

What's New With Cranes and Corn?

By Jeb Barzen

International Crane Foundation

As traces of spring seep into the landscape around us it is natural to contemplate two important and related harbingers: The return of migratory birds and the upcoming crop season. For many of us, these two events are closely related but how they play out this spring will depend greatly on decisions that are made over the next few weeks.

In the past, products containing lindane have been applied to seed corn to prevent cranes from eating planted corn. Once the cotyledons emerge, cranes adeptly walk down the planted row, consuming kernels still attached to the young plants. Applying deterrents to planted corn works well because it makes the seed undesirable to the crane but it does not move the cranes from one field to another. Corn fields offer more to cranes than just planted seed and the cranes react to lindane-treated seed by continuing to feed in the field but consuming alternative food items like waste corn from last year, beetle larvae, mice, and other foods.

Lindane, however, is hard to obtain these days and without it, cranes may again damage the corn that you plant. The International Crane Foundation (a local non-profit organization) and Arkion (a bird management company) have led a coalition of interested parties to discover, test, and deploy alternatives to lindane so that the problem of crane damage does not re-emerge. We have applied to the EPA to use a new substance – 9, 10 anthraquinone - on corn much like lindane has been used in the past. We will find out in the next few weeks if that application was successful. If so, we are prepared to make the treatment available through normal farm outlets. If you are interested in learning more, please contact Ken Ballinger of Arkion at: ken.ballinger@airepel.com or 800-468-6324; or Jeb Barzen at the International Crane Foundation at: jeb@savingcranes.org or 608-356-9462 extension 125.

We hope that these efforts will allow cranes and people to continue their fruitful co-existence and, come spring, the first call of cranes will still be met with the excited anticipation of spring.