i>Number estimated</i>		
	ad	juv	ad+juv	Ad	juv	ad+juv
Red-crowned Crane	42	10	52	68-76	15-17	83-93
Hooded Crane	5	-	5	5	-	5
White-naped Crane	6	3	9	6-10	3-6	9-16
Demoiselle Crane	10	-	10	12-16	-	12-16
Swan Goose	424	530	954	615-930	770-1165	1385-2095
Greylag Goose	301	154	455	540-720	275-370	815-1090

observed territory is not complete, we were able to record only part of the goose and crane populations (probably 40% to 70% for different species). We recorded 20 families (18 pairs and 2 single adults with chicks) and 4 single (may be also having a family) Red-crowned Cranes (table 2). We recorded about 198 pairs of Swan Geese and about 74 pairs of Greylag Geese. About 70% of adult Swan Geese and about 29% of Greylag Geese had goslings. We counted about 2% of the world population of Red-crowned Cranes and about 1% of Swan Geese. We estimated 30-35 families of Red-crowned Cranes and 287-436 pairs of Swan Geese inhabited the observed area. We observed only half of the wetland area in Huihe NR. Therefore, the total number of adult birds in the reserve could be over 50 pairs of Red-crowned Cranes and more than 500 pairs of Swan Geese.

Huihe NR is an internationally significant breeding habitat for globally threatened Red-crowned Crane and Swan Goose. It is also a very important gathering site for cranes - 232 Red-crowned Cranes were recorded there during 27 September 1988 (Songtao, 1998).

References

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