



ZHURAYL

A Newsletter of Friends of Muraviovka Park (FOMP) – February 2019

The Year of Volunteers

By Sergei and Elena Smirenski

Our work in that faraway and beautiful part of the world has always been rather challenging, which we consider the normal state of things. This year, however, tragic losses added to this “normalcy” – we lost dear friends of many years who were instrumental to the Park’s well-being. On 15 August 2018, the Park’s Site Manager and carpenter of 18 years, Alexander Kolotiy, died from sudden heart failure. Alexander managed and conducted all construction projects at the Park since 2000.

And just a month later, on 19 September, Jim Harris, formerly President and then the International Crane Foundation’s Vice President for East Asia for many years, and one of the few key people who made the Park’s very creation and existence possible, succumbed to an aggressive cancer. Jim loved the Park and was its Board and FOMP Member since 1998. Both men are greatly missed by their families, friends, and

colleagues (see also pp. 12-16).

In November 2018, the FOMP Board had established a special fund in memory of Jim Harris to ensure that summer camps at the Park will continue in the years to come. We appeal to our dear Friends to contribute to this fund!

In spite of all heartaches, headaches and obstacles, we managed to accomplish almost all work plans for 2018, which was declared in Russia *The National Year of Volunteers*. It also marks 20 years since the FOMP group was established. Since then volunteers stand as one of the pillars of the Park life.

Staffing and volunteers

The Year of Volunteers theme perfectly reflects the diverse volunteers’ contributions to the Park in 2018. We are still trying to recruit and hire an Education & Volunteer Coordinator to lead the Park’s visitor and public education & awareness programs. We have been advertising this position since 2016, but have not yet found a suitable candidate. So

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in 2017-2018, our long-term volunteers carried out numerous tasks and activities listed under the Environmental Educator & Volunteer Coordinator position. We hope to fill this position in 2019. Meanwhile, we recruited five excellent volunteers with relevant skills and experiences who served as the Park's Interim Education Coordinators for four to eight weeks each from May through August. Nastya Skripnichenko from Moscow (on Photo 1 with children from camp for orphans) who worked at the Park in May 2017, returned for four weeks in June 2018.



Photo 1.

Prior to coming to the Park, she went through a special training program for volunteers and acquired relevant experience, volunteering for nature reserves in Russia and Belarus. Nastya provided excellent care of our captive birds during their most sensitive times including egg

incubating, chick hatching, and the first days after hatching. She also cleaned up and organized the captive breeding facilities and the Headquarter duplex, helped host and coordinate groups of local volunteers from Blagoveshchensk and the Tambovka District villages, organized our gift shop, and gave tours to our visitors. Nastya and another volunteer, Lyuba Semenkova (also from Moscow), prepared and led a class at our summer camp about causes and methods of prevention and suppression of wildfires. Nastya has excellent English language skills and her participation as a translator made classes at the orphans' camp a huge success.

Since February, Lyuba and her husband, Andrei (see their photo on page 19) have been designing new t-shirts and coffee mugs as Park souvenirs. In June-July, they also participated in the renovation work on the Headquarters duplex and Education Center, supporting summer camp classes, and keeping all electronic equipment in working condition. Nastya, Lyuba and Andrei also helped with our festivals. After returning home they continued helping our projects remotely.

Volunteers from Khabarovsk, Vera and Sonya Kudryashov (mother and

daughter), helped us prepare the Park's Headquarters and campgrounds for hosting the international camp, kept the Headquarters and Education Center in good order, planted flowers, and delivered food for captive and wild birds.

In January-October, over 600 Amurians have been helping us in various ways - assisting with fire prevention, festivals, preparations of the Headquarters and camp grounds for the season, and bringing food for wintering birds. We were especially pleased that the Tambovka District Administration provided transportation to volunteers and just visitors coming to the Park from their district.

In 2018, we also received growing support from local businesses. One company installed a large (6x3m) billboard about the Park in Blagoveshchensk. In June, an auto repair center in Blagoveshchensk offered regular, free services to the Park's vehicles (oil change, battery recharging, and other technical assistance).

And of course 13 amazing volunteer educators (8 from the US, 3 from Moscow, and 3 from Khabarovsk) prepared and conducted one of the best summer camps in the Park's history (see more under *Public Education and Awareness* subtitle).

Amur Region Legislative Assembly recognized valuable contributions of the Park's volunteers and awarded them with special certificates. Many of our 2018 volunteers are members of the unique-for-Russia international support group, Friends of Muraviovka Park (FOMP) that embraces people from US, Europe, East Asia, as well as from central and remote parts of Russia. The group will celebrate its 20th anniversary on April 13th, 2019.

Thanks to this wide circle of dedicated volunteers, our limited staff was able to accomplish almost all activities planned for 2018, plus some unplanned ones!

Wildlife and Watershed Research

To provide better living conditions for visiting researchers, our two maintenance staff and five long-term volunteers upgraded appliances and furniture in the kitchen, dining room, and bathroom and upgraded plumbing in two bathrooms in the Headquarters duplex in April - June. And thanks to a generous gift from the Park's friends, now we can use a 2014 Toyota RAV4 in great condition for field surveys, which significantly enhanced our field research capacity.

To continue ongoing surveys of birds of the Giltchin River Watershed led by Wieland Heim from Germany (Photo 2), in June 2018 one Danish and five



Photo 2. Wieland Heim with a Siberian Rubythroat

German researchers recaptured 10 Passerine birds, which they marked with geolocators in summer 2017: 3 Barn Swallows, a Red-rumped Swallow, 4 Siberian Rubythroats, a Yellow-breasted Bunting (Photo 3) and a Pallas' Grasshopper Warbler.



Photo 3. Recaptured Yellow-breasted Bunting with geolocator

In April-July, six Russian plant biologists conducted field studies at the Park and added four new species of vascular plants (including two orchids) to the Park's list. In May-September, Sergei and two local ornithologists conducted ground surveys (on foot and by car) of cranes and storks, monitored their breeding, and mapped their nest locations.

Unfortunately, the spring was very dry (a total of 25 mm of rain in March-May), so almost all of last year's vegetation in wetlands was burned by a huge wildfire in mid-March. As a result, Red-crowned Cranes had no fledged chicks (in 2017, there were 2 families with one chick each), and only three pairs of White-naped Cranes had successfully raised their young (in 2017, 19 families). In late May, 70 White-naped Cranes, 150 Hooded Cranes, several Red-crowned and Eurasian Cranes, and one Siberian Crane remained near the Park's Headquarters. Due to warm weather in the fall, cranes began migrating later than usual, in late September instead of August. The migrating cranes were noticeably more fearful of motor vehicles and people. White-naped and Siberian Cranes took flight when the distance to an observer was just over

1 km (~2/3rd mile). Local cranes were not as easily disturbed. We believe this indicates that cranes migrating along the flyways in the northern part of the Amur Region and adjacent areas probably experience intensive shooting from hunters and are afraid of the sights and sounds of people.

Also in May-September, Alexander Prokin, a student from Nizhniy Novgorod, and two local entomologists collected insect samples in the Park to identify species composition and estimate the abundance of insects that constitute a critically important food source for breeding birds. In January-February 2019, Alexander will process these data and prepare a list of insects in the Park.

In May-June, Olga Malysheva, a postgraduate parasitology student from St. Petersburg University conducted studies of ectoparasites of birds (Photo 4).

Antonina Pakusina and Tatiana Platonova, researchers from Far-eastern Agriculture University and the Center for



Photo 4.

Advanced Teacher's Education, collected the first batch of data for their research of heavy metal contamination in aquatic and semi-aquatic plants from several wetlands and from pheasants. These data were processed and the researchers are preparing the results for publication.

We launched these studies in 2016 under the direction of Jim Harris, ICF's late Vice President for East Asia, who was concerned that high heavy metal contamination in crane wintering grounds in China could be causing increased bird mortality. In 2019, we will begin collecting feather samples from water birds, samples of lake-bottom sediments, and will sample a larger number of lakes and wetlands.

Wildlife Conservation and Restoration Captive breeding

To enhance conditions for captive crane breeding for release into the wild, in 2018 we planned to complete construction of an outdoor pen for a second pair of Red-crowned Cranes. In January-March, we purchased lumber and other materials. Unfortunately, we are still trying to find suitable metal mesh for fencing locally (we cannot afford shipping it from afar).

We hoped to complete the construction of the outdoor pen by the end of the year, but this project was interrupted and its completion postponed to 2019 due to the untimely death of the Park's Site Manager and carpenter, Alexander Kolotiy. Our staff had also equipped our winter facilities for cranes and geese with new heaters.

In April, we located a one-year-old female Red-crowned Crane (named Kanazawa) for potential pairing in 2019-2020 with the young male Red-crowned Crane (named May) hatched at the Park in 2017. In early May, our colleagues from the Oka Crane Breeding Center (located 200 miles SE of Moscow) shipped Kanazawa to the Park. The two young birds showed interest in each other and a lack of aggression, but until September we kept them in adjacent pens to give them a chance to get used to each other, and to reduce risk of injury from aggression in the future. Unfortunately, the female was raised in direct contact with caretakers and is imprinted on people, but we still hope that in time, Kanazawa will be able to establish a productive bond with May. Two healthy Red-crowned Crane chicks (offspring of Oka and Kivili) hatched in May and are growing normally in their parents' pen we will move

them to the spare pen in February 2019, when their parents begin to demonstrate mating behavior. (The spare pen became available after we placed all six Swan Geese –two pairs and two males – into one pen until the construction of the new pen is completed.) We plan to release these young cranes into the wild in spring 2019, to increase numbers of this species breeding in the Park's wetlands.

The young Oriental Stork, whom we saved from starvation in September 2017, lived in one of our pens until September 2018, when we shipped now strong and healthy bird to the Khabarovsk Zoo. Last fall we reported this bird to the local wildlife management officials, who asked to keep the bird for a short while until they find a better place for it. We hoped to release it into the wild this past spring but were not granted a federal permit. We ended up spending over \$1,000 taking care of the stork for 12 months, which we still did not get back.

Supporting migrating and wintering birds

In fall 2017, we harvested part of the lure crop (corn, barley, soybeans, wheat, and sunflower), leaving enough leftover grain in the field for the birds gathering and staging at the

Park in the fall and spring prior to migration, and for wintering birds. In spring 2018, we spread 60 metric tons (Photo 5) of harvested grain in the fields close to the wetlands for migrating birds arriving at the Park when the ground was still frozen or covered by snow.



Photo 5.

In May 2018, we planted 80 acres of lure crops of corn, wheat, oats, and sunflower for cranes and other birds to create favorable conditions for more efficient and safe resting and refueling. We solicited and obtained donations of seed, as well as some discounted seed from local co-ops. In October-November, we harvested part of the crops, leaving enough leftover grain in the field for the birds gathering and staging at the Park in the fall and spring prior to migration, and for wintering birds.

Fire prevention and suppression

With support from the Amur Region Government and the Legislative Assembly,

governmental teams of firefighters developed firebreaks around the Park in the fall of 2017 at no cost to us. Unfortunately, in March someone intentionally ignited a wildfire inside the park burning over 90% of our wetlands.

In October, our staff developed firebreaks around the pine tree plantation, demonstration pens, campgrounds, and other facilities. In August, we discussed our plan to develop firebreaks with the Amur Region Ministry of Forestry and Fire Safety, but the heavy snow fell early this fall and the firefighters did not get a chance to make the firebreaks. In September, our staff and volunteers planted 100 oak tree seedlings (2-3 years old) and over 500 acorns that will eventually serve as natural wind- and firebreaks.

Grassland restoration

In February 2018 issue of *ZHURAVL* (article *The Singer of Meadows*) we wrote about destruction of a chunk of grassland, which was a critically important breeding habitat for the endangered Yellow-breasted Bunting, by a local farming co-op whose workers had illegally plowed this meadow. In 2018, we succeeded in making this co-op pay compensation for this

illegal act, and plant Brome grass as an initial step to restore the grassland.

Public Education & Awareness

Summer Camps

Our 24th annual international environmental summer camp was among the best in the Park's history. We credit such success to participation of six excellent Wisconsin educators (3 are veterans of this program); a seasoned educator/musician from Alaska; a bilingual

Russian American teenager from Georgia who could sing and play the guitar, teach Russian students various handicrafts, and help Russian and American participants communicate; a delegation of 6 from South Korea; an environmental educator from China; and highly motivated Russian teachers and students who also had sufficient English language skills to fully participate in the camp program. We almost doubled the number of participants (over 60 in 2018 compared to 30 in 2017) - students, educators, farmers and officials from Russia, USA, South Korea, and China, - but still could not accept even 50% of the applicants. (In February 2019,

two US team members - Sharon Hushek from Milwaukee and Susan Grace Stoltz from Alaska - will lead the first international winter camp in the Demilitarized Zone of South Korea (DMZ) -- a key wintering ground of cranes and geese from Eastern Siberia; Olga Trenina, a teacher from Khabarovsk and five



Photo 6.

Russian students will also participate.)

By February 2018, we formed a wonderful team of four Milwaukee educators sponsored by grants from Erica P. John Fund, Woodland Park Zoo, and Columbus Zoo: Sharon Hushek, the Team Leader & FOMP President (Photo 6); Shannon Olson (see photo with Sergei on page 32), Michelle Vidrine (Photo 7, with Wang Hui from China), and Meghan Wagner (Photo 8), the program veteran. They were joined by four self-



Photo 8

paying volunteers: Susan Grace Stoltz, an experienced environmental educator as well as poet/composer/singer from Anchorage, Alaska; two volunteers from Milwaukee, Wisconsin - Sam Hushek and Eric Van Driska; (Photo 8) and a bilingual student volunteer (the 15-year-old Emily Smirenski). See photo of Susan and Emily on page 17.



Photo 9.



Photo 7

In January-April, we organized and coordinated logistics in the US and Russia for the team's travel. We also advertised the summer camp program in the Amur and Khabarovsk Provinces and selected Russian students and teachers to attend the camps. In January-May, we developed a language ecology summer camp program for 2018 entitled *Under One Sky*, focused on wetlands and wildlife with a special emphasis on threatened species such as Red-crowned, Hooded, and White-naped Cranes, the Oriental Stork, and Yellow-breasted Bunting. We held five team meetings where Sharon Hushek trained the team to lead the summer camp program at Muraviovka Park. In late April, a good news had arrived: the Amur Ministry for Education had approved our application for a grant in support of our summer camp program. We received ~\$3,000, which we used to prepare the campgrounds for the visitor season. In April-June, with monetary and in-kind support from the Amur Ministry for Education, the Friends of Muraviovka Park and our volunteers, we upgraded the campground's fire suppression and kitchen equipment, water-filtering equipment, and bathroom facilities. We also conducted anti-tick spraying, which

resulted in zero cases of tick bites. At the Headquarters apartment for staff and volunteers, we installed 5 new refrigerators, gas stoves, cabinets, and metal shelves in the kitchen. We also installed metal shelving in storage facilities. At the Education Center, we installed metal shelves and organized the gift shop on the main floor. We made repairs on the ground floor, turning it into a usable classroom.

All the Park's facilities received a new coat of paint and the crane mural on the wall of the Education Center is being refreshed. In June, we produced special t-shirts for the camp participants with a flock of flying cranes and the words *Under One Sky* printed in English, Russian, Chinese, and Korean. Our volunteers, Lyuba and Andrei created the design for this shirt. The 10-day camp session at Muraviovka Park was conducted in English from 15-24 June. In the evenings, Russian students gave Russian language lessons to American educators and other international attendees. Six officials, ecologists and environmental educators from South Korea (Photo 10) and one from China attended the camp at the Park to learn about our experiences. Both Korean and Chinese educators liked the camp very much and are

2019 now looking into partnerships with Muraviovka Park and ICF to launch regular similar schools near the DMZ and at Poyang Lake - critically important wintering grounds for cranes and other waterbirds.

During this camp session, on June 24th, we also organized and ran our



Photo 10

traditional and popular Crane Dawns Festival, which always coincides with the camp closing event. Students and educators from language-environmental school and professors from the Amur Region universities gave classes and tours to over 70 visitors. The students also presented their 'camp graduation projects' in English, all dedicated to the wetlands and wildlife: songs and skits they composed, murals they drew. The next day the American team traveled to the summer camp for social orphans in Krasny Yar, located ~150 miles north of the Park in Belogorsk District, to lead

lead outdoor environmental education activities for 69 children ages 3-16.

Fall Crane Festival

On September 16th, over 500 Amurians came to the Park for another traditional and popular festival, *See You in Spring, Cranes!* They learned about the Park's programs and activities and enjoyed a concert by a local classical choir *The Revival*, led by Elena Belyaeva (Photo 11).



Photo 11

Contests

In spring, our partner, the Center for Aesthetic Children Education in Tambovka, organized a creative contest throughout the Amur Province, and two youth conferences about the Oriental Stork.

In October, a local businessman and friend of the Park Konstantin Komov initiated and sponsored a regional contest, *Feed the Wintering Birds*. This winter, local residents (mostly school students) made bird feeders

and submitted photos of their works to the jurors. Makers of the best feeders received prizes in December 2018.

Other News

With support from a media holding "2x2," we developed and installed a new sign at the nature trail with logos of the Park's supporters, about current population status, biology, threats, and measures needed to protect the endangered Oriental Stork. We also produced a new coffee mug with the endangered Yellow-breasted Bunting image designed by A. Mosalov; a t-shirt with the Oriental Stork image designed by Maya Valeyeva; and a bookmark explaining the current situation with the Stork and importance of Muraviyovka Park for its wellbeing. We also produced a new t-shirt with a Hooded Crane image in "cubistic" style designed by our volunteer Lyuba Semenkova. The mugs and t-shirts (see photos on page 10) are of excellent quality and coveted items among the Amurians, who bought many of these in 2018. Numerous shirts were also sold by Wisconsin volunteers during two public events at the International Crane Foundation in August and September 2018. All these outputs resulted in fast

growing popularity and support in the region to the Park and its activities, as well as in greater income from sales of our unique and high quality merchandise. In January 2018, the local media holding "2x2" published a set of postcards *Birds of Muraviyovka Park* that also became a popular gift shop item. We have been distributing these cards among our major supporters and key stakeholders in the Amur Region.

Public Awareness

In March-October, six programs about Muraviyovka Park were broadcast by the local TV. These broadcasts have also been raising public interest and awareness about wetlands and waterbirds, and we hope will bring more supporters to our work in 2019. Throughout the year, we maintained the Park's website and Facebook page in Russian, posting regular updates.

Other conservation and wildlife-oriented organizations (such as Russian Bird Conservation Union) continue to use materials posted on our website and Facebook page for their websites.

In October, Sergei gave a presentation at an East Asian-Australasian Flyway Partnership Communication, Education, and Public Awareness

meeting in Manila on the importance of joint scientific research in raising community awareness about wetlands, waterbirds, and successful conservation work. We also began searching for opportunities to develop partnerships among local communities on breeding and wintering grounds.

Publications

Also in October, ICF published a book entitled *Cranes and Agriculture: A Global Guide for Sharing the Landscape*. This book is an important result of discussions during the international workshop *Cranes, Agriculture, and Climate Change* organized in 2010 by ICF and Muraviovka Park. The publication included a *Case Study on the Agriculture Program of Muraviovka Park: Integrating Wetland Conservation with Farming* by Sergei Smirenski, George Danner, and James Harris.

We also almost finished selection and preparation of materials for the second book in the *Giltchin River Watershed* series - *Lakes of Muraviovka Park*, to publish in 2019. Then we will disseminate results of the 2016-2018 studies to educate the public and increase awareness.

Infrastructure

In November-December, we replaced old, leaky, and

unhealthy asbestos-cement roof on the Headquarters duplex with metal sheets. Earlier in the year, we built a new indoor pen for captive birds.

Future Plans Research

In 2019, we will expand our studies of heavy metal pollution in the Giltchin River Watershed. We will collect samples of water, lake-bottom sediments, waterbird feathers, and plants, to test them for heavy metal content. Our preliminary studies indicated high concentration of these metals even in lakes that for a long time were not exposed to polluted inflows from the crop fields.

In recent years, a campaign was launched in Tambovka District to reclaim remaining wetlands for agriculture. Migratory waterbirds, including cranes, are still using some of such wetlands for roosting. To protect these important sites, in 2019 we will conduct a survey of areas adjacent to the Park to create a roster of previously unknown breeding and staging sites of cranes and storks. Each site will be documented by a passport describing its location, existing and potential threats. We will also prepare a proposal to the local government to protect a

patchwork of these wetlands by declaring them natural treasures.

Fire prevention and reforestation

We have a good understanding with the Amur Ministry for Forestry and Emergencies that in spring 2019 their team will create firebreaks around the Park and its facilities well before the beginning of the fire dangerous season. Trees and shrubs that we plant on elevations among wetlands and on the river terrace will slow down the winds and serve as firebreaks, creating a mosaic of burned and unburned patches. In time, storks will be using tall trees for nesting, and dense groves with diverse tree and shrub species will support higher diversity and numbers of forest birds.

Our many years of experience demonstrated that survival rate of 2-3-year-old seedlings of pine (we initially picked the pine for its fast growth during the first decade of life), planted during mass planting campaigns in mid-late May, is rather low. Besides, such

plants need intensive and frequent watering, for which the Park just does not have the capacity. In September, we began testing a new approach: digging out young (2-4-years-old) oaks, maples, Amur cork trees, and hawthorns from existing dense groves where they would not have a chance to grow, and replanting them in open areas. We will expand this practice in 2019, using a wide variety of deciduous trees and bushes (oak, aspen, cork tree, birch, ash, maple, elm, hazelnut, hawthorn, wild apple) that do not need much tending, produce additional food for wildlife (seeds and fruits), and are highly fire resistant.

Wildlife conservation

We will plant 40 acres of corn, wheat, barley, and sunflower for migrating and wintering birds.

Infrastructure

We are currently raising funds to restore in 2019 one of the camp cabins damaged by fire in 2011, improve the campgrounds fire safety, finish construction of the outdoor pen for captive birds, and maintain the road from the highway to the Park's Headquarters in good condition.

Education and Public Awareness

In June, we will conduct the 25th International summer camp at the Park. These camps were initiated by Jim Harris in 1994, and thanks to his tireless efforts there were no lack of American educators to lead the camps and introduce interactive hands-on methods of outdoor classes about wetlands and their wildlife. Since 2001,

we began conducting these classes in English without translators, offering a unique for this part of the world opportunity to learn English from language bearers. This allowed educate students, who never showed interest in nature and conservation, about wetlands, cranes and other wildlife and involve them in conservation action. We will also organize and conduct our traditional annual crane festivals and special days (*Day of Migratory Birds, Day of Raptors*).

Thanks to continued generous support and participation of our dear friends and volunteers in Russia and beyond, we can look forward to a fruitful and exciting year 2019 at Muraviovka Park!

Photo credits: Margarita Agulina, Sharon Hushek, Jin Iktae, Sergei Smirenski, Olga Trenina

Photos below show our new gift shop items: t-shirt with the White-naped Crane made in in four beautiful colors and sizes (available for purchase from FOMP through Elena Smirenski), coffee mug with Yellow-breasted Bunting, and t-shirt with the Oriental Stork (also available from Elena in four colors and sizes).



Reflection on a Vision

By George Danner



It has been 26 years since I first traveled to the Russian Far East. This trip was the result of conversations between myself (an agriculturist), Dr. Sergei Smirenski (an ornithologist), and avian specialists at the International Crane Foundation.

Each participant was contributing to the development of a concept, or vision that was first advanced

by Dr. Smirenski. This vision was based on the premise that conservation of endangered cranes, and the fragile environment they lived in, could be protected and managed by educating the

local population and integrating specific agricultural production practices. These production strategies would be a benefit for both the local human population and the native flora/fauna; using the multiple crane species found at Muraviovka, as indicators of environmental health.

At the end of my stay in the Russian Far East, I watched Dr. Smirenski walk down the street, from my hotel room in Khabarovsk, and thought that this was my Aldo Leopold moment. I had to help the vision become a reality. In 1993, I returned to the Russian Far East and was involved with the formation of “Muraviovka Park for Sustainable Land Use”, in the Amur Region. The vision was becoming a reality and tangible. The site included large areas of wet lands and hectares of agricultural fields. The past 25 years have seen unimaginably positive results and a few setbacks, neither of which could have

been predicted during those early conversations. I consider this project in the Russian Far East to be a valuable part of my legacy. I am very proud that through the continued efforts of people in Russia, the United States, Germany, South Korea, China, and many others, Muraviovka Park for Sustainable Land Use continues to stand strong and persistent.

It is gratifying to know that the years of teacher exchanges, educational youth camps at the Park, the introduction of alternative and sustainable agricultural practices, the use of prescribed burning to reduce wildfires, and many other domestic and international activities continue to benefit both the local population and the environment associated with the Park. There is a *Friends of Muraviovka Park* group in the United States, and also sister groups in the Amur Region of the Russian Far East and in South Korea. The vision is now a part of the history of that part of the world.

In Loving Memory of Friends and Colleagues

by Sergei and Elena Smirenski



Galina Lukyanova
1968-2018

As soon as the Muraviovka Park's land lease was signed, we began developing our environmental education program. We had no facilities and no staff –just a huge chunk of land, so we began reaching out to local science teachers hoping for their participation. Galina Petrovna Lukyanova, ecology teacher from Kuropatino School, was among the first who responded to our appeal. Galina participated in twelve international summer camps at the Park, led classes at a camp for social orphans at

Krasny Yar, and helped conduct environmental education camps in Heilongjiang Province of China.

In spring 2000, Galina visited Wisconsin and gave presentations about the Park, its wildlife and activities in Wisconsin schools. We remember Galina as an enthusiastic, kind, friendly, and caring person. She gave many of her students a good start in life, and those who attended her classes, worked with her, or just met her will never forget Galina.





Alexander Kolotiy 1960-2018

Alexander Ivanovich began his employment with Muraviovka Park in 2000. He was instrumental in construction of practically all Park's facilities: grain storages, garage, sauna, summer camp cabins, showers, pens for captive-bred birds, a gazebo... Being in charge of the Park's woodshop, Alexander produced lumber for our construction projects. He also made beehives, doors, picnic tables and benches, both for the Park and for sale, which were in big demand among Tambovka District residents. During 18 years of his work for the Park, Alexander became a jack of all trades -he could fix vehicles and farm machinery, maintained all our facilities in good

working condition, participated in fire prevention and suppression, reforestation, and many other activities. Since 2000, many people came to work here and left, all kinds of situations happened, but no one, even the faulty party, had never heard a single rude word from Alexander.

At the same time, he was a connoisseur of men and was ready to resign whenever we hired a new staff whose behavior threatened the park and its staff. Alexander was an engaging man, so everyone who met him enjoyed his fellowship. He was a good provider for his family, doing everything he could to make more money, but he never tried to squeeze the Park for higher pay for the same kind of work. Instead, he just worked more -and not just for the money, but because he

could not sit around doing nothing. After the end of his workday, he would often begin working on some other project in the woodshop -in recent years, mostly making the beehives. Alexander stayed at the Park five days a week, spending weekends with his family in Tambovka, where other tasks were waiting for him - vegetable garden, home repairs, grandchildren... He always had the same answer to questions about his health - "No problem." Only during the last couple of years, he began complaining on "heartburn," and we did not realize then that burning sensations in chest are one of the symptoms of developing heart attack. Noone among his family, colleagues or friends knew about his heart problem.

During the day on 15 August, we discussed with Alexander our work plans for the fall, talked about our vision for the Park's further development... Later that day Alexander died from a sudden acute heart failure.

I would like everyone who visited or will visit the Park, live or work here, to remember: these decent living and working conditions were created by the hands of Alexander Kolotiy.

Sergei Smirenski



Jim Thomas Harris 1950-2018

Since 1994, over three thousands of students of all ages, teachers, and experts from the south of the Russian Far East, Moscow, Kazakhstan, USA, European and Pacific countries attended annual international environmental education summer schools (since 2001 – language and ecology schools) at Muraviovka Park. The majority of them do not know that throughout these years, the initiator and major promoter of these events was Jim Harris, one of

the leaders of the International Crane Foundation. Jim participated in a number of our camps with great enthusiasm, especially during the early years of the program, and loved to visit the Park and enjoy its nature, birds, and people whenever he had a chance. It is hard to underestimate Jim's role in the very creation of the Park and development and implementation of all its programs. Jim not only strongly believed that preservation of cranes, storks and other threatened birds depends on the level of

environmental awareness of people and on the collaborative efforts of all countries where these birds live in the course of a year. He also did everything possible and – for most people – impossible to involve local and international communities in such efforts.

Jim knew very well that to be successful, international collaboration and environmental education must be ongoing and well-planned work, not just one-time actions. Only due to his tireless efforts, wisdom, knowledge, charisma and personal charm, the first summer camp

at Muraviovka led by American teachers from New Jersey was successfully held in 1994 – two years prior to the official recognition of the Park, when we still had no staff or infrastructure. Since then educators from many states of the USA and other countries have been annually sharing their knowledge and expertise with their Russian, Chinese, and Korean counterparts. Most of these educators were able to come to the Park due to grants solicited by Jim. In 1997, he organized the first Russian-Chinese summer school at Muraviovka Park, followed in 1999 by a Chinese-Russian camp session in Heilongjiang Province. This first for China experience of giving biology and ecology classes outside of school building walls was so significant that soon summer schools on ecology became regular in almost all provinces of China.

Jim Harris was loved by many for his extremely kind, caring, gentle, and fun spirit. Those who were not aware of his family circumstances had no clue that Jim, together with his wife and colleague Su Liying, for over two decades have been taking care of their son Steve, who was turned from a blooming toddler into a helpless invalid by a

babysitter prone to violence. Already suffering from the terminal cancer, Jim appreciated a good joke and rejoiced wholeheartedly about successes of his colleagues and friends, or their children. Jim did everything to enrich life for Steve, who could not speak or use his arms and legs. Whenever possible, Jim took Steve outdoors to enjoy nature, attend ecological summer camps in Inner Mongolia and other provinces of China, or visit nesting grounds of Hooded Cranes in Lesser Khingan Mountains. Jim and Liying spent tons of time with their son, trying to improve his physical abilities, hosted a physical therapy doctor from

Russia for 6 weeks one summer, and even brought Steve to Russia for alternative treatment. They also worked hard on Steve mental aptitude and read lots of good books to him, in English and Chinese. As a result, Steve, who for many years could not communicate, as a teenager began not only absorbing the world around him but also – with Jim's help – writing poetry. Jim published two books of Steve's poems that reflect amazingly deep perception of nature – *Four Seasons, the Year of Our Awakening* (Scrivania Press 2010) and *When the Grasses Spoke* (see page 20) (Scrivania Press 2016).



Selected Steve's poems were recently published in English with parallel Russian translations (When the Grasses Spoke, Solar Wind Press 2018). Olga Trubetkoy, a member of the Muraviovka Park International Board of Trustees, provided beautiful Russian translations, and we are planning to publish another collection of Steve's poems in Russian and English. Jim's heartaches and concerns about his son's future he expressed in particularly sensitive and respectful attitude and care towards all children he met, and in his relentless service to the cause of nature conservation.

Just keeping the memory of this wonderful man and his invaluable contributions to the nature protection in Asia, introduction of new approaches to environmental education in Russia and China, and development of collaboration among the countries of North-East Asia in conservation of migratory birds, would not be enough. We must preserve, carry on, enhance, and expand these very important programs initiated by Jim. One of these programs is Muraviovka Park – the place that had a special part in Jim's heart.

We propose to establish a special annual award in the name of James Thomas Harris and are looking for potential donors. This award will support participation of the American educators, students, and environmentalists, as well as experts from North Asian countries, in our international language & ecology summer schools. Since 1994, these schools turned many local youth from indifferent consumers into wildlife conservation champions. Keeping this program active will be the best memorial to Jim – an outstanding leader in waterbird and wetland conservation, and our dear friend.

A moment when grasses spoke

STEVEN HARRIS

Barcode Area

We will add the barcode for you.

Made with Cover Creator

Under One Sky

by Elena Smirenski



Sunday, June 24, 2018 --the day of our traditional "The Crane Dawns" festival and the closing ceremony of the international summer camp "Under One Sky" -- was bright and warm. Over 70 people gathered at Muraviovka Park by 10 AM to be treated to a diverse program of exciting activities. The highlight of the day was presentations in English by 40 Russian school students who attended our 24th Annual International Language and Ecology Summer Camp led by American educators. This summer, we were blessed to have two artistic souls among the 8 US participants Susan and Emily (right and left on photo above). The creativity and passion of these two volunteers

enriched the camp and the crane festival programs. Susan Grace, an environmental educator from Alaska writes and sings songs inspiring love and appreciation for wild things. Emily Smirenski, a high school sophomore from Georgia sings and plays guitar, is very good at handicrafts, and is fluent in both English and Russian. Art and especially music touch our emotions and are powerful tools to engage and connect people around shared values. Russian students who came to the Park to improve their English skills returned home as more fluent and confident English speakers -- and strong ambassadors for nature conservation.

While preparing for the camp closing, the students came up with an idea for each of the three groups to write a special song that they would sing at the crane festival.

Emily's group decided to remake the famous song "Imagine" by The Beatles into a song about nature. They asked Emily to draft the words and then edited the lyrics together. Their performance at the festival received a standing ovation from the public. Here are the words to their song and you can hear the group singing this song on the International Crane Foundation Facebook

<https://www.facebook.com/savingcranes/videos/1930146120383173/>.

IMAGINE

Imagine there's no valleys,
No blue skies and clouds,
No clean water to drink from,
And the sun has gone.

Imagine all the people
Living life in ruins...

Imagine there's no mountains,
No birds or trees,
Nothing to see or marvel
And no flowers, too.

Imagine all the people
Living life in ruins...

You may say I'm a dreamer
But I'm not the only one.
I hope someday you'll join us
To keep this world alive.
Imagine there's no nature,
I wonder if you can.

No deer or birds.
A life of darkness.

Imagine all the people
Living life in ruins...

You may say I am a dreamer
But I am not the only one.
I know someday you'll join us
To keep this world alive!

The World in Your Hands

by Victor Chizhov

Student, Language School Repetitor (Tutor), Khabarovsk, Russia

When I think about my future, I often hear the words of my parents: "The world is in your hands, everything depends on you." A meaning of this phrase has acquired a new sound. I realized how fragile is the world of nature and how important it is to preserve the House in which we live. My ten-day trip to the world of nature was organized by the leadership of the research base of Muraviovka Park in collaboration with team of American teachers from Milwaukee, Wisconsin, and Russian school for the study of foreign languages called Repetitor. Our camp was located in a conservation area sixty kilometers from Blagoveshchensk. Living conditions were Spartan: wooden houses with a minimum of amenities. But I have never experienced such peace and harmony with the world as here.

We lived in accordance with the biorhythms of nature. We got up early - at dawn. Previously, I did not find the time to calmly enjoy the sunrise. And in vain ... It's so

beautiful! You feel an extraordinary burst of energy, as if every ray passes through you, charging with its energy of life.

The conservation area of the Muraviovka Park is engaged in preservation of rare species of birds. I am ashamed to admit that we alone cannot maintain the restoration of the park after a fire.

Scientists from America and Germany teach our students to take care of rare species of migratory birds. Foreign ornithologists have involved us in an interesting case. We ringed the birds in order to track the paths and timing of their migration, distribution, change in numbers, causes of death and life expectancy. We wandered through the forest and marshy meadow, checking every net and examined the nets every fifteen minutes. Each day we ringed twenty birds of different species and sizes. Special attention was focused on the Far Eastern stork and the RedCrowned Crane, which are listed in the Red Book.

In folk traditions, stork is a sacred bird. She gives joy to people, bringing news about newborns in the family. Crane is personification of dreams, the embodiment of high aspirations. In the old days, man endowed nature with soul and poeticized it. What happened to our souls, if dream and poetry abandon are our lives?

Everyone decides what is important for him and has a special value, how to relate to an outside world: as a consumer or as a person who understands its importance and wants to preserve it. When I was holding a bird in my hands, I understood this as a dream that I let go in free flight ... But it will return to me with good news. It will return the same way how storks and cranes return to their native places from distant countries.

*The nature beauty is in everything
and everywhere.*

*Just look and see how bushes
shiver*

*Enveloped in a morning dew
And make your heart engaged
in songs of birds.*

*Then you will learn
How to protect it all.*

A Place Dear to My Heart

by Lyubov Semenкова, Muraviovka Park Volunteer, Moscow, Russia



From June 2018 to the beginning of August 2018, for two months, my husband Andrei and I (on photo above) had the opportunity to work as volunteers in Muraviovka Park of the Amur Region. It was an interesting and very rewarding experience. It is difficult to imagine how the park lives until one day you visit it yourself.

June greeted us with mild, wet weather and the start of preparation for the park's educational season. In the second half of June, Muraviovka Park holds an ecological-linguistic camp.

Many teachers came from America, and there were also guests from South Korea. For their arrival it was necessary to prepare the rooms and help improve the territory of the park.

The park is exceptionally beautiful. By the efforts of Sergei Mikhailovich Smirenski, it looks like a beautiful forest where you can admire various rare trees, plants, and birds singing. And there are a lot of them. From sparrows and swallows that almost touch you flying by, to cranes.

On May 22 of last year, a pair of Red-crowned Cranes kept in the aviary

once again became parents. At the time of our arrival, the baby chicks were already about 2 weeks old. Parents fiercely guarded them, loudly warning everyone who came to the enclosures that they should stay away. The beautiful birds that I had seen in Muraviovka Park almost ten years ago proudly walked in the pens. Soon I learned to cook morning baby food for the chicks and fed them for six weeks. My husband and I also took care of the Oriental Stork, a temporary guest of the aviary rescued from starvation in 2017.

And how beautiful are the birds that fly across the park early in the morning and at sunset by the dozens ! During a day, in between camp chores, we could always admire the birds through our binoculars. They are beautiful, majestic, completely calm, live in the wetlands so close to a man that it's hard to believe! Of course, coming to the park as a volunteer certainly involves hard work. The park always needs help. Men's hands are needed to patch up and fix something

around the house after a long winter. Women's ones - to clean the territory, feed the birds, paint and do small chores. Nobody is lazy here; everyone is doing their best. People travel here with belief that their help will be meaningful for the park. In June there were a lot of volunteers. People from different cities: Khabarovsk, Nizhny Novgorod, St. Petersburg, Moscow ... It looks like everyone in the country knows about the park!

We lived together and had a lot fun. Everybody settled down comfortably, no one was unhappy. Here everybody always inquires about your health, jokes, supports and directs. And we had lunch and dinner outside at a large table together with birds and chipmunks that climb right on our feet. Do not be afraid, because no one here is afraid of them!

I was taught to distinguish the songs of some birds. Of course, I also read and heard a lot of interesting things about cranes. Now I will never confuse the Daurian and Common crane. I understand their color, size, features. For my husband and me it opened a whole world which we did not know before.

Sophisticated, beautiful, bright world of birds.

In the second half of June, a summer school took place in the park. It kept everyone very busy, but the entire experience was so unique and gratifying. American teachers are very open and kind. The kids in the camp, too. For the first time in my life, I saw how students constantly study from morning till night, and when it gets dark they play together with teachers, not wanting to sleep. The camp cabins are not the most

comfortable, but who cares?

They all became friends so quickly that when they were ready to leave at the end, they did not let their teachers go for a long time. I understood why the students talk about camp sessions so much. This is a unique camp, where children not only practice the language, they learn to love and understand nature.

Then it was July, the month when my husband and I were practically alone in the park. We fed the birds, solved some housekeeping problems. I also refreshed the mural on the park's training center wall. It took full two weeks of work. The weather sometimes played a cruel joke with endless storms and showers, but as the sun returned, I painted again and again. From early morning

until the sun disappeared below the horizon ... Two flying Red-crowned Cranes on a blue background. I remember them from my childhood. Probably like every local does, who knows the history of Muravievka Park.

I am very grateful for this opportunity, for the trust and for the warm welcome. To say that leaving was hard, is to say nothing. This is a place where there was a lot of work, friends, birds and real human warmth. For me, this place will always be dear to my heart.

When Grasses Speak

By Steven Harris

*Happy people will decide I cannot
think or feel deeply
or that I have nothing to give.*

*They look away as if I wasn't
there or ask questions
like I couldn't hear.
They miss my life.*

*At summer camp,
after the children heard my poetry
they started to look into my eyes.*

*One little boy sang to me
in Mongolian
about the grassland
that I love, too
and both of us remember
a moment when grasses spoke like
I speak now.*

A Volunteer in the Park

by Vera Kudryashova

Muraviovka Park Volunteer, Khabarovsk, Russia



There are places where one wants to return. There are people you meet once and after that you will never be the same. These words fully relate to Muraviovka Park.

I learned about this amazing place by chance when looking for volunteer projects not far from my home, in the Far Eastern region. Blagoveshchensk is really close—just a night on a train, so why didn't come to the Park before? We came together with my 14-year old daughter. I wanted to distract her from her gadgets, to expand boundaries of the world, and to introduce a different way of life and different values. This is my first volunteer experience, and it turned out to be broader and much more interesting than I expected.

Our help in the park varied and was not burdensome; you could choose an activity to your liking, such as feeding birds and cleaning the aviary, other minor chores, preparing summer camp for children's arrival, painting and whitewashing buildings, cleaning the park's territory. In addition, volunteers took turns preparing meals for the whole team. Work, in total, did not take more than 4-5 hours a day, with breaks for lunch and tea. Though there once. Also, there were Americans watching birds, and locals who often visited the park with their children and provided possible assistance.

In our free time, we enjoyed nature, swimming, sunbathing, watching birds, reading, taking pictures and, of course, communicating with each other. Once we went to Blagoveshchensk, strolled around the city and viewed an exposition in the local history museum. But something strongly pulled us back to the park. Being in the city was depressing. An amazing microclimate, natural landscapes, clear

lakes, voices of many birds, picturesque sunsets, clean thick air, no fuss, life in rhythm with nature – all of this makes a cherished part of Muraviovka Park. The second important part of this outstanding place is all the people here that we otherwise may never meet in our ordinary life.

How many new things we have learned! What wonderful, educated, interesting and bright people we met! Every person is a Universe, and when they open their world for you, you become richer. This is the main gift of our past summer! It is very hard to return to the city afterwards. It is hard to let go all the thoughts about our lives with understanding that we somehow do not live the right way and that our values are false. Material wealth, security and comfort do not make you feel that you live the right way. But in the park, we had such confidence.



Camp of 1996

by Stanislav Pavlenko

It was a spring time. On a routine pre-class gathering one morning, our school principal announced that two students, Kirill Kolodin and Stanislav Pavlenko, "for achievements in studying English, were awarded scholarships to attend international ecology camp at Muraviovka Park." We heard that some teachers and students from the US would be there. It was such great news to hear! So hard to wait until summer...

I still remember when a bus brought us and students from other schools to a small grove of trees. Kirill and I got 2-person military-style tent that we set up along with the others. The weather was beautiful. Our American friends were staying in the neighboring camp. We were waiting anxiously for our first encounter. We lined up in a circle at the nearby clearing for the first greetings. I still remember some names of our American friends. Take, for example, Tom. It was a funny story about him. We were told that a correct pronunciation of his name is "Tam" (means "there" in

Russian). Hence, when somebody called him aloud, all Russians would immediately ask "What's there?" Interpreter's name was Melinda, as I could recall. It was very difficult for her to say the name of my village Kosmodemianovka. Some other names I could also recall: Cory, Jay, Kate, 12-year-old student Matthew.

After our initial greetings we were promptly settled into camp routine: an early wakeup, breakfast, environmental studies where we experimented with soil and plants. There were various games in the afternoon. In the evening everybody was waiting for a traditional campfire. We laughed, sang songs, played guitar... One time, somebody said: "Look up!" I raised my eyes and saw a crane in the sky. It looked so giant and graceful flying over our camp. It was an unforgettable experience! Soon time for our tour was up. We had to say good bye to our new friends. Just before departure, Kirill and I ran to the American camp to say good-bye to our interpreter

who had become a close friend to all.

These are my childhood memories of the camp from 1996. Many years have passed since then. Now I've got my own family. My son is eight years old. Recently we went to Muraviovka Park again all together as a family. What a joy it was to find myself on the same clearing! Gone were the tents - they were replaced with nice little cabins. Cafeteria is a solid building now. However, our old study trailer is still the same, only grown into the earth a bit deeper. I shared my memories of that magical summer with my family.

Later we visited Muraviovka Park again with my son for the "Farewell to Cranes" festival. He kept asking me: "When are they going to fly away?" Alas, we saw them only in pens. What majestic birds they were! After this, my son was asked in school during one of his classes: what do you know about Nature parks and preserves in Amur region? My son was very proud to tell everybody about his visit to the Muraviovka Park.

Fragile Miracle of Nature

by Margarita Agulina

Teacher, Language School "Repetitor," Khabarovsk, Russia



Something incredible happened to me this fall. In the midst of September, at the launch of the school year one Saturday evening right after school I allowed myself to jump into the Khabarovsk-Blagoveshchensk bus and on Sunday morning I already was in the Amur Region driving to Tambovka. What drove me that way? A possibility of an extraordinary encounter with Muraviovka Park at the annual autumn festival. For the first time I saw a park in brand new colors! The carnival of colors, the play of shades, the ringing air and

bouquet of aromas are so complex and unique that no perfumer of the world can create it ... and the voices of birds merging sadness of farewell with promises of a new meeting in spring. Emotions are beyond words... By watching expressions on faces of children who came to the park I realized that they also did not remain untouched by this simple, yet fragile miracle.

Another bright touch of the skillful canvas was meeting the young cranes.

The little ones we saw at the end of June as fluffy brownish lumps now turned into beautiful, though sometimes yet not fully graceful "teenage" birds. Trails of their wings looked very touching and naive when one of the cranes tried to drive an audience away from the enclosure protecting the other in attempt to imitate his parents.

I would like to believe that such encounters will transform at least a small part in the minds of children and their parents helping them realize how fragile, in spite of all its beauty, is the world around us and how much it needs our care and protection.

**Unforgettable
Experience**
by Margarita Agulina

On June 14th, the unique language-environmental summer school "Under One Sky" began. The session was organized by Muraviovka Park (Amur Region), the International Crane Foundation

(USA), and the school of foreign languages "Repetitor" (Khabarovsk).

The uniqueness of this year's session was the number of the children who took part in it and in the wide geography of the places they came from. In addition to 30 children from Khabarovsk, there were the students from Komsomolsk-on-Amur, Birobidzhan, Nikolaevka, Tambovka, and Svobodny. Altogether, there were 38 kids! It was a bright mosaic, which quickly turned into a single, colorful painting.

A noisy road, bags and rain, some nuances with accommodations, the first shock of the newcomers, smiles and joy of those who had already been there, new faces, acquaintance with the American teachers... everything was completely mixed on the first day.

Traditionally, classes are taught in English by professional teachers from the United States of America. This year the team led by Sharon Hushek represented the two states - Wisconsin and Alaska. The teachers - Shannon Olson, Michelle Vidrine and Meghan Wagner, worked together with the volunteers Susan Grace Stolts, Sam Hushek,

Eric Van Driska and the Russian teachers, Olga Trenina, Kseniya Pudova and Margarita Agulina. Sergei Mikhailovich Smirenski, the founder of the Park, also shared his knowledge and experience with the students.

In addition to the traditional 6 hours of studies (3 hours before lunch and 3 after), older children who showed particular interest worked as volunteers and made their own contribution to the improvement of the park's territory.

Evening gatherings with a guitar and without it around the campfire, or in the cabins, or under the canteen's tent, depending on the games of the weather, couldn't but make the children friends. Sports games (volleyball, table tennis, football, badminton) united the teenagers and the adults, the Russians and the Americans, making them feel like a team.

One more thing which gave a special zest to the atmosphere of the camp was music. The children not only enjoyed singing English and Russian songs at the camp fire, but composed new and rearranged old songs, taught each other

and rejoiced at the results.

The final chord of the shift was the Crane Dawns festival. The students organized various stations for the guests of the festival including scientific and educational experiments, excursions to the aviary of the cranes, the stork and the wild geese, games and art. The festival attracted a lot of people who are genuinely interested in the future and work of the Park. Someone offered help, someone took an interest in what was going on, and someone contemplated the beauty around. Experienced guests shared their knowledge about the Park with those who came for the first time. It was very nice to watch our girls and boys who answered questions of other guests near the aviaries, showed them the most picturesque places and sites for observing birds and animals, and picked up litter dropped inadvertently by someone. It was the moment when I realized clearly and keenly that everything done by the Park and in the Park is not in vain. This awareness did not come at the level of theory: to love nature is necessary and it is good. No, it didn't - the awareness was practical! At the festival I saw the teenagers who DID care.

(Continued from page 24)

And this “DID” appeared precisely because of things they learned and felt in the Park.

Watching the starry sky and meeting the sunrises were other lyrical touching notes of the summer school. It was next to impossible to describe the glitter of the eyes, the expression of silent delight mixed with wisdom or, on the contrary, naive amazement and readiness for new things on the faces of boys and girls looking up at the sparkling sky covered with millions of diamonds, or welcoming the rising sun above the horizon. It was not without tears...

The closing ceremony, the farewell bonfire, the web of friendships, phone exchanges, hugs... the summer school was over. Unforgettable impressions, experiences, new knowledge, emotions, friends remained.

See you at future Muraviovka camps!



*Milwaukee teacher Michelle Vidrine
with Russian children*

Camp Reflections

*by Sam Hushek, Milwaukee,
Wisconsin, USA*



Two years later I was finally able to return to Russia, and this time I was fortunate enough to visit Muraviovka Park! Even with all of the firsthand testimonials and photographs, I had seen I was simply blown away by the beauty of this place.

I was told we were visiting during a year in which growing conditions were not ideal for the plant life so the diversity of wildlife was lower than usual, but I can't seem to wrap my head around that because the amount of wildlife I saw was mind-bogglingly vast. It's fitting that in a place with so much wildlife diversity, people from across the world join together to learn about nature.

I will forever be grateful for my experiences with Friends of Muraviovka Park and the International Crane Foundation!

When I look back at my two trips to Russia with the Friends of Muraviovka Park, I see two different, but equally rewarding experiences. My first trip in the summer of 2016, we were unable to attend the usual camp in Muraviovka, so camp was held at a summer camp in Khabarovsk.

Here I learned about Russian culture, and was able to help usher growth in the students understanding of nature and our role as humans in preserving sensitive ecosystems. As amazing as this experience was, I knew I had to come back and see Muraviovka Park for myself.

20 Years of FOMP

by Barb Thompson and Ruth Bauer



Barb Thompson

In June 1995, ten Wisconsin teachers traveled to the newly established Muraviovka Park in far eastern Russia to conduct an environmental camp for students from the neighboring villages. They returned to Wisconsin very excited about the park and its goals to educate the public, especially children, and to create a demonstration farm that specialized in sustainable use farming techniques.

The following year, 10 more WI teachers spent a month at the park and a satellite camp at Lake Udył (Khabarovsk Region) teaching environmental education to children. They returned to WI as excited about the project as the previous team. In 1997 a mixed group of Wisconsin



Celebrating the 10th Anniversary of the Park with Friends in May 2003

and New Jersey teachers, along with three WI students, again traveled to the park and a satellite camp at the Ussuriski Nature Reserve (Primorski Region) to continue providing hands-on learning opportunities for Russian students.

Excitement for this unique project in far eastern Russia continued to grow among American teachers and we quickly realized that we wanted to stay involved with this project even though we could not go to the park every summer. So, on September 26, 1998, a group of teachers who had participated in the camps, along with Jim Harris and Elena Smirenski

of the International Crane Foundation, George Danner, and Kennedy Gilchrist, met at ICF to discuss ways to continue their involvement. The idea of a "Friends" group was enthusiastically discussed and *The Friends of Muraviovka Park (FOMP)* was born.

An interim board was established with election of board members the following year; by-laws were created; a working relationship was established with ICF; and money-raising ideas were widely discussed. FOMP was the first "Friends" group established in association with ICF. At first we were not quite sure what our

primary role would be. All we knew was that we wanted Muraviovka Park to continue its existence in the Amur Region. We began meeting monthly with Sergei to discuss how we could best help achieve that goal.

Over the past 20 years we helped a great deal, I think. Our main objective became raising money to help fund whatever projects Sergei deemed most important. We raised monies for specific projects: a bus, farm equipment, fire suppression equipment, a car, flags, a button maker, seeds and various other items needed to help the camps and farm run smoothly. We raised money to help build cabins for the teachers, students and other guests to stay in during the summer camps. We recruited American educators to teach at those camps. FOMP sponsored local students and orphans so they could attend environmental camps at the park. We solicited equipment for the camps and the farm. We also raised money to help with the construction of the crane pens, grain storage buildings and the nature trail. We hosted Russian teachers, park employees and government officials



Selling brownbag lunches at ICF event. From left to right: Ruth Bauer, Kate Wolf, Francine and Bruce Jones

in Wisconsin, showing them how we run our nature centers, public hospitals and schools, and organic farms. During lean years, FOMP contributed money for salary for park employees and, whenever needed, provided stipends for summer interns and specialists who came to the park at Sergei's request. To keep the park office running smoothly, FOMP has provided money for office supplies, phone service, computers, and other technology equipment. And we always made sure Sergei had the funds to travel to the park whenever he needed to be there.

As I write and re-read this last paragraph, I realize that FOMP raised a LOT of money for the Park's activities. I wish I could tell you exactly

how much we raised and donated to this project. I am sure it is in the hundreds of thousands of dollars. And we raised it all through grants, generous donations from our very supportive members, designing and selling t-shirts, selling *matrioshka* owls, necklaces and bird whistles made by local Russian artists, and by making and selling lunches at several ICF public events. I'm sure all of you reading this newsletter have donated to one or more of these various fundraising activities. Thank you.

In addition to all the money raised and donated, FOMP board members have provided expertise in many different areas of park life. A website was developed so people could learn more about the park. This newsletter

has been produced yearly since the inception of FOMP, advice and suggestions have been provided for successful camp and farm operations, and camp curricula have been developed for both the park and sister camps in China.

has told me several times that when times were really difficult and he felt like giving up he knew he shouldn't/couldn't/wouldn't because he didn't want to disappoint all the other people who had worked so hard to make Muraviovka Park a success. What Sergei perhaps did not realize was that those of us who served

think any of us have ever regretted one minute we spent helping Sergei achieve his dream of creating a place where cranes and people can live together for the benefit of both. I sincerely hope that FOMP remains that driving force for Muraviovka Park for another 20 years... and more!



Barb Thompson (center), FOMP President & US Teacher Team Leader from 1999-2015, with the current FOMP President & Team Leader Sharon Hushek, husband John Hushek, FOMP Newsletter Editor (on Barb's left), and two Wisconsin teachers, Allison Perry and Kayla Hedtke, serving lunch to Russian teachers and students on the 4th of July 2013 at Muraviovka Park

I know that Sergei has always very much appreciated all the time, effort and ideas FOMP board members have given over the years. He was happy to have a group of people who cared about the park as much as he did to bounce ideas off. But, most of all, he has truly appreciated the moral support FOMP members have provided. He

on the board (and there have been 31 of us along with two student members) enjoyed being part of such a worthwhile and exciting project. Many of us had been to the park and we feel that we grew personally from our experiences there. Working at the park was challenging at times but... oh, so rewarding. I don't

Note from the FOMP Board:

In 1993, Jim Harris found support in New Jersey to his idea to begin summer camps dedicated to conservation of cranes and wetlands at Muraviovka Park in Far Eastern Russia, which at that time was being established. In June 1994, a team of ten teachers from New Jersey, accompanied by a filming crew, led the first environmental education summer camp at the Park for local school students. Next year Jim succeeded in soliciting support from a Wisconsin teacher foundation, and in June 1995 ten Wisconsin teachers, joined by one teacher from the 1994 New Jersey team, traveled to Muraviovka Park to conduct the second environmental education camp. Since then, we ran a camp or two every year, and in June 2019, we will conduct the 25th annual camp at the Park!

*At their meeting in November 2018, the FOMP Board decided to establish a special **Jim Harris Memorial Fund** so that summer camps at Muraviovka Park could continue indefinitely.*

Those who wish to donate toward this cause, please earmark your donations accordingly!

Memories for the Soul

by Daniil Burlakin, Student, Nikolayevka School, Amur Region



So, I will tell you a little about my memories of the summer environmental linguistic camp in the Muraviovka Park. At first, the weather was not very nice. It was raining, wet, damp and rather cool. The road to the park was impassable because of puddles and mud. Getting there, somehow we started to settle in the huts. On the first day, it was a bit unusual to share the same house with completely unfamiliar boys. However, soon we began getting acquainted, we found something in common, and in a couple of days we were not longer shy about being ourselves in the company of each other.. Luckily, after three days, the sun smiled at us and we continued to communicate

with other children. Together we began finding a variety of exciting activities. Fortunately, there was everything necessary for fun and spending unforgettable time with friends in the camp. The basis of our entire stay in the park was a set of classes led by the teachers from Wisconsin and Alaska who spoke only English. At these lessons, we studied environmental problems, nature pollution and water pollution in particular. We searched for solutions to these problems. Each of the participants contributed to the solution. In addition to the lessons, there were fascinating research experiments conducted inside and outside, role-playing and plot games.

This camp left a lot of memories in my soul. I will never forget the romantic sitting around the campfire, admiring the starry sky and the Moon. I will not forget those emerald green plains, those marvelous views of the wild nature. The shift also gave me a lot of great new friends. Each of them was unique in his own way. Each of them really gifted in their

own way. The teachers in the camp became for me the same close people, the same teachers as the teachers of my secondary school. Having visited the Muraviovka Park, you will not want to leave it. You will look for any opportunity to return there, to return to the evening gatherings, the friends, the teachers and the unforgettable unique nature. If I am given the opportunity to come back to the park, I will certainly use it. And of course, I recommend visiting this place to all those people who want to see the picturesque nature, to find new friends and get unforgettable emotions.

No Regrets

by Vyacheslav Van

The Muraviovka Park, which I visited in June, gave me a lot of memories and new acquaintances. I learned about cranes, insects and wetlands, about forest fires and reservoirs. It was just incredibly interesting. It was not only knowledge that this trip was rich in. There were stunning views of the nature, beautiful sunrises and sunsets, millions of stars that were not visible in the city because of smoke and smog. I have never regretted the time I spent at this wonderful place!

Place Where People Connect with Nature

by Mikhail Prodan



I was fortunate enough to visit this place twice, and I do not plan to leave this number unchanged. There are many reasons for that. I will try not to concentrate on details of my first trip, I will only say about my initial impression. We were walking in the rain along a dirty road through puddles and mud, loaded with bags, our pants were soiled to the knee, our sneakers were ready to be buried, and the camp was not so close. On that day, our bus driver did not dare to go to the end because he was afraid that he would get bogged down and it would be very difficult to control the equipment on a kind of "sliding ring", so we could only count on our own limbs and will. Thanks to Sergei

Mikhailovich, he was able to load our staff into his van and some of us were able to change into boots.

A thought flashed through my mind: "Well, it's okay, we do not control the weather, and I have plenty of spare clothes." At the entrance to the camp we were met by Americans; some of our children were already trying to embrace them but I felt some kind of constraint. I thought, "Well, I'll get acquainted, will make friends with everyone." But the most interesting thing was ahead: we already entered camp territory and now I found myself standing in the middle of a small clearing in the grove overgrown with grass. But where is our camp? You can see a house somewhere between trees in the shade. And there is another one. But where is camp? As it turned out, these houses (four of them) were the base of the camp.

I was surprised and shocked without a doubt. But a year passed, and though it is dirt and rain again (although this time we

were safely brought to our destination), I look forward to arriving. I can't wait to see that clearing, these familiar houses, a volleyball court, a half-open cafeteria... I will tell you about all the miracles a little later, but for now it is worthwhile to introduce you to a general idea of purpose and structure of the camp.

Generally speaking, Muraviovka is a natural park located one hour drive from Blagoveshchensk. It was created to protect important territories and rare species of flora and fauna. Camp is only a small part of the park built for students from different regions of Russia. Classes combine study of biology, ecology and English as teachers come here from the United States. In addition to improving language and communication of teenagers, a goal is also to get them acquainted and united with nature that they never see in the city; to raise understanding and importance of land and motivation to protect the world around us. The lessons in the morning and afternoon are not in an ordinary school format, but in an extremely diverse one; in addition to lectures, there are many practical studies and play sessions. Students are free in the evenings, but usually they get involved in

some interesting activities until their bedtime.

My personal experience

I will begin with nature: at a first glance it seems ordinary, but soon it becomes clear how much peace and tranquility is around. I think that Muraviovka provided the best anti-stress experience I ever had in my life. Here you discover an abundant world of birds and insects, which is fascinating to watch and makes you feel like a real scientist. The best place of the camp is a panoramic view of the marshes from the stairs of the educational building. During my sixteen years of life, I have seen many beautiful landscapes, but only three of them belong to a category of the most beautiful things I have seen in my life. And it is this trio that immediately comes to my mind.

Thus, Muraviovka's panorama is one of them. A case when you can tirelessly and endlessly admire the divine natural beauty. Another point is cranes; have you ever seen cranes? No, not in the films and not even in the zoo, but these wild cranes flying overhead. In Muraviovka it is not uncommon; and if you arm yourself with a camera with tele-lens and attentiveness, you can find crane nests among the marsh grasses—

and if you're lucky, even cranes themselves!

Our studies

I really liked the informal and friendly atmosphere and lack of strict orders. It was always possible to ask American teachers for help with assignments and not to get an answer like "think for yourself." In general, the lessons were either useful and fun, or fun and relaxing. I also note that majority of active games focused on development of team spirit and collective coherence.

Before the trip, we were a little intimidated by reading an excerpt from the statement that a child should be ready for many hours of intense work. In fact, classes do not require any super-efforts (but this does not mean that you don't have to work); the process itself can be done by anyone; the main difficulty is overcoming the language barrier.

Team and communications.

The Americans who come here are excellent not only as teachers, but also as people (simple confirmation: they cross half of the world on a plane at their own expenses and travel to such a wilderness to communicate with us, unknown teenagers). You can talk to them on the most intimate level about things we can't even share with your

parents. Our students' team was disciplined and friendly; you are not a man if you return from Muraviovka without friends. Perhaps this is the only case where the temporarily collective team has become a unique permanent family. Our accompanying teachers also made a pleasant impression distinguished by a positive attitude and understanding.

So, I praised this camp, but if you are going to get there, you need to know about living conditions. No, I do not want to sharply end my narrative on the negative point. But if you are a typical city dweller, then you will need some time to adapt since conditions there are similar to a typical countryside. Many of us did not see them as a difficulty or a test at all; it may be even useful to get such an experience, so you should not ruin all the plans because of the conditions since the purpose of the trip is completely different.

Thus, Muraviovka Park is a place ideally suited for the reunification of man and nature; here you will be filled with vital energy, make new friends, learn many new and useful things, and forget about laziness. Do come here and you will definitely get tremendous experiences in different areas of life.

2018 Russia in Review

by Shannon Olson

I was invited to be a member of the 2018 teaching team who would travel to Russia to engage students in science activities in the English language at Muraviovka Park's summer camp. I'd been a science teacher for 7 years at the middle school level working with many students who experience English as their second language. My life experience included having grown up on a small farm in west central Wisconsin where environmental issues were always important part of my life. I knew the camp participants had some English speaking experience so I was confident we would connect on some level. What I didn't realize was just how much this place, Russia, Muraviovka Park and its people would change me.

Lessons were prepared before we left for the summer camp. These included hands on activities and environmental articles in English and discussions about what our ecological experiences meant to us and how this could impact the environment and its inhabitants. The students were shy at first but eager to get to know us and learn. We wanted to know as much about them as well. I think our passion for science and the environmental issues we discussed was infectious. Students were engaged in discussions about how they will have an impact on the environment and how our choices change the habitat for the animals that reside here. The real hands on experience of seeing the damage done to the plants and trees by the spring fires started at the hands of human beings. The understanding of how groundwater works and learning that this is different throughout the world based on the geology of the region.

The teachers had many lessons to learn as well.

During our time together, students would visit us at our "campsite" and teach us the Russian language. This was a wonderful opportunity for them to be the experts and the teachers to be students. It felt vulnerable as we had to form sounds we are not accustomed to in our language such as making the rolling of the R with your tongue in the middle of a word or the sounds formed at the back of your throat. It provided us all with lots of giggles at just how difficult it is to be the student in a new language and understanding that we are not that different. around our wrist and tied it off as a bracelet to represent our connection to one another and to hold those cherished memories in the string until we meet again.



The next day, as we were loaded into the bus and driving away from Muraviovka Park for the last time, the students stepped into the road and stopped us to climb into the bus with us for one more tearful hug, handshake and high five goodbye.

The Camp for Orphans



The energy at the Krasny Yar Summer Camp for Orphans was palpable. The kids were so very excited to have guests and could not wait to see what surprises we had in store for them. The kids were so eager to play and participate in our activities. The challenge being that their exposure to the English language was very limited. Most had no exposure so our communications became about gestures of pointing

and modeling what we planned for them. This was eagerly embraced as these beautiful kids participated in our activities, learned new songs and made every attempt to share with us their knowledge and life experiences through play.

The older kids, ages 13 to 17 were a little more savvy with

their understanding of English. They acted as though they did not understand, however, their smiles and quick responses to our words informed us otherwise which made our interactions all the more enjoyable. In our short time, we made friends and received numerous gifts of generous proportions as they created jewelry, artwork and cloth bracelets to help us remember our time with

them. To know that these kids have been dealt a hand in life that is filled with challenge and sadness beyond their control and what their future life possibilities holds for them is heart wrenching. However, their time at the summer camp and the incredibly caring staff that provides these kids with dreams of possibilities and a future truly leaves one speechless. I am incredibly grateful for the opportunity to be a very small part of their life journey and hope my presence had an impact on theirs.

I went to Russia with the plan to teach. To teach Russian students about the environment and share my expertise. What I didn't realize was how I would actually become the student and how much I would change, heart and soul. I went into teaching because I want to do all I can to change the world. When the opportunity arose, I didn't realize just how much teaching in the world would change me to be kinder, more thoughtful, more understanding and willing to embrace the differences that really make us one in the same.

Voices of Parents

Natalya Lopatkina, the mother of Sophia Lopatkina, participant of the camp session "Under One Sky,, Khabarovsk.

Good morning, everyone!

Yesterday we had a lucky chance to visit our children in the camp. What a unique place this park is! We breathed fresh air, looked at the surrounding beauty and—you won't believe it – we wished we could stay there, too! By the time of our arrival the children had finished their classes and were busy with different activities. Some of them played volleyball; some tied their shirts or cleaned their huts; others discussed issues heatedly in the fresh air. We saw the family of the cranes living in the aviary and having offspring – two charming chicks. They will go on a free flight as soon as they grow up. There were also wild geese and a wounded stork in the neighboring enclosures.

The Americans and Koreans who we met in the camp were very friendly, smiling and ready to communicate. To my shame and regret I don't speak English, therefore, I could say nothing but "Hello", some gibberish and wave my arms. It was supposed to convey my delight from the surrounding beauties.

According to the children, they got used to Spartan living conditions and really loved being in Muraviovka Park. I envy them a bit. Thanks to the creators and the organizers of such summer schools!

Svetlana Sintsova, the mother of Elena and Olga Sintsova, participants of the camp session "Under One Sky," Khabarovsk.

A big thank you to the people who have created this park and work there!

Thanks to your work, we get to understand that there is a fragile world, which spreads beyond the borders of different countries and unites us all.

Muraviovka Park is a place where we learn the important mechanisms of wildlife and how to live without disturbing the harmony of nature.

Special thanks for the teaching staff from the US! They are so sincere, and devote themselves selflessly to their work. They are people of wide views and extraordinary thinking. In a short time, they managed not only to become teachers for the children, but also to lay out a solid foundation for friendships. They were distinguished by openness and kindness. They are amazing people and their work is terrific!

Due to the project at Muraviovka Park, all these things became possible. Thank you so much once again, and I wish you success implementing all your new plans.

From Elena's Kitchen *Russian Naval Pasta*

Ingredients: 1 lb best quality ground beef, 1 lb ribbed or twisted pasta (like penne, rigatoni, gnocchi, or fusilli), 1 lb yellow onion, 150 g (2/3 cup) butter, olive oil, salt, bay leaves, black pepper corns, tomato paste, garlic, greens.

Boil 2.5 liters/3 quarts of water; add ½ teaspoon of salt; then add the pasta.

Reduce heat as soon as the water resumes boiling.

Cook as long as indicated on the pasta package. Then drain the pasta and immediately add 50 g (1/4 cup) butter.

While the pasta is cooking:

- Slice onions into uniform strips ("feathers") by cutting each onion in halves along the core and then slicing along the side.
- Sauté sliced onions in olive oil until almost brown. While sautéing, twice (with 1-2 min interval, this is important!) add 50g (1/4 cup) chunks of butter.
- In another small dry frying pan (no oil!), grill up to 8 black pepper corns (depending on your taste), then squash them with a wide kitchen knife.
- Sauté the ground beef in olive oil in another pan, constantly stirring it with a wooden spatula, watching how it changes its color from red to pink, and then to gray. Add 2 cups of tomato paste or diced tomatoes and chopped garlic (optional), mix, and cook for 1-2 more minutes before turning off the heat. When the ground beef is cooked, add salt, bay leaves, black pepper, and mix well. Mix cooked pasta, ground beef, onion and pepper together very well. Meat should get inside pasta pieces and envelop them. Sprinkle with chopped greens of your choice. Perform a special Russian Navy salute and enjoy!

Help them Grow with Adopt-a-Nest!

Adopt-A Nest is a great way to help protect nest sites for Red-crowned Cranes, White-naped Cranes, Oriental White Storks and all the other species that rise their young at Muraviovka Park

For a minimum "adoption fee" of \$50, those who adopt a nest (or receive it as a gift) will be acknowledged with a certificate, crane photo and a book about cranes, their habits and habitats. The package comes complete with postcards from the Park and a one-year membership in the Friends of Muraviovka Park. Repeat participants in the Adopt-A-Nest program receive a handsome refrigerator magnet.



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Visit our **WEBSITE**:

www.muraviovkapark.ru

Online donations are possible on
ICF website

[https://www.savingcranes.org/
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**Note the newly established Jim
Harris Memorial Fund for
summer camps (page 28)**

Please return the following information with your check.
Friends of Muraviovka Park Membership 2019

We hope you will renew your support of the Muraviovka Park and may consider an additional special gift. Please make your check payable to the ICF/FOMP and send to: ICF, attn. Elena Smirenski, P.O. Box 447, Baraboo, WI 53913.

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(Membership 1/1/2019 - 12/31/2019)

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Member contributions are tax deductible as
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Thank You!

Thank you!

List of organizations we thank for their monetary support (in ABC order):

Amur Region Ministry of Education and Science (Russia), Columbus Zoo (Ohio, USA), members of FOMP-USA, Governments of the Amur Region and Tambovka District (Russia), Erica P. John Fund (Milwaukee, USA), International Crane Foundation (Wisconsin, USA), Knoxville Zoo (Tennessee, USA), Publishing House "2x2" (Blagoveshchensk, Russia), Woodland Park Zoo (Seattle, USA), Likhach Autorepair Company (Blagoveshchensk, Russia), and educators from states of Wisconsin, Alaska, and Georgia (USA).

Friends of Muraviovka Park invite you to the

Annual Meeting April 13, 2019

*Please join us to hear from the
2018 Amur Teacher Team
and Dr. Sergei Smirenski!*

1:00-4:00--The Hushek residence

Hales Corners, WI

***Contact elena@savingcranes.org for more
information***

List of organizations we thank for their in-kind support (in ABC order):

Amur Ministry of Forestry and Fire Safety, Amur Botanical Garden (Far-eastern Branch of the Russian Academy of Science, Blagoveshchensk), Amur Legislative Assembly, Amur Region Ministry of Forestry and Fire Safety, Blagoveshchensk Institute for Advanced Teacher Education (Russia), FOMP in USA, Russia and South Korea, Moscow State University (MSU), Nizhniy Novgorod State University (Russia), language school "Repetitor" ("Tutor", Khabarovsk, Russia), Russian Bird Conservation Union (RBCU), Zoological Institute (Russian Academy of Science, St. Petersburg), agriculture co-ops "Baikal," "Dimskoye," "Muraviovka," "Amur" (Amur Region), students and professors of Blagoveshchensk Pedagogical University, students and teachers from high schools in Tambovka and Muraviovka, Civic Center in Nikolayevka (Amur Region, Russia), NGO "Victims of Political Repression" (Tambovka District, Amur Region, Russia), and ~600 volunteers from the Amur Region, Khabarovsk, and Moscow.

*Dedicated to environmental protection, educational programming, ecological research,
and sustainable agricultural development at Muraviovka Park and in the Amur River
watershed of the Russian Far East.*

FOMP is an affiliate of the International Crane Foundation

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