

# Organic farms help Thailand welcome cranes lost for 50 years

By Martha Mendoza  
The Associated Press

**B**URIRAM, Thailand — A fuzzy-headed baby sarus crane hatched on a rural farm this fall offers a glimmer of hope for wildlife conservationists, organic farming advocates, and a nation grieving after the death of their beloved king. That's because a chubby chick named Rice is the first of its auspicious species to survive after hatching in the wild in Thailand in 50 years.

The tallest flying birds in the world, 70 incubator-hatched, hand-fed sarus cranes have been raised and released over the past five years in Thailand's farm-rich northeast province of Buriram, whooping their startling two-toned song at dawn.

"The older generations told us about these cranes, they said they bring luck, but when I actually saw one in my field I was so excited," village leader Thongpoon Unjit said.

He and dozens of other farmers stopped using pesticides and parked their noisy tractors to help the birds survive. They hand-harvest for acres and leave large swaths untouched around nests.

Already the birds have brought good fortune: The farmers' organic rice sells for a premium at Bangkok supermarkets.

Forty-two of the cranes released in the wild have survived so far, and eight are living in monogamous pairs. But until now none have managed to successfully reproduce. Rice, now about a month old, likely pecked its little sibling to death, but that's to be expected, say the experts.

"It's been really fun to watch this family," said visiting ornithologist George Archibald, spying on the yellow-brown hatchling and its magenta-topped parents through a spotting scope. "I've been really touched by the intimacy of the parents to their juvenile. They're just continually watching that chick."

Archibald, co-founder of the International Crane Foundation, has advised Thai animal scientists throughout their efforts to reintroduce sarus cranes, six-foot-tall birds listed as vulnerable globally and extinct in Thailand.

"There are many challenges facing these cranes," said Archibald. "Will the farmers tolerate a little bit of damage in their rice fields? Will there be too many powerlines? Will the cranes fly into them? Will this landscape that has been absolutely trans-

## Japan actor gives his all to play shogi master in Satoshi

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hexagon-shaped tiles — with that decisive click against the board, their fingers placed just so.

The tension of the shogi scenes — two people facing off, sitting Japanese-style on the floor, in thick silence, except for the click-clicks against the board — is gripping, even to audiences unfamiliar with the art.

The intense rivalry that's also a respectful love story with Yoshiharu Habu, still a shogi star today, drives the film, as dramatic as that between top-level athletes — Ted Williams versus Joe DiMaggio, Martina Navratilova versus Chris Evert, Bill Russell



**CRANE COMEBACK?** Bird keeper Sarawut Wongsombat uses a crane costume to feed an eight-day-old sarus crane chick at the Korat Zoo hatchling center in Nakhorn Ratchasima, Thailand. Raising any type of crane to survive in the wild is a delicate matter, in large part because the birds tend to imprint on humans around them. Wildlife biologists who feed, care for, and transport the birds from zoo incubators to temporary outdoor habitats wear fake crane suits to stop the birds from bonding. (AP Photo/Gemunu Amarasinghe)

formed by modern man have a place that's safe for these enormous birds?"

Thailand's sarus crane colony disappeared in the 1960s after farms took over their habitat, pesticides wiped out the snakes and crabs they eat, and hunters killed them for their bright plumage. To bring them back, scientists borrowed a few sarus cranes from neighboring Cambodia, where a rare flock lives in a refuge. The United Nations Development Program helped pull together more than \$1.5 million for sarus cranes and two other endangered species in Thailand.

But raising any type of crane to survive in the wild is a delicate matter, in large part because the birds tend to imprint on humans around them. Wildlife biologists who feed, care for, and transport the birds from zoo incubators to temporary outdoor habitats wear fake crane suits to stop the birds from bonding.

At the Korat Zoo recently, birdkeeper Sarawut Wongsombat, sweating in his white gown, opened and closed a large sarus crane puppet mouth in his right hand while waving a tiny tilapia in front of the beak of an eight-day-old chick that wobbled on its skinny legs. The little bird refused the fish again and again, shaking its head and hopping away. But when Sarawut took a break, the curious chick gobbled a few mealworms it found in a bowl, followed by some pink vitamin water.

"He did OK for his first meal," said Sarawut, pulling off the costume.

About 100 miles north, two sarus versus Wilt Chamberlain.

While Habu gained a reputation as a cool thinker, Murayama dazzled with his unpredictable intuitive moves.

The movie closes with an unforgettably haunting scene. Soft wind whirrs on a street. A young shogi player, who had known and looked up to Murayama, senses Murayama's presence in the air, long after the master's death.

And then there he is, standing as he always did, big, smiling, gazing at what's ahead, an everyday street corner that serves as a profound reminder that such a legacy, such passion for the game, is eternal.



**RISKY TESTIMONY.** Widows of alleged drug suspects cover their faces to protect their identities during a senate investigation on drug-related killings in Pasay, north of Manila, the Philippines, in this September 15, 2016 file photo. The families of most victims in the drug war stay silent. Some who speak out are sheltered by a witness-protection program run by the Commission on Human Rights, which fears for the safety of witnesses while cases are investigated. (AP Photo/Aaron Favila, File)

## Speaking out for drug war victims, Filipina goes into hiding

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that they could not have done so. One of Jaypee's arms, they said, had been broken.

It wasn't the first time a drug suspect was fatally shot in police detention. A town mayor recently detained for illegal drugs and gun possession was killed by officers in a purported gunbattle in his jail cell in central Leyte province. Senator Panfilo Lacson, a former national police chief, called for an investigation and suspects the mayor, Rolando Espinosa Sr., was killed to prevent him from implicating other officials involved in illegal drugs.

Gascon said the officers in Kazuo's case may have killed her husband to cover any links that could connect them to drug crimes. Kazuo said Jaypee had met the two officers she accused at least once before, when he bribed them to get out of a previous drug charge.

The families of most victims in the drug war have stayed silent for good reason. Philippine media reported the story of one man who had doggedly pursued justice for months for his sister, who had been killed by unidentified gunmen in Manila. The man, who was not under the commission's protection, turned up dead in late October.

The death fits a pattern that has characterized Duterte's "war": those who speak out against it, or are perceived as doing so, often face consequences. They include journalists who've been attacked with hate mail and death threats by internet trolls, and foreign governments, rights groups, and critics Duterte has lambasted personally.

After senator Leila de Lima launched a congressional probe into reports of extrajudicial killings and called Kazuo to testify in August, Duterte suggested she resign and hang herself.

De Lima was later kicked off the probe by Duterte's legislative allies, a move Human Rights Watch slammed as "a craven attempt to derail accountability." Shortly afterward, she told journalists she feared for her own life. "Can I rely on the regular authorities in government? ... Can I rely on the (police) for my security?" she asked.

Carlo, the police spokesman, dismissed accusations the drug war was fuelling a climate of fear. But he said Kazuo had done the right thing by speaking out, because it helps authorities "go after the policemen involved."

Kazuo said she is now cut off from friends and family and does not even dare call them for fear her conversations could be tracked. On the few occasions she has met relatives, she's done so at the offices of the rights commission, which delivers groceries every week so she does not have to go out.

"I rarely go outside anymore," she said. "I stay inside the house, sometimes I read books, love stories ... I don't even want to go outside and walk."

Kazuo, who has a two-year-old daughter and a six-year-old son, gave birth to a boy in September. During a visit for a pre-natal checkup, someone recognized her, prompting commission officials to switch hospitals.

The commission is now protecting at least seven other witnesses in similar circumstances, several of which also have children. Its investigators are combing through 250 cases, many involving allegations that police carried out extrajudicial killings or other abuses.

They've received little cooperation from police, though, who've refused to release records for each death recorded so far. An investigator on Kazuo's case said police refused to release their autopsy report, so the commission conducted its own.

"It'll get worse before it gets better," Gascon said. "While Duterte is president, I do not believe people will be charged and held to account ... so what we need to do now is to prepare the evidence for the time we can have a proper reckoning."

Associated Press writer Teresa Cerojano contributed to this report.

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