



EASTERN CRANE BULLETIN

June 2016

The Eastern Crane E-bulletin is distributed to those interested in cranes in general, and specifically, the Eastern Populations of Sandhill and Whooping Cranes, as well as the continuing work for the protection of these birds and their habitats.

Wild Whooping Cranes hatch in Louisiana – first time since 1939

Abundant in Louisiana during the 1800s the population of Whooping Cranes dwindled to only two in 1945 and when the only surviving crane was captured in 1950 were considered extirpated from the state.

In 2011 [Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries \(LDWF\)](#) partnered with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, U.S. Geological Service (USGS) and the [Louisiana Cooperative Fish and Wildlife Research Unit](#) to return the species to the state. The [White Lake Wetlands Conservation Area](#) in Vermilion Parish was chosen as the release site for juvenile Whooping Cranes. Its southwest coastal prairie habitat coupled with the abundance of flooded crawfish and rice fields seemed to be ideal breeding grounds for Whooping Cranes. And, it has now proven to be the case.

For the first time in over 75 years in Louisiana, and considered by biologists to be a major milestone in the reintroduction of the Whooping Crane in Louisiana, the first wild chick hatched April 11, 2016 and two days later a second chick hatched in Jefferson Davis Parish. The new parents paired earlier this winter and nested and produced eggs for the first time in mid-March. The female, L6-12, is 4 years old and the male, L8-13, is just 3 years old but they are dedicated parents.

“This is something we’ve been looking forward to and anticipating since the reintroduction began in 2011,” said LDWF biologist Sara Zimorski, who leads the Louisiana Whooping Crane project. “One of the major steps in restoring the species is successful reproduction. We’ve had several pairs nesting the last couple of years but until now no favorable outcomes. It’s an exciting time for us and all of our partners who have worked so hard alongside us.

“This couldn’t have been done without the assistance of private landowners. The support and cooperation of the many landowners and farmers on whose property the birds spend time is critical to the success of the project.”

According to LDWF, both colts were seen on May 11 with the adult cranes, but by late afternoon on May 13, only one was confirmed with the adults. As is often the case when there are two chicks, only one survives. The remaining chick, LW1-16 has since been observed with its parents and appears to be healthy and growing.

Read the LDWF press release here: <http://www.wlf.louisiana.gov/news/40102>

Read more here: <http://www.audubon.org/news/first-wild-whooping-crane-hatches-louisiana-wwii>
and here: <http://www.wlf.louisiana.gov/news/40179>

Reward offered in shooting deaths of endangered Whooping Cranes in Acadia Parish, LA

Just as Louisiana biologists were celebrating the successful nesting and historic hatching of chicks in Jefferson Davis Parish, two Whooping Cranes from the December 2015 cohort were shot and killed in Acadia Parish. The bodies were found on May 20.

LDWF has released 75 Whooping Cranes since 2011 and is currently tracking 38 whooping cranes. The Louisiana Whooping Crane flock has lost nine birds to shootings over the last three years, including two birds that were shot in Texas in January 2016.

Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries (LDWF) Enforcement Division agents are looking for leads regarding two endangered whooping cranes that appear to have been shot to death in Acadia Parish. The cranes were found just south of Rayne off of Hwy. 35 on the morning of May 20. The cranes were recovered and sent to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) forensics lab.

Up to \$9,000 is being offered by various groups for information that leads to the arrest and conviction of the person or persons responsible for the illegal killing of these whooping cranes. LDWF's Operation Game Thief program and the Louisiana Wildlife and Fisheries Foundation are each offering a reward of up to \$1,000; The Humane Society of the United States (HSUS) and The Humane Society Wildlife Land Trust are offering up to \$5,000. LDWF also received a total of \$2,000 from private donations.

Anyone with information regarding these illegal killings should call the Louisiana Operation Game Thief hotline at [1-800-442-2511](tel:1-800-442-2511) or use LDWF's tip411 program. To use the tip411 program, text LADWF and the tip to 847411 or download the "LADWF Tips" app. The hotline and the tip411 are monitored 24 hours a day. Tips may be submitted anonymously.

To read the entire press release from the Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries, click here: <http://www.wlf.louisiana.gov/news/40235>

Read the press release from the International Crane Foundation here: <https://www.savingcranes.org/two-endangered-whooping-cranes-shot-in-louisiana/>

Editor's note: *The following is a tribute to Jeb Barzen from Richard Beilfuss, President & CEO of the International Crane Foundation, George Archibald, Co-Founder of the International Crane Foundation and Jeb's many colleagues working on behalf of cranes here at home and around the world.*

A tribute to Jeb Barzen: 30 years of dedication to crane conservation

Since 1987, Jeb Barzen has played a key role in the [International Crane Foundation \(ICF\)](#)'s research and conservation efforts around the world. As Jeb now moves on to a new career path, we wish to reflect on his many contributions to crane conservation over nearly 30 years and thank him for his dedicated service.

Near ICF headquarters in Wisconsin, Jeb and his team studied a flourishing Sandhill Crane population, relating long-term changes in crane productivity to increasing population density. They developed a new technique for reducing damage to newly planted corn crops through treatment of seed corn with a non-toxic deterrent that is distasteful to cranes (and many other seed-eating birds), now marketed as Avipel. Jeb's understudy, Anne Lacy, now leads these efforts.

In Southeast Asia, Jeb was instrumental in establishing and managing Vietnam's first wetland national park, Tram Chim, in the Mekong River Delta. Together with ICF's Director of Southeast Asia Programs Tran Triet, Jeb developed the Mekong University Network, which trains faculty and students in wetland ecology and management across seven nations in the region.

Annual water fluctuations in China's most important wetland, Poyang Lake, sustain nearly the entire wintering population of Critically Endangered Siberian Cranes and many other waterbird species. Jeb's research team documented changes in the distribution of different waterbird species in relationship to varying water levels and associated availability of food. The results of this work have raised awareness among local and national decision-makers about the negative impacts of dams and other development on the health of the wetland.

Perhaps Jeb's greatest passion is ecological restoration. Jeb spearheaded efforts to restore and manage diverse prairie and savanna communities at ICF and across southwestern Wisconsin. Each spring we are reminded of Jeb's tireless efforts for the land when the first Pasqueflowers bloom.

We wish Jeb great happiness and achievements in coming years, and hope that we can continue to collaborate in making this world a safer place for the cranes. Thank you, Jeb.

Aransas-Wood Buffalo WHOOPERS

Whooping Crane "Stopover Habitat" project continues northward

Efforts to identify, improve and protect Whooping Crane stopover habitats on military bases along the cranes' Central Flyway migratory route is increasingly vital in attempts to assist the only remaining wild Whooping Crane population on the planet. The Management Team from [Friends of the Wild Whoopers \(FOTWW\)](#) and [Gulf Coast Bird Observatory \(GCBO\)](#) traveled to Oklahoma and Kansas recently to evaluate military land sites for suitable Whooping Crane stopover habitat. Sixteen wetland ponds were evaluated on three military installations.

Read more about the continuing stopover habitat work by Friends of the Wild Whoopers here:
<http://friendsofthewildwhoopers.org/whooping-crane-stopover-habitat-project-continues-northward/>

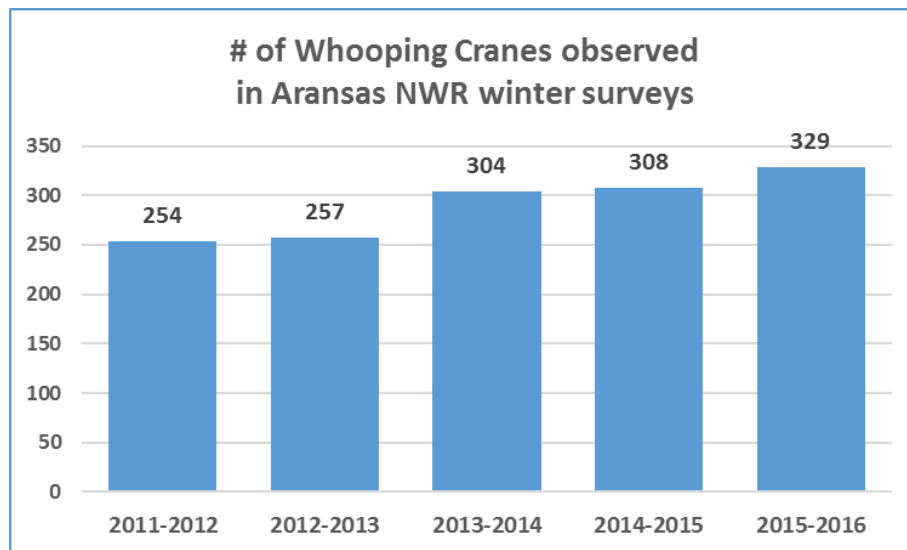
Help support this project by becoming a friend of the Wild Whoopers, click here to find out how:
<http://friendsofthewildwhoopers.org/support-fotww/>

Whooping Crane Survey Results: Winter 2015–2016 329 wild Whooping Cranes estimated

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service has released the results of the winter 2015-2016 Whooping Crane survey. A total of 329 birds were observed on the Aransas National Wildlife Refuge and surrounding areas. The estimate included 38 juveniles and 122 adult pairs.

During the course of the survey there were some Whooping Cranes outside the area considered to be the primary wintering area. "The fact that researchers and citizen scientists are viewing Whooping Cranes outside the primary sampling frame is an indication that the endangered species is capable of finding suitable habitat as the population expands," said U.S. Whooping Crane coordinator Wade Harrell in an interview with the [Victoria Advocate](#). Settlement money from the BP oil disaster and conservation easements have helped with initial land acquisition around the primary wintering area, providing protected habitat for the cranes.

Here are the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service winter survey results for Whooping Cranes during the past five years:



For a map of the survey area and more information, click here:

[Whooping Crane Survey Results: Winter 2015–2016](#)

And here:

<http://friendsofthewildwhoopers.org/whooping-crane-winter-2015-2016-survey-results-released/>

Whooping Crane nesting grounds in winter

Each year, in July, [Parks Canada](#) and the Canadian Wildlife Service conducts two aerial surveys over the Whooping Crane nesting grounds. They provide [Friends of the Wild Whoopers](#) (FOTWW) with the results of the nest count in June and later in August, the fledgling count. John McKinnon with Parks Canada shared some photos taken of the Whooping Crane nesting grounds during spring surveys in [Wood Buffalo National Park](#).

Click here to see the photos:

<http://friendsofthewildwhoopers.org/whooping-crane-nesting-grounds-winter/>

Eastern Migratory Population of WHOOPERS

As was mentioned in the March issue of the *Eastern Crane Bulletin*, the 2015 [Operation Migration](#) ultralight-led migration of the of juvenile Whooping Cranes from Wisconsin to Florida has been discontinued. [In a January 2016 statement released by the Whooping Crane Eastern Partnership \(WCEP\)](#), its partners agreed to modify rearing and release methods.

"In an effort to improve the success of the Eastern Migratory Population of whooping cranes, the [Whooping Crane Eastern Partnership](#) will modify all methods of rearing and releasing whooping cranes. The announcement came as the result of meetings among the partners to focus on the long-term viability of the Eastern Migratory Population. Modifications are being made to put emphasis on more natural methods of rearing and releasing young whooping cranes, which means discontinuing ultralight-led migrations and perhaps other techniques that rely heavily on human intervention as recommended by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service."

The International Crane Foundation has answered questions about these changes. Read more here:

Changes to the Whooping Crane Eastern Partnership: Your Questions Answered

<https://www.savingcranes.org/changes-to-the-whooping-crane-eastern-partnership-your-questions-answered/>

And here:

What's Next for Whooping Cranes: Your Questions Answered

<https://www.savingcranes.org/the-international-crane-foundations-role-in-whooping-crane-recovery-your-questions-answered/>

Patuxent Refuge alters methods in rearing Whooping Cranes

The Patuxent Research Refuge – nearly 13,000 acres of marsh and woodlands at the western edge of Anne Arundel County, Maryland – was founded in 1936 by President Franklin D. Roosevelt as the first federal reserve devoted to wildlife research. Today it is known as the [Patuxent Wildlife Research Center](#). The first Whooping Crane, a one-winged male named [Canus](#), arrived there in 1966. According to the U.S. Geological Survey, at the time of his rescue, he was one of only 42 whooping cranes left in the wild. Named for the cooperation between **Canada** and the **United States** to save the species, Canus went on to sire many of the whooping cranes hatched in captivity at Patuxent.

Breeding efforts expanded in June 2001 with the launch of a Whooping Crane reintroduction project by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. The goal was to raise and train an eastern population of cranes to be released into the wild for migration from Wisconsin to Florida. Patuxent was charged with raising the chicks and then Operation Migration was to teach them the migration route.

Since that date researchers have released about 300 Whooping Cranes in the eastern population. While those cranes hatched 64 chicks in the wild, only nine lived to fledge. These numbers are not considered a good outcome.

"There's something about these birds' early-learning experiences that affects their breeding," said Sarah Converse, a research ecologist at Patuxent. In the effort to pinpoint what was going wrong, it was decided by the [Whooping Crane Eastern Partnership](#), a group of federal and state agencies and nonprofits working to restore cranes, to move away from the costumed rearing of the young Whoopers and end the ultralight-led migrations. Without airplanes, puppets or costumes, captive cranes at Patuxent will raise their own chicks until fall. Then the juveniles will be shipped to Wisconsin where, the hope is, that they follow other migrating cranes south.

Click here to read more:

<http://www.baltimoresun.com/news/maryland/bs-md-whooping-cranes-20160311-story.html>

WCEP Whooping Crane Update: June 1, 2016

With nesting and wanderings in full swing, the [Whooping Crane Eastern Partnership \(WCEP\)](#), thanks the staff of [Operation Migration](#), the Fish and Wildlife Service, the Department of Natural Resources, and all of the volunteers who help keep track of the cranes throughout the year. This is a major contribution to the recovery of the whooping crane eastern migratory population.

To read about the 2016 nests, wanderings and updates on the EMP of Whoopers, click here:

<http://www.bringbackthecranes.org/technicaldatabase/projectupdates/2016/June2016.html>

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Alaska:

Sandhill Crane behavior study: 21 years and counting

Since 1995, biologists [George Happ and Christy Yunker Happ](#) have lived on 40 acres of permafrost taiga near Fairbanks, Alaska in the bottom of the Goldstream Valley. Each spring since 1996 a pair of Sandhill Cranes have nested on the [cranberry bog](#) on their property. "Millie" and "Roy" have been photographed by Christy since 2004, and over the course of 17 nesting seasons have hatched 14 colts. Seven lived to migrate south with their parents.

Christy records the Sandhills' daily activities in photographs and videos every day during the summer until the family group leaves in September to head south for the winter. Needless to say, the end result of these many hours of observation is an impressive and fascinating documentation of Sandhill Crane behavior. Check it out at the following links.

To read more and see photos of the colts, click here:
<http://www.christyyunker.com/GoldstreamColts.html>

Millie and Roy return for 21 year!
<http://www.christyyunker.com/16-1-arrival/index.html>

<http://www.christyyunker.com/>
<http://www.georgehapp.com/>

*For anyone who wants a handy reference to crane behavior, the **Sandhill Display Dictionary: What cranes say with their body language** (A Pocket Naturalist Guide, 2011), is an excellent resource. Learn more here:* <http://www.christyyunker.com/CraneDisplayGuide.shtml>

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Florida:

Florida parks need protection from private interest groups

[Paynes Prairie State Preserve](#), just south of Gainesville, was acquired by the state of Florida in 1970 and became the state's first preserve in 1971. It was designated a Natural National Landmark in 1974. Paynes Prairie comprises twenty-five distinct natural communities with more than 800 kinds of plants. Covering 22,000 acres, the preserve has diverse habitat where one can observe alligators, bison, wild horses and 271 species of birds. The preserve's website has a photo of Whooping Cranes and Sandhill Cranes.

The prairie basin was formed when a number of closely situated sinkholes eventually merged. The lush grasses, sedges and flowering plants that cover the basin act as a filter purifying water in the vast wetland. [Alachua Sink](#) works like a drain in the floor of the basin providing an essential "recharge" of the Floridan Aquifer – one source of Florida's drinking water. During its recorded history, the basin's character has changed little, except for periods when the area has flooded enough to be considered a lake.

As long-time advocates of, and promoters for the protection and wise management of natural resources in the public interest, the [League of Women Voters](#) view the recent announcement by Department of Environmental Protection Secretary Jon Stevenson as a warning flag for the well-being of Florida parks. Despite yearly cuts in funding to the parks, and the fact that in 2014, Florida's state parks produced \$2.9 billion for the economy and paid for 75 percent of their operating and management costs, Stevenson wants to make parks "self-sustaining" by giving private interests the right to graze cattle, log and hunt in Paynes Prairie and other state parks.

Editor's note: *Florida is in the company of other states facing the growing threat posed by a consumptive-use mindset by those overseeing what happens with our state and national parks and forests. Selling to the highest bidder is in direct opposition to the very reason state and national parks were created – to preserve and protect natural habitats and the wildlife living there, and at the same time allow public access to enjoy the park through non-consumptive activities – for generations to come.*

Whooping Cranes dance in "The Yearling"

Painter N.C. Wyeth journeyed to Florida in the 1930s to research his paintings for an illustrated edition of author Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings' Pulitzer Prize winner, "The Yearling." Wyeth's "Dance of the Whooping Cranes" at the [The Cici and Hyatt Brown Museum of Art](http://www.moas.org/reflections_press.html) in Daytona is part of the collection, "Reflections: Paintings of Florida 1865-1965" and shows Florida's palmetto prairie stretching into the distance behind the cranes. Wyeth gave the painting to Rawlings, who hung it above her mantle in her home at Cross Creek.

Interestingly, the last record of a wild Whooping Crane in Florida was in 1723 while *The Yearling* was written in 1939. Perhaps N.C. Wyeth's Florida research for his paintings was for the habitat to use as a backdrop to the group of dancing Whooping Cranes he had observed elsewhere?

For more about Daytona's Museum of Arts and Sciences go here:

http://www.moas.org/reflections_press.html

To see N. C. Wyeth's "Dance of the Whooping Cranes," click here:

<http://www.moas.org/images/galleries/neotmp495615.jpg>

N. C. Wyeth, *Dance of the Whooping Cranes*, ca. 1938

Reflections: Paintings of Florida 1865 – 1965

From the Collection of Cici & Hyatt Brown

Museum of Arts & Sciences, Daytona Beach, FL

Maryland:

Maryland Zoo rescues Sandhill from parking lot

Click on the following link for close-up views of the parking lot Sandhill Crane. It looks as though its bill may have been damaged.

http://www.greatbigstory.com/stories/on-the-brink-sandhill-crane?iid=ob_homepage_deskrecommended_pool

Minnesota:

DNR conduct aerial Sandhill Crane survey in northwestern Minnesota

The Minnesota Department of Natural Resources conducted an aerial survey of Sandhill Cranes during May in the northwestern part of the state including the area from Crookston north through Thief River Falls to the Canadian border.

Both nesting pairs and nonbreeding cranes were counted to better monitor breeding populations. The survey is timed to count the cranes while most are on nests incubating eggs.

Last year's crane survey report, "2015 Northwest Minnesota Sandhill Crane Breeding Ground Survey" (pages 40-55 of the PDF), is available by selecting Wetland Wildlife at: www.dnr.state.mn.us/publications/wildlife/populationstatus2015.html

For more information on Minnesota Sandhill Cranes click here: www.dnr.state.mn.us/birds/sandhillcrane.html.

Mississippi:

First Mississippi Sandhill Crane nest of the season

Historically, non-migratory Sandhill Cranes inhabited much of the Gulf Coast, but loss of habitat due to timber farming and wildfire suppression has mostly confined the Mississippi Sandhill Crane to the 19,300 acres of the [Mississippi Sandhill Crane National Wildlife Refuge](#). Crane monitoring has been conducted there since before the refuge was founded in 1975, and is currently led by Fish and Wildlife Service biologists Scott Hereford and Angela Dedrickson. With approximately 125 cranes left in the population, the success of each nest is critical.

[Student Conservation Association \(SCA\)](#) intern Henry Wolley, made the first observation this season of a nesting Sandhill Crane at the refuge.

For photos and to read Henry's full account of finding the first nest of the season click here: <http://www.fws.gov/news/blog/index.cfm/2016/4/27/Discovering-the-First-Observed-Mississippi-Sandhill-Crane-Nest-of-the-Season>

[Student Conservation Association](#) (SCA) interns working to promote, protect and study wildlife on public lands all over the United States. Since 1957, SCA has been connecting young people from all backgrounds with life-changing, career-making conservation service opportunities.

Learn more about the [Mississippi Sandhill Crane National Wildlife Refuge](#)

Nebraska:

Two fined for dead Sandhill Cranes and geese

Nebraska Game and Parks Conservation Officer Tim Williams helped investigate the estimated 150 dead snow and blue geese, found in Merrick County, Nebraska mid-March near the Platte River and a second nearby dumpsite of 10 dead Snow Geese and three Sandhill Cranes near Grand Island. Many of the geese and the Sandhill Cranes had been butchered for their breast meat then discarded.

According to Officer Williams Snow geese were in season at the time but it is illegal to kill a Sandhill Crane in Nebraska. The cranes were shot with a rifle.

Two Wood River men pleaded guilty and were fined a total of \$825 for killing the Sandhill Cranes and abandoning scores of dead Snow Geese. Dumping the geese amounted to littering and shooting them from a roadway and from a vehicle is illegal.

Ohio:

Camp Perry reviving wind turbine project

In 2014, after the [American Bird Conservancy](#) and the [Black Swamp Bird Observatory](#) (BSBO) threatened a lawsuit, the Air National Guard put the Camp Perry wind turbine on hold and announced it would carry out a new study of the project's impact on wildlife. The National Guard is now in the final stages of completing an environmental assessment, subject to review by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

The proposed 600-kilowatt wind turbine at Camp Perry was funded by a \$1.5 million earmark from U.S. Rep. Marcy Kaptur, D-Toledo, a "green energy" proponent. It would stand about 200 feet tall. Camp Perry officials have made it clear that they have no interest in generating renewable energy with this turbine. The sole purpose is to erect the turbine as an experiment in order to conduct "studies" to determine the impact to birds and bats, with an end goal of determining if the Lake shore is suitable for commercial wind development.

According to the BSBO website, "...Camp Perry officials have agreed to follow every suggestion the wildlife agencies recommended, including turning the turbine off every night during spring migration (1 April – 31 May), and during fall migration (15 July – 31 October). They also agreed to curtail the turbine at night when wind speeds are less than 6.9 m/s (15 March – 31 October) in order to protect bats. (This turbine will be shut down more than it's operating.)

"On the surface, this seems like a great spirit of cooperation and a genuine interest in protecting wildlife. However, if the entire basis for this turbine is to do a study measuring the impacts—but the turbine is never operated during the most sensitive times—the resulting study represents biased data showing little impact. As we've seen many times over the last decade, these corrupt studies are touted by the industry as proof that turbines have little impact."

Read more about BSBO's Responsible Wind Energy and the proposed Camp Perry Air National Guard wind turbine here: <http://www.bsbo.org/responsible-wind-energy.html>

The Sandhill Crane is considered an endangered species in Ohio with only 25 breeding pairs recorded in recent years. [Ottawa National Wildlife Refuge](#) in Ottawa County offers one of the best viewing opportunities to spot the bird.

Pennsylvania:

Sandhills now regular visitors to Keystone state

A 2015 fall survey observed 151 Sandhill Cranes in the Keystone State. That was an increase of 25 from 2014 and 53 more than in 2013, according to Lisa Williams, a wildlife biologist with the Pennsylvania Game Commission. Sandhill Cranes were counted in Crawford, Bradford, Lackawanna, Lawrence, Mercer and Sullivan counties during the survey.

Sandhills have now been reported in about 30 Pennsylvania counties. While the majority of those sightings have been during spring and fall migrations there are also reports of Sandhill Cranes during the winter.

Breeding by Sandhill Cranes in Pennsylvania is still relatively rare, Williams said. The earliest breeding recorded was in 1993 in Lawrence County and the first photograph of a nest in Pennsylvania was taken in 2009.

A male Sandhill Crane, born and banded in 2011 as a chick near Cambridge Springs, was seen with a flock in Florida in January 2014. The following summer, the crane returned to Crawford County with a mate and juvenile.

Texas:

Defendant Pleads Guilty in Texas Whooping Crane Shootings

During a pre-conference hearing on May 24, 2016 in the Beaumont Texas Federal Court, the defendant entered a plea of guilty to shooting two federally endangered Whooping Cranes, L1 and L14-14, in January 2016 in Jefferson Co. Texas. Both cranes were part of the reintroduced population in Louisiana but had been in the Beaumont area for approximately eight months.

A pre-sentencing report is to be prepared by the Federal Probation Department in Beaumont, Texas within the next three months. The [International Crane Foundation \(ICF\)](http://www.savingcranes.org) advocates for the maximum in fines and penalties in response to these senseless shootings.

Read the ICF press release here:

<https://www.savingcranes.org/defendant-pleads-guilty-at-pre-conference-hearing-for-texas-whooping-crane-shooting/>

Vermont:

Sandhill Cranes make surprise visit to Windsor County

Reports of Sandhill Cranes in east-central Vermont are still unusual enough to cause a stir among the local birding community. Such was the case on April 22, 2016, when a family of three cranes dropped in for a visit.

While sightings of Sandhill Cranes are still unusual, the cranes are not new to Vermont. A pair of cranes took up residence in Bristol, VT in 2005 and has nested there annually ever since. In 2013, a second pair was seen consistently in Fairfield and was confirmed to have bred last summer.

For photos and to read Executive Director of the [Vermont Center for Ecostudies](http://vtcostudies.org), Chris Rimmer's account of the encounter click here:

<http://vtcostudies.org/blog/sandhill-cranes-make-surprise-visit-to-windsor-county/>

Habitat Matters!

Future of Sandhill Cranes in the Columbia River lowlands

Sandhill Cranes are classified as an endangered species in the State of Washington.

The [International Crane Foundation](http://www.savingcranes.org) announced that on March 25, 2016 an important step was made for the protection of an important Sandhill Crane wintering and staging area in the Columbia River lowlands. A block of 541 acres of Columbia River lowlands was transferred to the [Columbia Land Trust](http://www.columbialandtrust.org), a Washington-Oregon land conservation nonprofit organization, from the Port of Vancouver USA, a Washington state agency, for Sandhill Cranes and other species. The land is already used by foraging cranes but it will now be augmented with crops grown for their benefit. The transfer culminates years of negotiation between the Port and Columbia River Alliance for Nurturing the Environment (CRANE), a Washington nonprofit chaired by International Crane Foundation Board Director Paul King.

This area is one of the few crane habitats in the United States within a major metropolitan area. The partners in the transfer are considering the possibility of nearby, but offsite viewing areas to watch and learn about these iconic birds without disturbing them.

To learn more from the International Crane Foundation about the land transfer, click here:
<https://www.savingcranes.org/a-future-for-sandhill-cranes-in-the-columbia-river-lowlands/>
and here: <https://www.columbialandtrust.org/crane-attraction/>

Illinois:

Juvenile Whooping Cranes use wetlands as migration stopover

The [Sue and Wes Dixon Waterfowl Refuge](#) at Hennepin and Hopper Lakes is a restoration project of the [The Wetlands Initiative](#) (TWI) of approximately 3,000-acres of wetlands, prairies, and savannas. Since the start of the restoration in 2001, 274 bird species have been observed at the refuge, including 24 state-threatened or endangered birds, and 56 species confirmed breeding at the site. In 2004 Audubon designated the site one of Illinois' first [Important Bird Areas](#). And in 2012 the Refuge was officially designated a [Wetland of International Importance](#) under the [Ramsar Convention on Wetlands](#).

On April 6, 2016, five juvenile Whooping Cranes, members of [Operation Migration](#)'s "class of 2015," made a stop at the Hennepin and Hopper Lakes in the Dixon Waterfowl Refuge on their first solo return trip from their wintering grounds in Florida to nesting grounds in Wisconsin. A map of their path north shows they diverted slightly west from the migration route they learned in the fall, which allowed them to find the Refuge.

"For these extremely rare birds to find the Dixon Refuge as they're migrating and stop there, it's an amazing validation of the work we've done to bring back the habitats that were historically present," said TWI Senior Ecologist Dr. Gary Sullivan. "It's a big part of why we restore wetlands."

The Dixon Waterfowl Refuge is located in north-central Illinois along the Illinois River, 40 miles north of Peoria and two hours southwest of the Chicago Loop.

For photos of the five, Operation Migration's map of their route and to learn more about The Wetlands Initiative, click here:
<http://www.wetlands-initiative.org/featured-news/2016/5/6/highly-endangered-whooping-cranes-stop-over-at-dixon-refuge>

[The Wetlands Initiative](#) is a nonprofit organization dedicated to restoring the wetland resources of the Midwest to improve water quality, increase wildlife habitat and biodiversity, and reduce flood damage.

Kansas:

Shorebirds flock to Cheyenne Bottoms

Every spring and fall, [Cheyenne Bottoms](#), and nearby [Quivira National Wildlife Refuge](#), host millions of birds during their seasonal migrations, including waterfowl, shorebirds, even Whooping Cranes that stop to rest and eat.

Covering approximately 41,000-acres, Cheyenne Bottoms is the largest wetland area in the interior United States and attracts nearly half of all North American shorebirds. Considered the most important shorebird migration point in the western hemisphere the area was designated a Wetland of International Importance in 1988 by the [Ramsar Convention on Wetlands](#).

Managed by the Kansas Department of Wildlife, Parks and Tourism (KDWPT) and The Nature Conservancy, the area is critical habitat for several threatened and endangered species, including the

only wild population of Whooping Crane, Least Terns, and Piping Plovers. Of the 470 bird species known to Kansas, 330 species have been observed at Cheyenne Bottoms. In mid-March thousands of Sandhill Cranes stop on the way to their staging area along the Platte River in Nebraska. April brings tens of thousands of shorebirds to the mudflats.

Interview with Rob Penner, The Nature Conservancy's Cheyenne Bottoms and avian programs manager:
<http://www.nature.org/photos-and-video/video/kansas-birds-of-cheyenne-bottoms-preserve>

To learn more about Cheyenne Bottoms and other Kansas wetlands visit:
<http://www.kansaswetlandsandwildlifescenicbyway.com>

Learn more about the [Kansas Wetlands Education Center](http://wetlandscenter.fhsu.edu/) that overlooks Cheyenne Bottoms and features many state-of-the-art exhibits that tell the story of this unique Kansas wetland, click here:
<http://wetlandscenter.fhsu.edu/>

Minnesota:

Sherburne National Wildlife Refuge

Congress established the 30,700-acre [Sherburne National Wildlife Refuge](#) in 1965 with Federal Migratory Bird Hunting Stamp (Duck Stamp) funds. The Refuge provides habitat for up to 40 pairs of breeding Sandhill Cranes each year. Upland habitat including grasslands to oak savanna to forest are interspersed with a variety of wetland and river habitats ranging from sedge meadow to deep water marsh. This diverse mixture of habitat supports over 230 species of birds, with approximately half of those species documented as breeding there.

Located in east-central Minnesota in Sherburne County less than an hour's drive from the Twin Cities the refuge is designated as a state [Important Bird Area](#) by the National Audubon Society.

Utah:

Swaner Preserve and EcoCenter

With 1200-acres and a 10,000 sq. ft. education and museum building in Park City, Utah, the [Swaner Preserve and EcoCenter](#) is not only a refuge for an abundance of wildlife but it also offers engaging environmental science educational programs for all ages – set in an urban setting.

A crane web cam was recently added to the EcoCenter observation tower. The webcam shows a Sandhill nest that has been active since 2008. Cranes migrating from the [Bosque del Apache National Wildlife Refuge](#), stop in Park City to nest for the summer. There are about seven pairs of Sandhill Cranes that nest on the Preserve, according to Nell Larson, executive director of the Swaner Preserve and EcoCenter. "The nesting territory is usually about 200 acres, so, the ones that come here have a slightly smaller area, which probably has to do with the high quality of the habitat," she said.

To read about the history behind the Swaner Preserve and watch an excellent video about the preserve, click here: http://www.swanerecocenter.org/about_us/history.html

And for more about the Ecocenter, click here: <http://www.swanerecocenter.org/>

Check out a nesting Sandhill Crane on the Swaner Preserve and EcoCenter's live web cam here:
<http://www.swanerecocenter.org/live-preserve-web-cam.html>

And here: http://www.parkrecord.com/scene/ci_29874313/ecocenters-new-addition-gets-up-close-sandhill-cranes

Wisconsin:

Whooping Cranes call revamped dairy farm home

18 years of hard work by Tom Jessen turned 82-acres of the former Jessen dairy farm homestead into a combination of agricultural land and enhanced wetlands – an area capable of attracting Whooping Cranes. So ideal are the wetlands that this spring a pair of Whooping Cranes not only nested but successfully hatched a chick there. According to the International Crane Foundation, it is the 69th recorded hatch in the wild in Wisconsin.

Jessen estimates he invested about \$300,000 to develop the land, northeast of Camp Douglas, into the Willow Wildlife Retreat. The once-dairy farm is now 40 acres of fertile soil for cash crops, 28 acres of wetland marsh territory, and a one-acre irrigation and fishing pond. He also constructed drainage ditches, planted hundreds of trees and developed miles of walking trails along the pristine property.

Possibly due to the property's nearness to [Necedah National Wildlife Refuge](#) and the [Meadow Valley preserve](#), three Whooping Cranes have chosen Jessen's property as their home-away-from-home.

Read more of Tom Jessen's story here:

http://www.wiscnews.com/juneaucountystartimes/news/local/article_78334ad1-04ae-5c39-b5da-df5aa984d7c2.html

Environmental Issues:

EPA proposes use of toxic pesticide [dicamba](#) on genetically engineered cotton and soybeans

According to a [Center for Biological Diversity](#) press release, on April 1, 2016 the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) proposed a plan to approve the use of *dicamba* on cotton and soybeans that are genetically engineered to tolerate the pesticide. Dicamba has been around for decades, but this new EPA decision would allow the herbicide to be sprayed directly on cotton and soybean crops – opening the door for annual *dicamba* use to jump from less than 1 million pounds to more than 25 million on these two crops alone.

Dr. Nathan Donley, a scientist with the Center for Biological Diversity expressed concerns, “Iconic species like endangered Whooping Cranes are known to visit soybean fields...and now they’d be exposed to this toxic herbicide at levels they’ve never seen before.”

From the Environmental Protection Agency Q&A about dicamba:

4. Is *dicamba* safe?

...Use of dicamba will not cause unreasonable adverse effects on the environment, including endangered species. The Agency assessed risks from dicamba to endangered species and found that there would be no effect on listed species from this active ingredient in the approved use area when the product is used according to label directions.

5. How did EPA assess the safety of *dicamba*?

...Used worst-case estimates for impacts on the environment, including risks to endangered species.

The Agency expects to issue its final decision in late summer or early fall 2016.

Read more here:

<https://www.epa.gov/ingredients-used-pesticide-products/epa-extends-comment-period-proposed-decision-register-dicamba>

Read the Center for Biological Diversity press release here:

http://www.biologicaldiversity.org/news/press_releases/2016/dicamba-04-01-2016.html

American Bird Conservancy seeks tougher siting rules for wind farms

Michael Hutchins, director of the American Bird Conservancy's [Bird-Smart Wind Energy Campaign](#), says wind turbines are likely to cause excessive mortality rates when they are located along heavily used migration routes or near important habitat where birds breed or feed.

The [American Bird Conservancy \(ABC\)](#) seeks changes on several fronts. However, it is difficult to accurately assess the scale of the problem, Hutchins said, because most of the data on bird deaths are private. The data generally are collected by operators of wind farms, and unless they involve public land or are part of a legal case, they are not accessible. Only Hawaii requires that bird deaths be tallied by a third party and made available to the public, according to Hutchins. He would like to see that standard adopted nationwide.

The Conservancy also advocates changes in wind farm siting and in mitigation for bird deaths and loss of habitat. Towards that goal the group has created a risk assessment [map](#) that identifies and rates important bird habitats across the country. Hutchins estimates that about 8 to 9 percent of the country would rank as the most critical habitat, meaning it should be completely protected from wind-turbine installation.

Read more about ABC's Bird Smart Wind Energy Campaign here:

<https://abcbirds.org/program/wind-energy/bird-smart-strategies/>

American Bird Conservancy Wind Risk Assessment Map

<https://abcbirds.org/program/wind-energy/wind-risk-assessment-map/>

Editor's note: *The following was taken from an article in the **Birding Community E-bulletin - April 2016**. The Merricourt (McIntosh and Dickey Counties, North Dakota – EDF Renewable Energy) and Ninnescah (Pratt County, Kansas – NextEra Energy Resources, LLC) sites pose high level threats to the endangered wild population of Whooping Crane as they are located in the cranes' migration route between Wood Buffalo NP, Canada and Aransas Texas.*

Worst Wind-Farms

Last month, the [American Bird Conservancy \(ABC\)](#) released a list of 10 of the worst-sited or proposed commercial wind-energy projects in the country from the perspective of bird conservation. New wind-energy projects are increasingly being planned and built, often with little regard for the risks they may pose to birds and other wildlife.

The 10 worst-sited projects was chosen by ABC to illustrate a range of threats to birds in various regions and habitats – threats that are far too common in the wind industry.

All of the listed projects illustrate the problems of poor siting and the limitations of current mitigation strategies, many of which are still untested for their efficacy. You can view the list of "10 Worst-sited Wind Energy Projects for Birds" here:

<https://abcbirds.org/10-worst-wind-energy-sites-for-birds/>

(You can access all the past *Birding Community E-bulletins* on the National Wildlife Refuge Association (NWRA) website: <http://refugeassociation.org/news/birding-bulletin/>)

Editor's note: *Surely, alternative energy is not 'green' if it is killing thousands or millions of birds annually. It seems that since the USGS study uses wintering crane data only up to 2007, coupled with the alarming rate wind farms are being erected the percentage of overlap between Sandhills and turbines will inevitably increase. And, while Whooping Cranes were not part of the study, they are a federally endangered bird occupying the same areas during migration and therefore facing the same risks. Click here for 2007 [USFWS Confirmed Whooping Crane Sightings/Central Flyway of the U.S.](#)*

Study claims most wind turbines in Southern Great Plains are low risk to Sandhill Cranes

The current placement of wind energy towers in the central and southern Great Plains may have relatively few negative effects on [Sandhill Cranes](#) wintering in the region, according to a [U.S. Geological Survey study](#) released April 20, 2016 (see next story, *Wintering Sandhill Crane exposure to wind energy development in the central and southern Great Plains, USA*).

The region is used by the midcontinental population of Sandhill Cranes, the largest population in North America, comprising approximately 650,000 individuals. They breed from western Quebec in the east, across the Canadian Arctic and Alaska to northeastern Russia in the west in a variety of ecoregions from Arctic tundra to temperate grasslands. This population winters from southern Oklahoma to northern Mexico, using playa and coastal wetlands.

Scientists with the USGS compared crane location data from the winters of 1998-2007 with current wind-tower sites in Texas, Oklahoma, Kansas and New Mexico prairies. Findings showed only a seven percent overlap between cranes and towers, and that most towers have been placed in areas not often used by cranes during the winter.

Read a press release from USGS here: <https://www2.usgs.gov/newsroom/article.asp?ID=4517>

Wintering Sandhill Crane exposure to wind energy development in the central and southern Great Plains, USA

Aaron T. Pearse ^{*}, David A. Brandt , and Gary L. Krapu
U.S. Geological Survey, Northern Prairie Wildlife Research Center, Jamestown, North Dakota, USA

ABSTRACT

"Numerous wind energy projects have been constructed in the central and southern Great Plains, USA, the main wintering area for midcontinental Sandhill Cranes (*Grus canadensis*). In an initial assessment of the potential risks of wind towers to cranes, we estimated spatial overlap, investigated potential avoidance behavior, and determined the habitat associations of cranes. We used data from cranes marked with platform transmitting terminals (PTTs) with and without global positioning system (GPS) capabilities. We estimated the wintering distributions of PTT-marked cranes prior to the construction of wind towers, which we compared with current tower locations. Based on this analysis, we found 7% spatial overlap between the distributions of cranes and towers. When we looked at individually marked cranes, we found that 52% would have occurred within 10 km of a tower at some point during winter. Using data from cranes marked after tower construction, we found a potential indication of avoidance behavior, whereby GPS-marked cranes generally used areas slightly more distant from existing wind towers than would be expected by chance. Results from a habitat selection model suggested that distances between crane locations and towers may have been driven more by habitat selection than by avoidance, as most wind towers were constructed in locations not often selected by wintering cranes. Our findings of modest regional overlap and that few towers have been placed in preferred crane habitat suggest that the current distribution of wind towers may be of low risk to the continued persistence of wintering midcontinental Sandhill Cranes in the central and southern Great Plains."

Article Citation:

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<http://www.aoucospubs.org/doi/full/10.1650/CONDOR-15-99.1>

KUDOS

Happy Birthday George Archibald!

Those of us at the *Eastern Crane Bulletin* would like to thank George Archibald, co-founder of the [International Crane Foundation](#), for his tireless dedication and ongoing work to protect and preserve the world's cranes and their habitats. We send him a resounding **WHOOOP! WHOOOP!** in celebration of his upcoming birthday.

Consider becoming a member of the International Crane Foundation or make a gift to the *George Archibald Endowment for Conservation Leadership* – to help ensure the global conservation leadership built by Dr. Archibald continues. To find out more, click here: <https://www.savingcranes.org/support-icf/>

Thank you Jeb!

The [Kentucky Coalition for Sandhill Cranes](#), and other "craniacs" in Kentucky and Tennessee wish to recognize Jeb Barzen, former Director of Field Ecology at the International Crane Foundation, for the generosity of his time and expertise during meetings with the Kentucky Department of Fish and Wildlife Resources in 2011, and the Tennessee Wildlife Resources Agency in 2013 as the fate of the eastern migratory population of Sandhill Cranes in each state was decided. Despite opposition by the agencies, Jeb's unwavering professionalism during his presentation of research data, was much appreciated by the crane advocates in attendance. Thank you Jeb and best of luck in your new adventures!

Victoria Advocate journalist recognized for work

The national Local Media Association named Texas *Victoria Advocate* writer Sara Sneath "journalist of the year" as well as awarding her a second place in the Best Environmental story category for, "Survival of Whooping Cranes hinges on financial decisions." Her articles about the Aransas-Wood Buffalo Whooping Cranes and issues affecting them appear regularly in the *Victoria Advocate*.

To read Sneath's article **Survival of whooping cranes hinges on financial decisions**, click here: <https://www.victoriaadvocate.com/news/2015/apr/11/survival-of-whooping-cranes-hinges-on-financial-de/>

Upcoming Events:

Whooping Crane Festival

Princeton, WI

September 9-12, 2016

For more information

click here: http://cdn.princetonwi.com/2015_Whooping_Crane_Festival.pdf

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