



EASTERN CRANE BULLETIN

December 2023 | This is our FINAL ISSUE

The Eastern Crane e-bulletin covers news about the Eastern Populations of Sandhill and Whooping Cranes, as well as general information about cranes and the continuing work for the protection of these birds and their habitats.



Adult and juvenile Whooping Cranes on the Blackjack Peninsula, Texas

Aransas National Wildlife Refuge: established in 1937 – unknowingly preserved last wintering grounds of endangered crane

Now covering more than 115,000 acres, the Aransas National Wildlife Refuge is a haven for all manner of waterfowl and wildlife in South Texas. But with its establishment in 1937, the refuge inadvertently played a key role in protecting what was discovered to be the only remaining natural wintering habitat of the wild Whooping Crane population. Historically cranes wintered along southern coastal areas of Texas, Louisiana, and Florida but by the 1930s fewer than 30 birds remained mostly along the refuge coastal area.

The San Antonio Loan and Trust Company owned the land the Aransas Unit (Blackjack Peninsula) occupies until the Federal government took an active role in wildlife conservation, and the Bureau of Biological Survey (precursor to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service) recommended the purchase of the St. Charles Ranch as part of its obligation to preserve and manage waterfowl

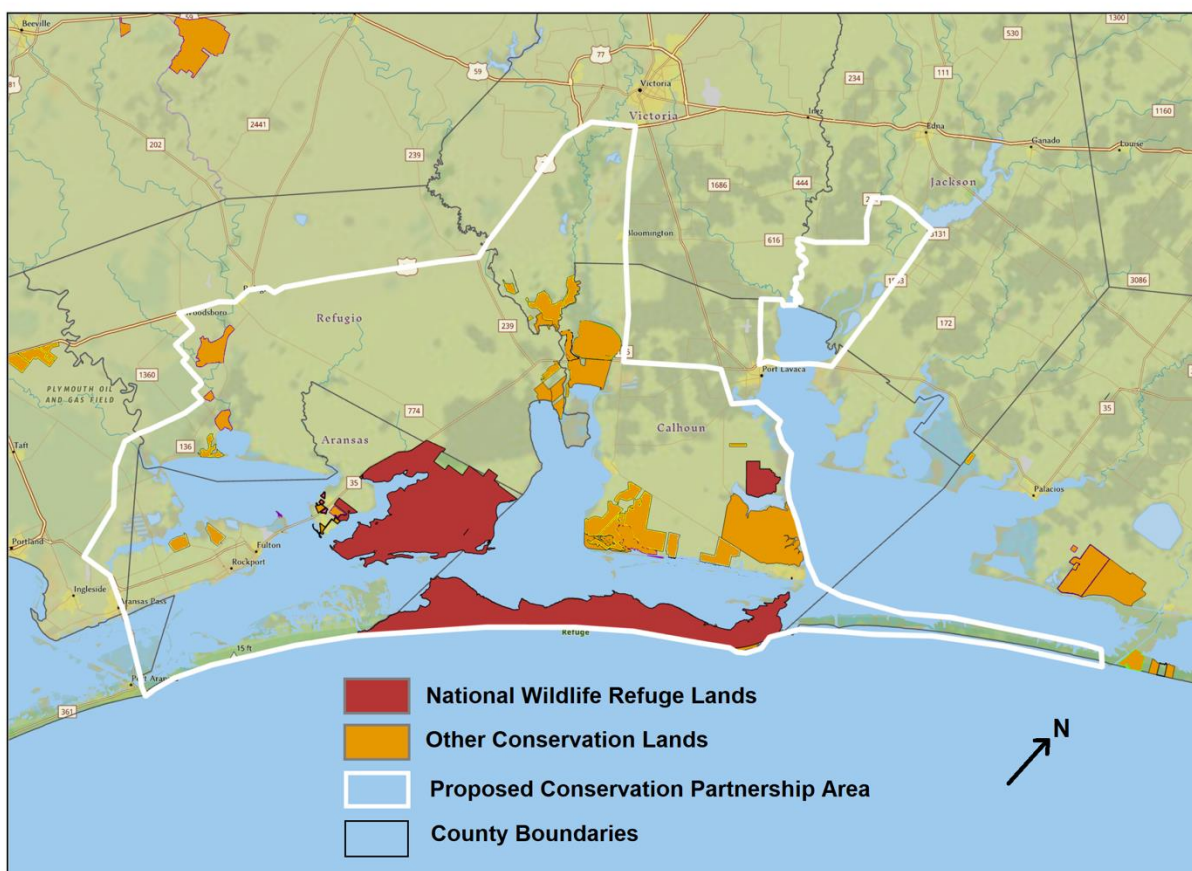


The sign for the Aransas National Wildlife Refuge near Austwell, Texas, February 1970. Photo: Caller-Times File

habitat along the Central Flyway. At the time, it was about 45,000 acres of undeveloped land along the St. Charles and San Antonio bays in Aransas, Refugio and Calhoun counties and occupied 47,261 acres of the Blackjack or St. Charles Peninsula. While much of the area is covered by live oak (*Quercus virginiana*) the peninsula was named after the blackjack oak (*Q. marilandica*). The \$463,500 purchase price came from the sale of [migratory bird stamps \(USFWS Duck Stamp\)](#). The Refuge was established on 31 December 1937 as the Aransas National Wildlife Refuge Complex (NWRC) – the 121st refuge to be established in the National Wildlife Refuge System and second in Texas.

[Works Progress Administration \(WPA\)](#) workers soon began work on building roads and dams as well as clearing land where water would be impounded to create small ponds and lakes. Six months later, [Civilian Conservation Corps \(CCC\)](#) workers arrived to continue the work the WPA had begun. They were accompanied by the refuge's new manager, James O. Stevenson who during his three-year stint as refuge manager was credited with taking the first color movies of the Whooping Crane courtship dances.

Eventually Matagorda Island, part of the chain of barrier islands along the Gulf Coast, became a part of the Aransas refuge after years of back-and-forth with federal and state governments. Between the 1940s until 1974, the Air Force used the island as a practice bombing range, until it was determined that Whooping Crane numbers had expanded enough that some were nesting on the island across from the refuge. In 1994 the island came under a management plan between Matagorda Island National Wildlife Refuge and the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department (TPWD). It is now managed as a unit of the refuge, with the refuge responsible for the wildlife and habitat management and TPWD responsible for the public use management.



Map of Aransas National Wildlife Refuge and surrounding areas. Photo: USFWS

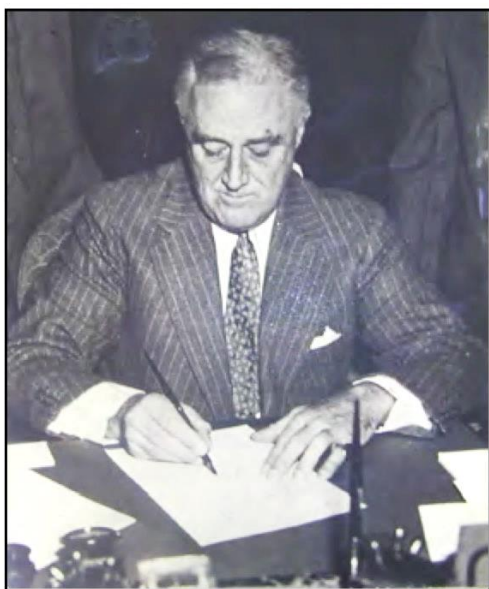
In addition to the general charge of protecting and conserving native wildlife within its boundaries, the Refuge has responsibility for the management of habitat primarily for ducks, geese, shorebirds, and waders. Aransas NWRC was established for the benefit of migratory waterfowl passing along the Central Flyway and was initially called the Aransas Migratory Waterfowl Refuge. In 1940, the Aransas Migratory Waterfowl Refuge became the Aransas National Wildlife Refuge.

Shortly after World War II, when the impending extinction of the Whooping Crane became apparent, it was realized by coincidence that the tidal flats of Aransas NWRC included the last significant wintering grounds of the species. Since then, the fate of the Whooping Crane and the importance the Refuge plays in its survival have been intertwined. In 1941 the refuge became a focal point of the national and worldwide effort to save Whooping Cranes from extinction. Only 15 Whooping Cranes survived in the wild at that time.



Above left: Whooping Cranes fly over Aransas National Wildlife Refuge near Austwell, Texas in April 1970. Photo: Caller-Times. Above right: People scan the shoreline with telescopes and binoculars to catch a view of the Whooping Cranes at Aransas National Wildlife Refuge from the Intracoastal Waterway, aboard a new crane tour boat owned by Ken and Melanie Keltner on 11 December 1987. Photo: George Gongora/Caller-Times file

The Aransas Unit occupies Blackjack Peninsula, an isolated neck of land bounded by St. Charles Bay on the west, San Antonio Bay on the east, and the Gulf Intracoastal Waterway (GIWW) along the south; it is 16 miles long and two to seven miles wide. As originally established in 1937, the entire Refuge was contained in these 47,261 sandy peninsular acres, and it is still the site of the Refuge headquarters and most visitor facilities. In addition, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) has jurisdiction over 12,934 acres of open bay waters established by Presidential proclamation in 1938. As a marked buffer zone around the margin of Blackjack Peninsula, the proclamation boundary was established to prohibit migratory bird hunting – a major component found in the original Refuge purpose for this unit, as intended for the protection of waterfowl. Today, this proclamation boundary additionally serves to protect the endangered Whooping Cranes.



President Franklin D. Roosevelt signing the Executive Order establishing Aransas National Wildlife Refuge in 1937. Photo USFWS

Aransas National Wildlife Refuge (Aransas Unit), originally comprising 47,261 acres, was established on December 31, 1937, by Executive Order 7784, “...as a refuge and breeding ground for migratory birds and other wildlife...” This acquisition was implemented under the authority of the Migratory Bird Conservation Act of 1929 (45 Stat. 1222), which also established that the Refuge is “...for use as an inviolate sanctuary...for any other management purposes...for migratory birds...” (16 U.S.C. § 715d). Additionally, this unit, comprised of the Blackjack Peninsula, has a designated proclamation boundary or buffer zone, adding an additional 12,934 acres of jurisdiction over open waters surrounding the peninsula for the protection of waterfowl (Presidential Proclamation No. 2314 [1938], and No. 2478 [1941]). The proclamation boundary (50 CFR, Part 32.8) was established to “...effectuate the purposes of the Migratory Bird Treaty Act of July 3, 1918...designated as closed area in or on which hunting, taking, capturing or killing...is hereby prohibited.”

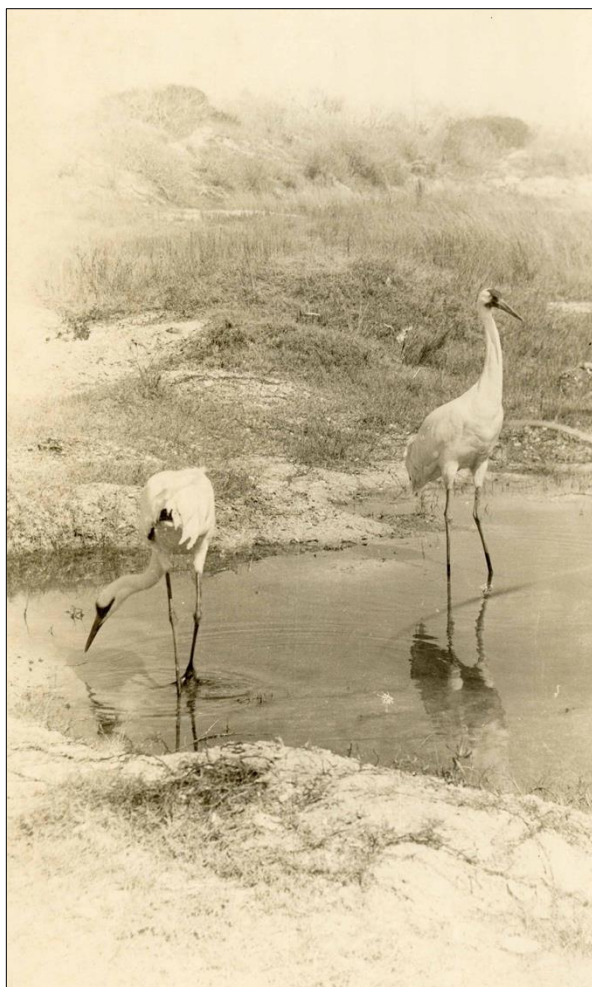
The USFWS 2010 Comprehensive Conservation Plan (Plan, CCP) for the 115,931-acre Aransas National Wildlife Refuge Complex (NWRC) will guide management decisions over the next 15 years and set forth goals, objectives, and strategies for achieving the Refuge vision. The Refuge will help conserve and enhance habitat for “Federal trust

species,” which includes migratory birds, threatened and endangered species, inter-jurisdictional fish, marine mammals, and other species of concern. The Refuge will maintain and establish good working partnerships with stakeholders as well as provide the greatest opportunities for the public to learn about and enjoy the Refuge experience. The Aransas NWRC is currently comprised of the Aransas Unit (Blackjack Peninsula, 47,261 acres), Tatton Unit (7,568 acres), Lamar Unit (979 acres), Myrtle Foester Whitmire Unit (3,440 acres), and Matagorda Island Unit (56,683 acres).

To read more, or download a full-text pdf of the USFWS Aransas National Wildlife Refuge Complex Comprehensive Conservation Plan and Environmental Assessment, go here:
<https://ecos.fws.gov/ServCat/DownloadFile/43956>

In an April 1946 interview, then refuge manager C.A. Keefer spoke fondly of the 17 Whooping Cranes he had spent the winter watching over. As he awaited the Whoopers’ imminent departure to Canada, he told the reporter with a note of sadness, “I hate to see them go.... But, maybe they’ll be back this fall with many young ones. Maybe there won’t be just 17 next year. Maybe there will be 25 or more.”

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Whooping Cranes at Aransas Wildlife Refuge

*Left: Photo of Whooping Cranes foraging at refuge.
(dated 1949-02-11)*

Charles F. H. von Blucher Family Papers, Collection 4, Box 172, Folder 1. Special Collections and Archives, Mary and Jeff Bell Library, Texas A&M University-Corpus Christi

Charles F. H. von Blucher Family Papers
Permanent URI for this collection
<https://hdl.handle.net/1969.6/88044>

The Charles H. F. von Blucher Family Papers are the records of an eminent pioneer family of Nueces County surveyors. They contain valuable, hand-drawn maps, as well as other business and personal records spanning several generations. The Blucher Papers also include the Conrad Blucher Surveying Collection, a voluminous body of maps and field notes dealing with South Texas that reflect the work of the Blucher surveyors over the years. The materials made available here are all from the Conrad Blucher Surveying Collection.

<https://tamucc-ir.tdl.org/items/b195f7f0-77d3-4fe8-be97-fed6fbcc4fb2>

Aransas-Wood Buffalo Population of Whooping Cranes

Cranes arrive on Texas wintering grounds

The population of Whooping Cranes has slowly crept back from the low 15 known cranes in 1941. 2022-2023 breeding surveys from the Canadian Wildlife Service, and wintering surveys by [USFWS](#) indicate that there are now approximately 540 Whooping Cranes in the wild Aransas-Wood Buffalo population that over-winter along the Texas coast.

This season, Texas Parks and Wildlife Department reported the first pair of arriving Whoopers Cranes was observed on 1 November 2023 flying toward the Aransas National Wildlife Refuge on the southwest side of San Antonio Bay. Their arrival was about 10 days later than last year, but well within the typical arrival window, according to Kevin McAbee, [U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service](#) Whooping Crane Coordinator. According to the International Crane Foundation, 30% of the tagged Whoopers have since arrived. Whoopers remain in Texas on their wintering grounds until April when they then head back to Canada to breed and nest.

As the cranes continue making their way across the state on their way to the coast, the [Texas Parks and Wildlife Department \(TPWD\)](#) reminds Texans to be on the lookout for this endangered species. “Whooping cranes have spent all summer nesting and raising chicks in and around Wood Buffalo National Park in northern Canada,” said McAbee. “Now they are completing the approximately 2,500-mile journey south to their wintering grounds in Texas, a migration that can take up to 50 days.”

During their migration, Whooping Cranes seek out wetlands and agricultural fields as stopovers where they roost and feed. The birds often pass large urban centers like Dallas-Fort Worth, Waco and Austin. Though the cranes rarely stay in one place for more than a day during migration, it is important that they not be disturbed or harassed at these stopovers. As a federally protected species, it is illegal to disturb or harass these birds.

“No access” warning signs have been posted by the International Crane Foundation signs in the cranes’ habitat on the Aransas National Wildlife Refuge and along the Gulf Intracoastal Waterway where they will winter.

Habitat Conditions

The conditions Whooping Cranes experienced in their 2023 summer nesting area in Canada are relatively similar to what they will find when they reach coastal wintering grounds. Drought and wildfire conditions through the summer degraded habitat quality, with thick smoke and dry wetlands throughout the nesting and rearing period. “Luckily, most Whooping Cranes and nests were not directly impacted by fires,” said McAbee. “While these conditions may reduce the number of juvenile cranes that will arrive in Texas this year, we expect overall numbers to be similar to the estimated 540 whooping cranes that inhabited coastal Texas last year.” Drought conditions are something the birds will have to contend with in their winter habitat, according to the [U.S. Drought Monitor](#). Bay salinities are high following a dry summer, causing Whooping Cranes to be more likely to use freshwater habitats and new areas, some of which are more inland than previous years.

Whooper Watch

The public is encouraged to help track Whooping Cranes by reporting sightings to [TPWD’s Texas Nature Trackers’ \(TNT\) Texas Whooper Watch](#), a citizen science-based reporting system that tracks Whooping Crane migration and wintering locations throughout Texas. For more information, visit the website to learn more about the program and download the [iNaturalist](#) mobile app to get started.

These observations help biologists identify new migration and wintering locations and their associated habitats. Questions about Texas Whooper Watch and other TNT programs that contribute to TPWD’s research and conservation efforts can be directed to TNT staff at tracker@tpwd.texas.gov.



Always maintain a viewing distance of at least 100 yards from Whooping Cranes (if in a vehicle), and 200 yards if on foot. This photo, courtesy of John Jefferson, was taken from a chartered small boat. The crane approached the boat along the shoreline.

Biologists remain optimistic that continued research and restoration work will ultimately lead to improved numbers of Whooping Cranes and say that new pending federal legislation, the [Recovering America's Wildlife Act \(RAWA\)](#), could help in a big way. RAWA would provide the funding needed to continue the important conservation work that is vital for Whooping Cranes and other species throughout Texas. Learn how to help through the [Texas Alliance for America's Fish and Wildlife online toolkit](#). Texas Wildlife Alliance is a grass roots coalition formed to support RAWA.

For those interested in seeing the cranes a bit closer, either one of the following boat experiences provide opportunities to observe these endangered species without threatening them.

- Captain Tommy Moore, of "Whooping Crane Charters" (877-892-4737), is a 30-year veteran tour boat operator out of Rockport, TX. His boat, the "Skimmer" handles groups and individuals starting at \$45.
- Captain Lori of the "Aransas Bay Birding Charters" (361-790-3746) operates a smaller boat especially designed for serious photographers. Taking a maximum of six costs \$550. For less than six, the first four costs \$500.

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Preliminary data analysis of aerial surveys of the Aransas-Wood Buffalo whooping crane population conducted in January 2023 indicated 536 whooping cranes, including 88 juveniles, in the primary survey area (approximately 160,125 acres) centered on Aransas National Wildlife Refuge. The [last survey from winter 2021-2022](#) estimated 543 whooping cranes, indicating the population has remained stable over the last two years. Biologists plan to conduct the next survey in January 2024.

To download the USFWS PDF “Whooping Crane Survey Results: Winter 2022–2023,” go here: <https://www.fws.gov/sites/default/files/documents/WHCR%20Update%20Winter%202022-2023.pdf>

Report a Banded Sandhill Crane

Observations of banded cranes are especially critical to the understanding of cranes habits and movements throughout their lives. If you see a crane but did not see its bands or even if it didn't have any bands, you may still help by submitting your sighting via eBird. Go to the following to submit your Sandhill Crane Finder report: <https://sandhillfinder.savingcranes.org/resighting>

Eastern Migratory Population of Whooping Cranes

Eastern Migratory Population WHCR Update – December 1, 2023

Below is the most recent update for the Eastern Migratory Population of Whooping Cranes. During November, the chicks of the 2023 cohort have migrated south with other Whooping Cranes and most cranes are gone from the breeding grounds! A huge thank-you to the staff of the Fish and Wildlife Service, the Departments of Natural Resources of flyway states, the International Crane Foundation, and all the volunteers who help us keep track of the cranes throughout the year. We appreciate your contribution to the recovery of the Whooping Crane Eastern Migratory Population. This report was produced by the International Crane Foundation. Near real-time locations of Whooping Cranes in this population is at <https://whoopermap.savingcranes.org/>

Population Estimate

The current estimated population size is 76 (42 F, 32 M, 2 U). 16 of these 76 individuals are wild-hatched and the rest are captive-reared. To the best of our knowledge, as of 1 December, there are 4 that were last reported in Wisconsin, 1 in Michigan (who has likely migrated south), 11 in Illinois, 27 in Indiana, 6 in Kentucky, and 18 in Alabama. The remaining birds' locations have not been confirmed in the last month. Their last known locations (in the past month) are on the map below. During migration, bird locations change quickly and there may be more that have moved further south.

2021 and 2022 Cohorts

- W2-21 (M) has migrated to Morgan County, Alabama with W3-17 (F).
- W14-21 (M) was last seen at Necedah National Wildlife Refuge with W3-20 (F) in early November.
- 84-21 (F) has migrated to Gibson County, Indiana and is with other Whooping Cranes.
- 85-21 (M) has migrated to Morgan County, Alabama and is hanging out with 7-11.
- W1-22 (U) showed up at Wheeler National Wildlife Refuge in Morgan County, Alabama at the end of November.

2023 Cohort

- W9-23 (F) separated from 15-11, W6-18 and 15-23 during migration and arrived alone in Morgan Co., Alabama. Luckily, she's found other Whooping Cranes at Wheeler National Wildlife Refuge!
- W12-23 (M) and his parents, 24-08 and 13-02, have safely arrived in Morgan Co., Alabama.
- W13-23 (U) is still with parents 12-11 and 5-11. They left Juneau Co., Wisconsin and were seen in Lawrence Co., Illinois.
- 15-23 (F) was parent-reared at ICF this summer and was released at Necedah in late September. She migrated to Greene Co., Indiana with 15-11 and W6-18 in late November.
- 21-23 (M) and 22-23 (F) were parent-reared at the Calgary Zoo this summer and were released at Necedah in early October. They migrated to Hopkins Co., Kentucky with 2-04 and W14-19 in late November.

- 16-23 (F), 17-23 (F), 18-23 (F), 19-23 (M), 20-23 (F), and 23-23 (M) were costume-reared at ICF this summer and were released at Horicon National Wildlife Refuge in Dodge Co., Wisconsin during October. All six have migrated and are now in Putnam Co., Indiana.

Mortality and Long-term Missing

- Two adult male Whooping Cranes (28-17 and W10-15) were last seen on the breeding grounds during July and August. Their mates were then seen alone on their breeding territories, then arrived on the wintering grounds without their mates. Since it is unusual for breeding pairs to separate and for one to disappear, we assume these two birds have died and are now considered long-term missing.
- 80-19 (F) has not been seen for over a year and is now considered long-term missing. We have removed her from the population totals above. (November report)
- 74-18 (M) has not been seen for over a year and is now considered long-term missing. We have removed him from the population totals above. (October report)

To follow the reintroduced eastern population, go here: <https://whoopermap.savingcranes.org/>
 Within map locations is a list of WHCR, click on links to individual cranes for its biographical information.
 For biographies of the reintroduced eastern migratory population of Whooping Crane, go here:
<https://www.savingcranes.org/whooping-crane-biographies/>

W = Wild hatched to a wild Whooping Crane pair that then teach the migration route to the juvenile.
 To report a banded Whooping Crane sighting, go here:
<https://www.savingcranes.org/report-whooping-crane/>

General News

50 years of protecting endangered species

In 1963, one year after Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring* was published, Bald Eagle populations in the lower 48 U.S. states hit an all-time low. Officials counted just 417 nesting pairs – a fraction of the estimated 100,000 birds that once soared the skies in the 18th century, and a grim reinforcement of Carson's warning against agriculture's indiscriminate use of chemicals like the pesticide DDT. Other species' numbers were plummeting as well. A postwar boom in construction, logging, and agriculture was polluting the nation's air and water and degrading habitats for many animals, including grizzly bears, Whooping Cranes and Shortnose Sturgeon.

Amid a groundswell of public concern for the imperiled wildlife and the broader environment, the federal government began implementing a series of conservation measures. In 1970, Congress established the Environmental Protection Agency, which in 1972 outlawed most uses of DDT. Then, in 1973, President Nixon signed the Endangered Species Act, which mandated steps to protect and restore plants or animals identified as "threatened" or "endangered." In doing so, it provided a framework for protecting species and their ecosystems from further decline, and it signaled to the world that direct action could make a difference.

In the 50 years since the act was adopted, more than 1,000 fish, mammals, insects, birds, flowers and other species have been listed under the act, and more than 50 have rebounded because of its protections.

"ESA is administered by two federal agencies, the [United States Fish and Wildlife Service \(USFWS\)](#) and the [National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration \(NOAA\)](#) (which includes the [National Marine Fisheries Service \(NMFS\)](#)). NOAA handles marine species, and the USFWS has responsibility over freshwater fish and all other species. Species that occur in both habitats (e.g. sea turtles and Atlantic sturgeon) are jointly managed."



*The Endangered Species Act turns 50
on December 28, 2023. The Act was enacted by the
93rd Congress on December 27, 1973, and signed into law
the following day by President Richard M. Nixon.*

ECOS Environmental Conservation Online System / USFWS
<https://ecos.fws.gov/ecp/>

Threatened & Endangered Species

ECOS serves a variety of reports related to FWS Threatened and Endangered Species.
Click on the Species Reports for a complete list.

Listed Animals

1480 Records

Group Type: Vertebrates, Invertebrates

Listing Statuses: Endangered, Threatened, Emergency Listing, Endangered, Emergency Listing,
Threatened, Experimental Population, Essential, Experimental Population, Non-Essential, Similarity of
Appearance (Endangered), Similarity of Appearance (Threatened)

Click on the following for a complete list of animals:

<https://ecos.fws.gov/ecp0/reports/ad-hoc-species-report?kingdom=V&kingdom=I&status=E&status=T&status=EmE&status=EmT&status=EXPE&status=EXP&status=SAE&status=SAT&mapstatus=3&fcritab=on&fstatus=on&fspecrule=on&finvpop=on&fgroup=on&header=Listed+Animals>

Alaska:

2023 Kachemak Bay cranes head south

[Kachemak Crane Watch](#), a project of the Center for Alaskan Coastal Studies, was started in 2013 by Edgard Bailey and Nina Faust to track Sandhill Cranes from Anchor Point to the head of Kachemak Bay. Kachemak Crane Watch is dedicated to the protection of Sandhill Cranes and their habitat in Homer, Alaska and the surrounding Kachemak Bay area.

Sandhill Cranes arrived in the area this year on 5 April. Approximately 40 cranes were heard at Beluga Slough on April 10. Despite a cold, wet summer, the 2023 Kachemak Crane Watch's annual Sandhill Crane summary indicates that the nesting success rate in the Homer area was better than usual. The nesting component of the report relies on reported observations by residents of nest locations, number of eggs hatched, fatalities and number of colts fledged. Of the 61 reported nests, 54 successfully fledged juveniles – an 88.5% nest success rate. The success rate – or the survival of colts – is impacted by issues such as predation or bacterial infection. Predators include coyotes, eagles, crows, ravens, and dogs.

Three public crane count days during fall migration were hosted by the organization on August 19, 26 and September 2, 7. During these days, citizen scientists gather at Beluga Slough at 6:00 p.m. and count cranes until sunset. On August 26 counters noted a total of 187 cranes – a record high count for the slough. Peak fall migration days occurred on September 11 and 17, with as many as 1,000 flocks of birds flying over Anchor Point and Homer. The last departing flocks were reported on 2 October 2023.

The full crane report with appendices and more information about the history of the organization can be found at: www.cranewatch.org.

Canada:

Calgary-raised Whooping Cranes join the Eastern Migratory Population

The [Calgary Zoo/Wilder Institute's](#) facility, headquartered in Alberta, Canada, is the only conservation breeding program for Whooping Cranes in Canada. The Wilder Institute and the International Crane Foundation have been working together to support Whooping Cranes for more than 30 years.

The organization hosts a breeding flock of Whooping Cranes and provides care to the eggs, chicks and adults. Due to conservation efforts, including work done by the International Crane Foundation and the Wilder Institute, Whooping Crane numbers continue to rebound.

"From daily feeding and monitoring to specialized veterinary care, our team works tirelessly to help these birds have a better chance at survival when they are released to the wild," said Caitlin Slade, animal care manager at the Wilder Institutes' Archibald Biodiversity Centre.

This year juvenile Whooping Cranes "Reed" and "Harp," hatched at the Wilder Institute as part of the breeding program and were soon released at the Necedah National Wildlife Refuge in Wisconsin. Established in 1939, the Refuge with its diverse wetlands is known to be the northern nesting site for the reintroduced Eastern Migratory Population of Whooping Cranes.

"The [International Crane Foundation](#) is excited to once again work across borders to release these birds at the Necedah National Wildlife Refuge in Wisconsin," said Kim Boardman, curator of birds at the International Crane Foundation. "ICF is dedicated to saving this species, and this release will bring the total number of Whooping Cranes released by ICF this year to nine."

Officials said the process of safely transporting the endangered birds across international borders and more than 2,000 kilometers was no small feat, with months of planning and preparations.

"While transporting these cranes was a challenging and complex process, it's worth it to know that every hour put in by our team supports the whooping crane's recovery," said Deanna Snell, the Wilder Institute's manager of zoological records and animal relocations, who spent more than 80 hours preparing for this shipment.

Colorado:

Merrill leads movement to save the Yampa Valley Sandhill Cranes

The [Colorado Crane Conservation Coalition \(CCCC\)](#) is a nonprofit based in Routt County, and President Nancy Merrill is at the center of the movement to save Sandhill Cranes.

Nancy Merrill's passion for Sandhills resulted in the 2020 launch of the Yampa Valley Crane Festival as part of the CCCC. Since then, her commitment to cranes has expanded further through partnerships with local farmers and ranchers, working with them to increase grain production and lease land to help the cranes thrive. Sandhills rely on waste grain left in harvested fields as part of the food needed during migration and are now benefitting from area field crops planted specifically for cranes.

Merrill's impact has been felt in the community, as she helped defeat a proposal that would have allowed hunting Sandhill Cranes in northwest Colorado. Both farmers and hunters put their support behind her. Her work continues to create connections between farmers and ranchers, all the while educating future generations about conservation.

Florida:

Signs posted to alert drivers to presence of Sandhill Cranes

"Wildlife Crossing" signs were installed along 10 roadways across Hillsborough County during the summer 2023 to notify drivers that wildlife, particularly Sandhill Cranes, might be in the road ahead

looking for food – slow down! The [Raptor Center of Tampa Bay](#) made the request to Hillsborough County as a part of the organization's effort to bring awareness to the problem of Sandhill Cranes foraging in medians and along busy roadways – with the goal of reducing the growing number of crane injuries and fatalities caused by speeding vehicles.

Hillsborough County Public Works collaborated with wildlife experts to study wildlife that traverse roadways to fully understand their behaviors to make sure the wildlife crossing signs were only put in areas where they are most needed so that residents know that if they see a warning sign, there is a high probability that wildlife is in the area using the roadway.

The new signs are up in the following locations:

- Parsons Avenue in Brandon
- Big Bend Road in Riverview
- Tyler Road in Odessa
- Fairway Meadow Drive in Riverview
- 24th Street NE in Ruskin
- Linebaugh Avenue in Tampa
- Bloomingdale Avenue in Brandon
- Panther Trace Boulevard in Riverview
- Summerfield Boulevard in Riverview
- Covington Stone Avenue in Apollo Beach

As part of ongoing research into ways to help prevent Sandhill Crane injuries and death, the [Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission](#) requests residents to please report to the FWC any Sandhill Crane, dead or alive, that has been hit by a vehicle.

Kansas:

Taddicken's legacy

After 26-years, Bill Taddicken recently stepped away from the position of the Center Director of the Ian Nicholson Audubon Center Rowe Sanctuary. During his time in the position, he was credited with working to raise awareness and activities around the annual Sandhill Crane migration every spring, and turning Kearney into the Sandhill Crane Capital of the World. The annual six-week crane season now draws visitors from nearly all 50 states and numerous foreign countries. Taddicken work was also instrumental in Rowe's \$12.5 million expansion project, part off "[Elevate: The Campaign for Audubon Nebraska](#)," which began spring 2022.

"During my tenure the local community went from disregarding cranes and crane watchers to Kearney proclaiming itself the Sandhill Crane Capital of the World," he said. "An amazing team of stakeholders and staff created a 50-year vision for Rowe and the river so the future will remain bright for birds in the Central Flyway."

"It takes all of us, as a community, to take care of the environment at Rowe Sanctuary. Rowe became the Sandhill Crane Capital of the World not because of me, but because of you."

– Bill Taddicken

A city proclamation noted Taddicken's work putting Rowe Sanctuary and the Kearney area on a worldwide stage. His work while at Rowe contributed to the following:

- Conservation work on the Platte River for the betterment of Sandhill Cranes, Whooping Cranes, and other birds.
- Assisting with Kearney's designation as the Sandhill Crane Capital of the World.

- Expanding Rowe from 1,100 acres to 3,000 acres in size, “providing the gold standard for a habitat complex on the Platte River.”
- Launching the Platte River Recovery Implementation Program, which manages the entire river for cranes and other birds and wildlife.
- Making the Platte River a haven for cranes and an “extraordinary learning experience” for worldwide crane devotees.

According to Kristal Stoner, Vice President of the National Audubon Society and executive director of Audubon Great Plains, there is currently an extensive search underway for a permanent director.



With arrival of cranes – hunting pauses at Quivira and Cheyenne Bottoms

With only 543 Whooping Cranes in the Aransas-Wood Buffalo migratory population, it is exciting when the migrating cranes make a stop in Central Kansas. Kansas Wetlands Education Center Director Curtis Wolf said the first Whooping Cranes of the season were spotted late October at Cheyenne Bottoms. That rarity of the birds can also impact hunting in the at the refuge and surrounding areas. Hunting is stopped completely if cranes are spotted in the vicinity of Quivira. Cheyenne Bottoms shuts down only the pools the Whoopers are using and may also shut down goose hunting on the south end of the Bottoms. Since the end of October more than two dozen Whooping Cranes were observed around Quivira National Wildlife Refuge, including two adults and a juvenile. Whooping and Sandhill Crane numbers will vary year to year.

The federal-state, Quivira National Wildlife Refuge, and Cheyenne Bottoms Wildlife Area contingency plans provide guidance as to what actions to take if Whooping Cranes are present during hunting seasons. Because cranes use the area for stopovers during migration, hunting regulations have been formulated and contingency plans utilized to minimize the chance of federally endangered Whooping Cranes being accidentally shot by Sandhill Crane hunters. Although Sandhill Cranes start concentrating in huntable numbers during late October, the start of the hunting season was delayed to the Wednesday following the first Saturday in November to allow most of the Whooping Cranes to migrate through the state. Hunting hours for Sandhills begin at sunrise rather than one-half hour before sunrise to minimize the chance of a hunter mistakenly shooting a Whooping Crane due to low light conditions. Kansas is the only state in the Central Flyway to have delayed shooting hours to protect Whooping Cranes.

For more information about the impact of Whooping Cranes on the Kansas Sandhill season, [click here](#).

Louisiana:

LDWF’s Whooping Crane Program adds four cranes to Louisiana population

With assistance from the [Louisiana Wildlife and Fisheries Foundation \(LWFF\)](#), [Audubon Nature Institute](#) and the [Dallas Zoo](#), the [Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries \(LDWF\)](#) on 12 November 2023 added four juvenile Whooping Cranes to its experimental population at LDWF’s [White Lake Wetlands Conservation Area \(WLWCA\)](#) in Vermilion Parish.

Three of the juvenile cranes were hatched and reared at the [Freeport-McMoRan Audubon Species Survival Center](#) in New Orleans, part of the Audubon Nature Institute. The fourth crane was transferred as an egg to Dallas from the [International Crane Foundation](#) and was the first ever to be reared at the Dallas Zoo’s offsite breeding facility, the [Whooping Crane Center of Texas](#), before being moved this fall to Audubon, and then to WLWCA.

LDWF and the Audubon Nature Institute have been longtime leaders in Whooping Crane conservation in Louisiana and continue to expand their partnership with the goal of establishing a self-sustaining population of the species in the state.



"We are proud to work with our partners on this exciting project to reintroduce Whooping Cranes in the state," said Richard Dunn, Assistant Curator of Freeport-McMoRan Audubon Species Survival Center. "Since 2017, we have sent 47 birds for release including 26 that were hatched at our facility. Every bird raised and released is one more step toward creating a sustainable population of these amazing birds in Louisiana."

With the release of these new juvenile cranes from the protected portion of the release pen located at WLWCA, the Louisiana population is now 85 cranes. They had disappeared entirely from the state in the 1950s as well as from much of their former range across North America. The Louisiana flock began in 2011 when 10 Whooping Cranes from the U.S. Geological Survey's Patuxent Wildlife Research Center in Maryland were released at White Lake WCA to develop the non-migratory flock. This marked a significant conservation milestone with the first wild Whooping Cranes back in Louisiana since 1950.

For more photos, video, and interviews from the release, go here:
<https://ldwf.canto.com/v/WhoopingCranesRelease2023>



Above: All photos are the latest cohort of juvenile Whooping Cranes to join the Louisiana experimental population. Photos courtesy of Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries.

Recent Facebook posts by [Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries - Whooping Cranes](#)

November 7

They're here!!! Our 2023 cohort arrived today! It's a small, but feisty cohort made up of 2 males, both of whom were parent reared, and 2 females, who were costume reared. The oldest male and both females

were hatched and raised at the [Audubon Nature Institute](#)'s Whooping Crane breeding facility in New Orleans and the younger male was reared at the [Dallas Zoo](#)'s offsite Whooping Crane breeding facility. At the end of September, the chick from the Dallas Zoo was moved on a LDWF airplane, to Audubon so it could join the 3 chicks there, prior to all of them coming to us today. Audubon's crew drove the birds to the White Lake Wetlands Conservation Area today where they were given a quick exam by our state veterinarian, banded with their permanent bands and transmitters, then taken out and placed in the top-netted portion of our release pen. And right on cue, a pair of adults flew in to check out the new arrivals! Thanks to our partners who raised these birds and everyone who helped make today go so smoothly! Stay tuned for more updates on these new additions who will be released and officially join the LA population in the near future!

November 17

Thanks to our coworker, Liz, for sharing these photos that she took recently! The chick in the photos is our 'mystery' chick from several months back, that we determined has to be LW14-23! To remind those of you who might not know or remember, we actually thought LW14-23 hadn't survived when its mom was observed outside of her nesting territory without her mate or chick, neither of whom were able to be found. Unfortunately, the dad was never found and is presumed to be dead, but the chick reappeared with a new pair of adults who seem to be serving as 'foster' or 'adoptive' parents!



This unique family continues to be seen periodically, including sometimes with several other Whooping Cranes who may serve as buddies or associates when LW14-23 does eventually separate from his/her surrogate parents. And maybe this experience will 'inspire' L1-12 and L10-19 to nest and hopefully hatch and raise their own biological chick in 2024!



Photos of LW14-23 and adults, by Liz Bourgeois, Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries

Call to All Louisiana Artists: Whooping Crane Art Show and Contest!

In honor of the Louisiana Whooping Crane Reintroduction Project / Presented by the Louisiana Wildlife and Fisheries Foundation



The last wild Louisiana Whooping Crane died in 1950, and there were no cranes on the Louisiana landscape for over 60 years. But in 2011, the first cohort of Whooping Cranes were released into southwest Louisiana. Now, as these cranes have reproduced and new cranes have continued to be released into the wild, there are about 80 wild cranes. Please help us celebrate the reintroduction project by creating beautiful art.

SUBMISSION DEADLINE: January 6, 2024

- Eligibility: To enter, must be 18 years or older and a resident of Louisiana.

- **Media:** Any 2-dimensional art inspired by the Louisiana Whooping Crane Reintroduction Project – including drawings, paintings, photographs, or wall hangings. All media accepted.

For more information, go here: <http://www.lawff.org/whoopingcraneshow>
Or see below in the “Cranes in Art” section of this bulletin.

Help LDWF by reporting all Whooping Crane sightings and violations

If you are lucky enough to see a Whooping Crane, please do not approach it, even in a vehicle, to avoid habituating the birds to human activity. If you share the sighting on social media, bird listservs, or other public sites, please do not share location information more specific than county or parish level.
<https://www.wlf.louisiana.gov/page/report-a-whooping-crane-sighting-or-violation>

If you see a Whooping Crane elsewhere in the eastern United States (besides Louisiana), please report it here: <https://www.savingcranes.org/report-whooping-crane/>

If you see a Whooping Crane in the western United States, please report it here:
<https://whoopingcrane.com/report-a-sighting/>

Note: Whooping Cranes in the Louisiana population have been known to travel into surrounding states.

Anyone witnessing suspicious activity involving Whooping Cranes is advised to call the LDWF's Enforcement Division at 1-800-442-2511 or use the tip411 program, which may offer a cash reward for information leading to arrests or convictions. To use the tip411 program, citizens can text LADWF and their tip to 847411 or download the "LADWF Tips" iPhone app from the Apple iTunes store free of charge. Citizen Observer, the tip411 provider, uses technology that removes all identifying information before LDWF receives the text so that LDWF cannot identify the sender.

For LDWF updates on the Louisiana non-migratory population of Whooping Cranes, go here:
<https://www.facebook.com/lawhoopingcranes/>

For more general information about the cranes, go here:
<https://www.wlf.louisiana.gov/subhome/whooping-crane>

Nebraska:

Ornithologist Paul Johnsgard also carved decoys

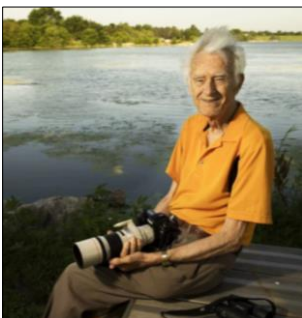
Renowned ornithologist Paul Johnsgard died in 2021 at the age of 89. At the time of his death, he was overseeing the editing of his 105th book, *The Sandhill Crane State: A Naturalist's Guide to Nebraska*. While known to most as a prolific author what many may not know is that before he began writing about birds and natural history, he created beautiful carvings – of birds. A full-size Bald Eagle and Trumpeter Swan, owls, ducks, shorebirds, and geese to name just a few species.

“Carving was a winter activity or family vacation,” according to his son Scott Johnsgard. A winter snowstorm that kept him home from his job at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, where he taught for 40 years, would provide the perfect opportunity.

A chance meeting sparked Paul Johnsgard's interest in creating decoys. The biology professor found hand-carved mallard decoys at an estate sale, where he also happened to meet local sign painter Ralph Stutheit. The two decided to begin carving decoys together and in 1970 co-founded the [Central Flyway Decoy Carvers and Collectors Club](#). As seen in the 70 carvings Johnsgard produced, his skill with attention to detail of the birds' plumage and coloration were honed, as decoys are detailed down to the individual feather. His carvings were created in the 1970s and '80s before writing consumed his attention.



In 2023 the Johnsgard family decided to sell about two dozen of his carvings as well as some original illustrations used in his books. Although illustrated with many of his own drawings, local artists were often commissioned to paint book covers or color plates. Signed copies of some of these books were to be sold as well. Considered to be of museum quality craftsmanship, Johnsgard's carvings draw prices in the thousands. A full-scale, flying Trumpeter Swan recently sold for \$6,000.



Far left, clockwise: Some of decoys by Johnsgard (top to bottom) – Canvasback, male Harlequin duck, male and female Common Mergansers; Illustration of Sandhill Crane; Paul Johnsgard in June 2019 at Holmes Lake, one of his favorite places to spend time watching birds. Journal Star file photo.

To read about Johnsgard's life, *My Life in Biology: Paul A. Johnsgard*, or for a full-text pdf, go here: <https://digitalcommons.unl.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1081&context=biosciornithology>

North Dakota

Whooping Crane Migration

Whooping Cranes were already moving through North Dakota in late September, with sightings expected to increase over the following weeks as they made their way south. Observers were encouraged to report any sightings to USFWS contacts listed below.

The Aransas-Wood Buffalo migratory population of Whooping Cranes, currently estimated to be 543 birds, are traveling from their nesting grounds in Wood Buffalo National Park, Canada to where they winter along coastal areas and the Aransas National Wildlife Refuge in Texas – about 2,500 miles.



Whooping Crane in the company of Sandhill Cranes observed over North Dakota.

Whoopers stand about 5 feet tall and have a wingspan of about 7 feet. They are bright white with black wing tips, which are visible in flight and when wings are outspread. In flight, they extend their long necks, while their long, slender legs extend behind the tail. Whooping Cranes typically migrate singly, or in family groups of two to three birds, and

may be associating with Sandhill Cranes. Other white birds such as Snow Geese, Swans and Egrets are often mistaken for Whooping Cranes. The most common misidentification is with American Pelicans, because their wingspan is similar and the way they hold their head in flight, creating a silhouette similar to a crane when viewed from below.

Anyone observing Whoopers should not disturb them, but record the date, time, location, and what the behavior of the crane – whether it was roosting, foraging, interacting with another crane, etc. Observers are also asked to look for and report any colored bands on the legs – which may occur on one or both legs as some have been marked to help determine their identity.

All Whooping Crane sightings should be reported to U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service offices at Lostwood, 701-848-2466; Audubon, 701-442-5474; the North Dakota Game and Fish Department in Bismarck, 701-328-6300; or to local game wardens across the state. Reports help biologists locate important Whooping Crane stopover habitat areas, monitor marked birds, determine survival and population numbers as well as migration routes and timing of migration.

Ohio:

Fifty years later, Endangered Species Act still helping Ohio's wildlife



A Sandhill Crane forages in a northern Ohio marsh. The species is one of hundreds that are endangered in Ohio.

Fifty years after the Endangered Species Act was passed, Ohio's list of endangered or threatened species has almost doubled.

The 1973 act provides protection for endangered animals' habitats and prohibits taking animals out of these habitats. According to the Ohio Department of Natural Resources Division of Wildlife, Ohio's first list of endangered species published in 1974 included 71 species. The list is reviewed extensively every five years. As of 2022, there are currently 131 endangered species and 46 threatened species in Ohio. Endangered species are in danger of extinction, and threatened species are on the verge of becoming endangered. Black bears, Sandhill Cranes, West Virginia White butterflies, Frosted

Elfin and Spotted turtles are a few of the animals listed as endangered and at risk of extinction in Ohio. Ohioans can help protect endangered species by planting native plants to increase wildlife habitat and natural areas, according to Derrick Cooper, Grand River restoration coordinator for the Ohio Nature Conservancy.

Congress is currently considering the [Recovering America's Wildlife Act \(RAWA\)](#), which would expand the impact of the [Endangered Species Act](#). The Endangered Species Act only protects animals already classified as endangered, threatened, species of interest or extinct. RAWA is a bipartisan bill that will allow a proactive approach for species that are at risk of becoming endangered and extinct before they are listed.

For a PDF of the Ohio Department of Natural Resources / DIVISION OF WILDLIFE / OHIO'S LISTED SPECIES: Wildlife that are considered to be endangered, threatened, species of concern, special interest, extirpated, or extinct in Ohio, go here: https://ohiodnr.gov/static/documents/wildlife/state-listed-species/Pub+5356+Ohio+Listed+Species_R0722.pdf

Oklahoma

Four Oklahomans sentenced after pleading guilty to killing endangered Whooping Cranes in 2021

In early October, four Oklahoman men were sentenced to pay restitution totaling \$68,000 for unlawfully killing four endangered Whooping Cranes protected under the Migratory Bird Treaty Act, announced U.S. Attorney Robert J. Troester. All four men pleaded guilty and U.S. Magistrate Judge Amanda Maxfield Green ordered each defendant to pay \$17,000 in restitution to the International Crane Foundation and pay a \$750 fine. The defendants were also each ordered to forfeit their shotguns and will also lose their hunting privileges in all 50 states for the next five years.

On August 22, 2023, Joseph M. Roman, 43, and Justin M. Wine, 40, of Altus, Chanod M. Campbell, 32, of Gould, and Brian Lee Gollihare Jr., 35, of Hollis, were charged by information with taking a migratory bird for which there is no season. According to information presented in court, on or about November 5, 2021, the four defendants were hunting at Tom Steed Reservoir in Kiowa Co. in southwest Oklahoma when they killed four Whooping Cranes and attempted to hide the birds before leaving the scene.

A Whooping Crane with a shotgun wound was discovered by hunters, who then notified game wardens with the Oklahoma Department of Wildlife Conservation (ODWC). The crane died while being transported to a veterinarian clinic. Upon further investigation of the same area afterwards, agents uncovered three additional dead Whooping Cranes.

“Each of us bears responsibility to protect endangered wildlife so that the species is preserved for future generations. My office stands with and commends the work done by our federal and state law enforcement partners, and we hope this case serves as a warning for those who would harm endangered species.”

U.S. Attorney Robert J Troester



Oklahoma Game Warden Jeremy Brothers approaches an injured Whooping Crane that later died due to its injuries. November 2021

Whooping Cranes are a migratory bird and protected under the Migratory Bird Treaty Act. The cranes travel through Oklahoma during migration to and from their breeding grounds in Canada to wintering grounds in Texas. Most [whooping crane sightings in Oklahoma are reported](#) from mid-October through November.

According to the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service (FWS), the Whooping Crane is one of the rarest birds in North America and listed as critically endangered. [An FWS report from May, 2023](#), estimates there are less than 550 total Whooping Cranes in the wild, Aransas-Wood Buffalo population.

“This is a great example of state and federal agencies working closely together throughout the investigation. The outstanding ODWC Game Wardens were tireless in tracking down leads and in their collection of key evidence that led to this outcome,” said Nathan Erdman, Law Enforcement Chief for the Oklahoma Department of Wildlife Conservation. “Rest assured that those committing wildlife violations in Oklahoma will be caught thanks to thorough investigations like this along with tips from the public.”

“The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Office of Law Enforcement is committed to conducting criminal

investigations with the Oklahoma Department of Wildlife Conservation for the protection of endangered species such as the Whooping Crane,” said Edward Grace, Assistant Director of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Office of Law Enforcement. “The outcomes of this case are the result of vigorous

investigative efforts by the Office of Law Enforcement and our ODWC partners to bring wildlife violators to justice.”

Whoopers pass through state

Each year, sportsmen, bird watchers and other wildlife enthusiasts are invited to join the Oklahoma Department of Wildlife Conservation (ODWC) in documenting federally endangered Whooping Cranes as they migrate through Oklahoma. Though sightings are tracked across the Central Flyway, it is important for Sandhill Crane hunters to be aware that Whooping Cranes could migrate through Oklahoma and be roosting or loafing in hunting areas at any time throughout the entire season, according to the ODWC. Should a Whooping Crane be sighted at a Wildlife Management Area during specific hunting seasons, the Wildlife Department may close the area until the endangered bird has continued its migration. During a closure, the area will be prominently marked with signs and any closures will be reported at wildlifedepartment.com



Wisconsin

Indiana Outreach Biologist Assistant - Welcome Lauren!

Happy fall! The weather is getting colder, leaves are on the ground, and the Whooping Cranes in Wisconsin have already started making their way south toward you after yet another successful breeding season! This year in Wisconsin, we saw 14 eggs hatch, and 3 of these wild-hatched chicks are still with the population. Additionally, we led our largest release effort since 2017, and we have introduced 9 captive-reared Whooping Cranes in Wisconsin, some of which may join you in Indiana this winter!

For more information about the Eastern Migratory Population, please check out this recent [blog post](#) by Hillary Thompson, and follow along with their migration [here](#)!

Additionally, our team grew this year as we welcomed Lauren Benedict, our new Indiana-based outreach biologist assistant. For those of you who knew Katelyn Garrett last year, Lauren is holding a similar position but will be with us until September 2024 and in addition to managing our Indiana outreach efforts she will also be monitoring the wild birds to help inform our management decisions. Lauren is an incredible asset to our team, and I am very excited to introduce her to you! As Lauren gets settled into her new position, she will send regular updates about the Indiana Whooping Cranes and share new and recurring volunteer opportunities. If you have any questions or an interest in volunteering at an event or program, please do not hesitate to contact Lauren or me!



Best,

Stephanie M. Schmidt, MSc.

Whooping Crane Outreach Coordinator, CIG

She | Her | Hers

Office: 608-356-9462 ext.142 | Mobile: 262-441-8958

International Crane Foundation

E11376 Shady Lane Rd. Baraboo, WI 53913

Left: Whooping Crane #1-11 (male), St. Croix Co., Wisconsin Photo by Terry Mortier

Texas:

Ecology and management of Sandhill Cranes in the western U.S.

At a [Highland Lakes Birding and Wildflower Society \(HLBWS\)](#) meeting at the Texas A&M Agrilife Extension Service on 5 October 2023, Dr. Blake Grisham summarized a decade's worth of research findings on Sandhill Cranes generated by him and his team. According to Dr. Grisham, Sandhill Cranes (*Antigone canadensis*) are among the most recognizable and beloved birds in North America, given their size, stature and striking red crowns. The U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) recognizes 6 migratory populations of Sandhill Cranes, four of which occur in or west of the Rocky Mountains. In 2013, Dr. Grisham and his colleagues initiated a series of research projects on the Lower Colorado River Valley cranes. Ten years later, his team expanded their research to include ALL migratory populations in the Western United States. The major findings from these combined projects are based on data captured by more than 120 global positioning system transmitters deployed on Sandhill Cranes in Texas, New Mexico, Arizona, California, and Oregon. Dr. Grisham is an Associate Professor of Wildlife Management at Texas Tech University in the Department of Natural Resources Management.



Habitat Matters!

Arizona:

Sandhill Crane livestream up and running

The Arizona Game and Fish Department has launched its annual Sandhill Crane livestream from the [Whitewater Draw Wildlife Area](#) where viewers can watch the activity of 20,000 and 25,000 cranes. The live cam will run until March/ April when the cranes migrate north to their nesting grounds. Recommended viewing is from sunrise until about an hour after as the cranes disperse to feed in nearby fields. The

cranes will then return to the Draw in the late morning remaining there the remainder of the day. They may be visible at night as well roosting standing in shallow water. Arizona Game and Fish tries to keep the camera trained on cranes and other interesting subjects. *To watch the Arizona Game & Fish Department's Sandhill Crane live cam, go here:*
<https://www.azgfd.com/wildlife-conservation/wildlife-viewing/wildlife-live-cams/live-sandhill-crane-cam/>



The Merced National Wildlife Refuge hosts the largest wintering concentration of Lesser Sandhill Cranes on the Pacific Flyway. Photo © Brad R. Lewis

California:

Seeking farmers to provide habitat for cranes

[BirdReturns](#) is a flexible, cost-effective wildlife habitat marketplace designed to increase flooded habitats for migratory birds where and when they need it most in ways that deliver multiple benefits for the farmers, wetland managers, and communities who participate. BirdReturns is implemented by the [Migratory Bird Conservation Partnership](#) – a strategic partnership between [The Nature Conservancy](#), [Audubon California](#), and [Point Blue Conservation Science](#) with the goal of creating a climate-resilient California with thriving bird populations and sustainable water for wildlife and people.

Interested individuals can still learn how to create short-term habitat for the BirdReturns–Sandhill Crane Program at [BirdReturns.org](#). The deadline to apply this year has already passed, ending on October 16, 2023. The [BirdReturns Program](#) creates short-term habitat desperately needed by migratory birds – including Sandhill Cranes – by paying farmers to flood their fields.

What is required?

The Program requires post-harvest management and two habitat types:

- At least 50 acres of flooded habitat for a minimum of eight weeks
- At least 150 acres on harvested small grains fields must remain unflooded for at least six weeks

Make crane habitat your second crop!

Winter post-harvest flooding of roost fields helps decompose crop residue, aids salt management, and offers pre-irrigation benefits if extended into the spring. Flooding in the Delta also helps combat subsidence. Without our help, Sandhill Cranes and other waterbirds that overwinter in the Central Valley are likely to continue to see declines in their populations. Overwintering cranes are in dire need of safe habitat to rest and refuel before embarking on their spring migration north. Flooded fields provide roosting

habitat while dry agricultural fields offer foraging opportunities. Make helping cranes and other waterbirds part of your annual cropping cycle by providing habitat with BirdReturns!

For more information, go to [BirdReturns.org](https://birdreturns.org) or contact the following individuals with any questions:

- Billy Abbott at 530-228-1862, william.abbott@tnc.org
- Julia Barfield at 916-449-2852, jbarfield@tnc.org
- Jerred Dixon at 916-516-4011, jerred.dixon@cfrstaten.com

Learn more about California Rice programs by going here: [California Rice News](https://calricenews.org/2023/10/05/seeking-farmers-to-provide-habitat-for-cranes/) or here: <https://calricenews.org/2023/10/05/seeking-farmers-to-provide-habitat-for-cranes/>

Idaho:

Sandhill Cranes nest for the first time at Kootenai National Wildlife Refuge

In 2022, the Kootenai National Wildlife Refuge completed a habitat restoration project that improved the water delivery infrastructure – removing the old, leaking levy and water structures as well as invasive species. Once the site of a deep, stagnant pond, the area is now a healthy, connected wetland habitat where native plants can flourish – increasing the amount of plant seeds and invertebrates available for wildlife to eat. At the refuge, the Sandhill Cranes can be found in the restored wetland and wet meadow areas near their nest site on the southern end of the property.



Kootenai NWR, Idaho 2022-06-29. Photo by Carlene Hardt

“Seeing Sandhill Cranes here, using the restored habitat, just reinforces how important these projects are for wildlife,” said Ehlers. The refuge is planning additional habitat restoration projects to remove additional old levees and improve water connectivity and management capabilities to improve habitat for waterfowl, birds, moose, and a host of other species.

<https://www.fws.gov/story/2023-08/sandhill-cranes-nest-first-time-kootenai-national-wildlife-refuge>

Expansion of Grays Lake National Wildlife Refuge coming soon

The U.S. Department of Interior announced that \$6.2 million in funding has been approved for USFWS to acquire almost 2,500 acres to expand [Grays Lake National Wildlife Refuge](https://www.fws.gov/gray-lake-national-wildlife-refuge) near Wynan, Idaho – benefitting Sandhill Cranes.

The Migratory Bird Conservation Commission approved the funding 13 September 2023 as part of a larger \$50.6 million effort to expand wetlands and upland bird habitat, the U.S. Department of Interior announced in a press release issued earlier this month.

The Grays Lake National Wildlife Refuge, located 30 miles north of Soda Springs, was created in 1965 through a Refuge Use Cooperative Agreement with the US Fish and Wildlife Service, Bureau of Indian Affairs, and local landowners to protect a portion of the historic Grays Lake and provide nesting and

resting habitat for migrating waterfowl. It includes a high elevation 22,000-acre bulrush marsh that hosts the largest breeding population of Sandhill Cranes in North America.

Acquiring the additional 2,496 acres expands the amount of protected habitat for Sandhill Cranes, U.S Fish and Wildlife Service spokesperson Christina M. Meister said.

The funding comes primarily from sales of Federal Migratory Bird Hunting and Conservation Stamps, which are commonly known as Duck Stamps, Department of Interior officials said. The Federal Duck Stamp Program was established in 1934 and has provided more than \$1.2 billion for habitat conservation in the National Wildlife Refuge System.



Juvenile and adult Sandhills Cranes. Photo by Bill Schiess/EastIdahoNews.com

Illinois:

Family group stops at Muirhead Springs Forest Preserve

Just when you thought Muirhead Springs Forest Preserve couldn't get better for birding, critically endangered Whooping Cranes make an appearance. Muirhead Springs Forest Preserve is located at 42W855 Bahr Rd., Hampshire. For more information on the Forest Preserve District of Kane County, visit www.kaneforest.com or search social media for @forestpreserve. <https://kaneforest.com> For the press release of the visit, go here: https://kaneforest.com/upload/WhoopingCranes_Nov23.pdf



Above: Photos by Haley Gottardo.

Kansas:

Water rights during severe drought: Farming vs. critical wetlands habitat

Quivira's marshes have a legal right to water. Kansas has never enforced it, because doing so would hurt farmers who need the water for crop irrigation. Under Kansas state law, Quivira's water needs take legal priority over 95% of other water users in the area. This is because Kansas law takes a first-come, first-serve approach. The longest-established water users get first dibs when supplies run low. Quivira's water rights date to the early 1960s.

While drought continues to batter some of the Great Plains' most important wetlands, decades-long arguing continues over what to do about it. Kansas politicians, farmers and community leaders pressed the federal government in October 2023 to drop its call for Kansas to uphold a state law guaranteeing water for [Quivira Wildlife Refuge](#). The [federal government's demand](#) would in practice have required farmers to irrigate their crops less.

Marshes at Quivira and elsewhere in central Kansas remain largely dry after more than a year and a half of intense drought, complicating yet another migration season for more than 1 million birds – including endangered [Whooping Cranes](#) – that rely on these wetlands as a critical resting and feeding place during migration each fall and spring.

But that water is also in demand for crops that fuel the local economy. So much so that there was a backlash earlier this year when the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service filed paperwork to push a Kansas state agency into securing water for Quivira. USFWS has since backed off but continues to seek effective collaboration with the Division of Water Resources and other involved agencies to solve the issue – as it was disclosed that [Quivira was shortchanged in 26 out of the 34 years](#) that the division reviewed.

Rattlesnake Creek and Quivira lie above groundwaters that include the Great Bend Prairie Aquifer. Water levels in this branch of the massive eight-state [High Plains Aquifer](#) are relatively stable compared to the more famous and rapidly dwindling Ogallala branch farther west. The federal agency has supported exploring the option of pumping groundwater into Quivira. But even if the idea proves feasible the proposal wouldn't fully address the refuge's water shortage.



Above left: A sign at Quivira Wildlife Refuge notes the presence of rare Whooping Cranes that use these wetlands during their annual migrations. Photo by Celia Llopis-Jepsen/Kansas News Service. Above right: A saltmarsh at Quivira Wildlife Refuge lies almost entirely dry during bird migration season last November. This fall the refuge had very little water. Photo by Celia Llopis-Jepsen/Kansas News Service

On paper, Quivira National Wildlife Refuge has the right to 14,600 acre-feet per year from Rattlesnake Creek. To visualize that volume: It is enough to cover Quivira's 7,000 acres of wetland in water two feet deep. The creek's annual flow into the refuge, though, often comes up at least 20 percent short because of well pumping. Dry years like 2022 and 2023 magnify the tension between economic and environmental interests. The area surrounding Quivira is experiencing severe drought, according to the [U.S. Drought Monitor](#).

To read the 10 February 2023 letter from the U.S. Department of the Interior to the Kansas Dept. of Agriculture concerning Quivira NWR and USFWS efforts to secure water, go here: https://agriculture.ks.gov/docs/default-source/bmt---impairments/signed-quivira_feb-10-2023.pdf?sfvrsn=6b2499c1_0

To read the findings of a 2016 review by the Division of Water Resources Kansas Department of Agriculture of a decades long investigation Concerning a Claim by the USFWS of Water Right

Impairment, go here: https://agriculture.ks.gov/docs/default-source/wms---impairment-reports/final-impairment-report-quivira-20160715.pdf?sfvrsn=ad2ab8c1_4

To read more in the High Plains Public Radio article, go here: <https://www.kcur.org/news/2023-10-25/a-federal-agency-backs-off-a-push-to-take-water-from-kansas-farmers-for-a-wildlife-refuge>

Cheyenne Bottoms Wildlife Area maintains vital wetlands

Jason Wagner is the public lands manager who oversees and maintains Cheyenne Bottoms. Managing almost 20,000-acres is a big job for him and his staff of two – the work never ends. The primary management goal of Cheyenne Bottoms Wildlife Area is to provide a diverse marsh habitat for waterfowl and shorebirds during migration – which includes access to food, water and roosting places during migration stopovers. A secondary goal is to increase the number of nesting waterfowl and shorebirds in the area. Part of a 41,000-acre natural land sink, Cheyenne Bottoms is a 19,998-acre wildlife area, located 11 miles northeast of Great Bend, Kansas.

The current fight over water rights at Quivira doesn't affect Cheyenne Bottoms Wildlife Area. The state made some farmers [cut irrigation dramatically starting in the 1990s](#) to protect streams that feed into these wetlands. But the current drought is so bad that only about 2,000 of its acres are wet. That's better than fall 2022, but normal years offer five times as much wetland. That means the massive flocks of water birds passing through this time of year are competing for less food.

Forty percent of North America's shorebirds pass through Cheyenne Bottoms during migration, gaining it designation as an internationally important birding area (IBA). Long distance migrants such as the [Hudsonian Godwit](#), stop in Cheyenne Bottoms during their annual migration to and from South America – breeding in arctic bogs and tidal mudflats, the species travels nearly 10,000 miles to near the tip of South America. The Aransas-Wood Buffalo population of Whooping Cranes use it as a stopover as well.

Through collaborative work undertaken with the help of community partners, control of invasive phragmites and other conservation work is possible. "Our environmental remediation work started in the mid-1990s, and we appreciate having our partners very much," said Wagner.

BirdLife International (2023) Important Bird Area factsheet: Cheyenne Bottoms Preserve and Wildlife Area. Downloaded from <http://datazone.birdlife.org/site/factsheet/cheyenne-bottoms-preserve-and-wildlife-area-iba-usa> on 17/11/2023.

Minnesota:

Wildlife Drive opening at Roseau River Wildlife Management Area

The 27-mile Wildlife Drive within the Roseau River Wildlife Management Area was open from Saturday, July 15 - Sunday, July 23, and then on Saturdays and Sundays through Sunday, August 6. The self-guided tour covers wetland, woodland, brushland, grassland and farmland habitats, providing visitors with great opportunities for wildlife viewing.

[Roseau River WMA](#) is managed by the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources and located 20 miles northwest of Roseau. The WMA is part of the Pine to Prairie Birding Trail, consisting of 45 sites spanning a 223-mile corridor in the northwestern part of the state. These sites offer some of the most spectacular birding in the state, along with scenic beauty and friendly communities.

For more information go here: [DNR website](#)

Sandhills flock to Sherburne National Wildlife

By the early 1900s Sandhill Cranes were considered rare in Minnesota mostly due to habitat loss that included extensive draining of wetlands, and unregulated hunting. Between that time and the 1950s, critical conservation work took place – regulation of Sandhill hunting and protecting and restoring their habitat – all contributing to the gradual increase the eastern Sandhill Crane population.

[Sherburne National Wildlife Refuge](#) was established in 1965 at the urging of local conservationists and hunters interested in restoring the wildlife values of the St. Francis River Basin. Located just northwest of Minneapolis, the 30,700-acre refuge protects mixed habitat types including oak savanna, Big Woods, and wetlands. The St. Francis River flows through the eastern side of the park. The refuge is now a wild remnant of where the western prairies meet the northern woods, with oak savanna, prairie opening, forest, wetland, and riverine habitats.

Considered to be a critical stopover in the Central flyway for eastern migratory birds, Sandhill Cranes use the refuge on their way south to their wintering grounds in Florida, Alabama, and Georgia. In 1992, fewer than 100 cranes were counted there during peak migration. In fall 2022 a record was set with 29,256 Sandhill Cranes counted at the refuge during its annual fall crane count. Sandhill Crane migration at Sherburne typically peaks around the end of October or early November. Count numbers start to decrease as it gets colder, and water begins to freeze.

In 1944, there was only an estimated 10 to 25 nesting pairs in the state. The first breeding pair of Sandhill Cranes was recorded on the refuge in 1975. An estimated 25 to 50 pairs of cranes now nest there each year.

Crane surveys begin the second week of October and continue until the cranes leave the area, which is typically mid-November. Updates to crane numbers on the refuge during fall migration are posted at <https://www.fws.gov/refuge/sherburne>. To learn more about sandhill cranes at the refuge, view the DNR webinar at <https://tinyurl.com/3pa37yrj>.



*Sandhill Crane at the Sherburne National Wildlife Refuge, May 2019.
Photo by Tim Larson.*

Nebraska:

\$10M to help restore wetlands in Nebraska, Kansas

The Kansas Nebraska Wetland Initiative will get \$10 million, part of nearly \$52 million awarded through Ducks Unlimited (DU) to support projects with farmers, ranchers, and landowners in four key areas of the U.S. The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) announced the award 2 November 2023 as part of the agency's investment in climate-smart agriculture practices.

Operating under the USDA's Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP), DU hopes to create a new, flexible, and cost-effective wetland and riparian restoration, management, and protection program that fills a niche for Kansas and Nebraska ag producers willing to invest in their land.

“Under this initiative, our goal will be to address some of the changes the landscape has endured from drought, drainage, and dewatering, by creating habitat that sustains several wildlife species, not just waterfowl,” said Ele Nugent, DU’s manager of conservation programs in Nebraska. “It’s going to take a lot of time and effort, but our staff has the knowledge and expertise to get it done. Thanks to our project partners for supporting this initiative and to USDA for funding our proposal. We’re all excited about the opportunities this investment affords.”

Ducks Unlimited Inc. is the world's largest nonprofit organization dedicated to conserving North America's continually disappearing wetlands, grasslands, and other waterfowl habitats. Established in 1937, Ducks Unlimited has restored or protected more than 16 million acres thanks to contributions from more than a million supporters across the continent. Guided by science, DU's projects benefit waterfowl, wildlife and people in all 50 states. DU is growing its mission through a historic \$3 billion Conservation For A Continent capital campaign. Learn more at www.ducks.org.

Texas:



Photo courtesy of the San Antonio River Authority.

Protecting the Whooping Crane

Located in the Central Flyway, the San Antonio Bay area plays an important role in the function of the North American continental ecosystems – providing habitat for migratory bird species such as the federally endangered Whooping Crane.

As recent as 1941 Whooping Crane numbers were so low the species was facing extinction but through ongoing, collaborative efforts of federal, state and international (Canada) groups the population is slowly increasing. The Whooping Crane is not only one of the rarest bird species in North America but is also the largest bird in North America, standing up to 5-feet tall with a wingspan of up to 7.5-feet. Every year the wild population of Aransas-Wood Buffalo Whooping Cranes migrates from Canada to the bays and estuaries near San Antonio Bay to spend the winter.

The San Antonio River Authority engages with numerous partners at the state, local and federal level to foster understanding that healthy waters upstream contribute to healthy waters downstream, where the Whooping Cranes and many other species rely on a clean habitat for survival.

Multiple areas near the San Antonio Bay are designated as parks, USFWS Critical Habitats for Threatened and Endangered Species and National Heritage Institute Wetlands. All these efforts are vital

for the recovery and sustainability of this endangered species. In 2022 the Aransas-Wood Buffalo migratory population numbered 543 birds.

To learn more about the San Antonio River Authority, go here: <https://www.sariverauthority.org/bays-estuaries/protecting-whooping-crane>

Environmental Issues:



Whooping Cranes, at the Quivira National Wildlife Refuge in Stafford County. GREAT BEND TRIBUNE file photo.

Kansas

Oil production water spills into Quivira NWR

State and federal agencies are investigating the spill in September of over 2,000 barrels of “produced” water from oil production into the Rattle Snake Creek about three miles upstream of the Quivira National Wildlife Refuge in Stafford County, said Matt Lara, communications director for the Kansas Department of Health and Environment. “Produced water” is a term used in the oil industry or geothermal industry to describe water that is produced as a byproduct during the extraction of oil and natural gas or used as a medium for heat extraction. Water that is produced along with the hydrocarbons is generally brackish and saline water in nature.

The spill was first reported by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, which manages the refuge, at approximately 1:30 p.m. 12 September 2023. Approximately 90,000 gallons of produced water and minimal amounts of crude oil were discharged from a production pipeline over Rattlesnake Creek resulting in a stream advisory issued for Rattlesnake Creek and livestock watering due to potentially high chlorides.

Lara said an adsorbent boom has been deployed across the creek to stop oil migration downstream. Adsorbents accumulate liquid on the surface of a solid material, unlike absorbents that soak the liquids into the materials. In addition, a plan to dam the creek and pump contaminated water from it was being developed.

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Science News:

The Whooping Crane Continues to Visit Louisiana

By E. W. Nelson

The Condor, Volume 31, Issue 4, July 1929, Pages 146–147, <https://doi.org/10.2307/1362979>

Published: 01 July 1929

In February and early March, 1928, the writer spent some time investigating the distribution and habits of the Blue Geese (*Chen caerulescens*) on the coastal marshes of Louisiana. On March 11, with the local game warden, Ulyese Veazey, I rode over some miles of slightly flooded, hard marsh lying between the shore of the Gulf of Mexico and the long oak ridge, some eight miles inland, known Pecan Island. About two miles from the Gulf, at a distance of perhaps a mile, I saw cloud-like flocks of blue geese, aggregating five or six thousand birds, rising and settling uneasily on their feeding ground, filling the air continuously with their chorus of rather highly pitched notes.

The son of the owner of a small cattle ranch on the coast rode with us and on inquiry as to what part of the marsh the big white cranes frequented, of which he and his father had told us, he pointed to the right and farther inland. After following that direction for nearly a mile I was delighted to see a splendid pair of *Grus americana*, their plumage gleaming white in the bright sunshine as they stood in the midst of a little group of half a dozen cattle.

We took a course that would lead us within about 500 yards to one side of them and as we approached that point they arose with slow and stately wing strokes and moved across the marsh, at an elevation of about 100 feet, for about a mile and, alighting, stood on the alert. After watching them for some time we turned away and left them in peace.

I believe that all the members of the Cooper Club will appreciate the exultant thrill I experienced in seeing these majestic birds in life for the first time since the middle 70's when, as a youngster, I roamed the prairies of the Mississippi Valley. As my eyes followed these birds moving deliberately away a feeling of sadness arose as I realized this was probably my last sight of some of the very few survivors of one of the finest birds native to our fauna but doomed to early extinction. So far as I could learn among the trappers and hunters living in these marshes, from the delta of the Mississippi to the border of Texas, this pair is all that survives of the many Whooping Cranes that once wintered there.

On January 7, 1929, Ulyese Veazey wrote me from Pecan Island that this pair of cranes was again wintering where we had seen them in 1928. He had seen them within two weeks of the time he wrote and he frequently heard their rolling call notes from a distance as he worked his trap-line daily in the marsh.

One disquieting element regarding these birds is that this is the fourth successive winter they have passed on this section of the marsh, always without young. Possibly these birds may be of the same sex, but in any case, they fail to rear young, so far as the evidence goes, and when they meet their fate, in the not distant future, the species may disappear forever from this region. Formerly Whooping Cranes wintered commonly south to the marshes at the head of Lake Chapala, Jalisco, on the southern part of the Mexican tableland, but they vanished from there many years ago.

Mr. Veazey, who has spent his life on Pecan Island, informed me that years ago, from 15 to more than 20 Whooping Cranes regularly wintered in the section of marsh where we saw the pair.

Ordinarily they were seen singly or in groups of from 2 to 5, but on one occasion he counted 21 gathered in a loose flock, but it soon broke up and the birds scattered as usual. He stated that for the last 15 or 20 years these birds have been steadily decreasing.

Whooping Cranes breeding at White Lake, Louisiana, 1939: observations by John J. Lynch, U.S. Bureau of Biological Survey

Roderick C. **Drewien**, John **Tautin**, Mary L. **Courville**, and Gay M. **Gomez** (2001). Whooping Cranes Breeding at White Lake, Louisiana, 1939: Observations By John J. Lynch, U. S. Bureau Of Biological Survey.

PROCEEDINGS OF THE NORTH AMERICAN CRANE WORKSHOP 8:24-30

<https://pubs.usgs.gov/publication/5211129>

Abstract: On 15 May 1939, John J. Lynch of the U.S. Bureau of Biological Survey located 13 Whooping Cranes (*Grus americana*), including 2 prefledged young, during an aerial survey near White Lake in southwestern Louisiana. His observation was the last historic record of Whooping Cranes breeding in the wild in the United States, and it confirmed the presence of a nonmigratory breeding population along the Gulf Coast. While reviewing old U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service files at the National Archives in 1999, we located Lynch's original 1939 field note, 2 letters, 5 photographs, and a draft manuscript describing the discovery; 4 other related letters also were found. Because of their biological and historical interest, we have reproduced the documents in this paper. A thorough assessment of the White Lake marshes as a potential site for returning nonmigratory Whooping Cranes to southwestern Louisiana should be conducted.

To read the full-text article or to download a full-text PDF, go here:

<https://digitalcommons.unl.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1054&context=nacwgproc>

The International Crane Foundation's Webinars

We are taking a year-end break and will return with our regular webinars in February 2024! You are invited to our monthly From the Field Webinar series on Thursdays at 11 a.m. Central Time.

To learn more about sponsoring a webinar, please contact [Kate Fitzwilliams](#) at 608-617-6002.

<https://savingcranes.org/webinars/>

[Click here](#) to view the library of past webinars.

Cranes in Art:

International Crane Foundation and Peggy Notebaert Nature Museum present "The Art of Saving Cranes" Exhibition

Experience the beauty of cranes in art at a special exhibition, "The Art of Saving Cranes: 50 Years of Conservation at the International Crane Foundation," on view at the [Peggy Notebaert Nature Museum](#) in Chicago, Illinois. Exhibition dates: October 28, 2023 - February 18, 2024.

The special exhibition marks the first time the [International Crane Foundation](#) has highlighted part of its art collection outside the Foundation's Baraboo, Wisconsin headquarters. The display includes 12 paintings, prints and other mediums donated or created over the past 50 years. Works on display

illustrate the fragility and resilience of the world's 15 species of cranes and people coming together to protect cranes and their habitats, with works by artists Victor Bakhtin (Soviet Union) and David Rankin (Ohio).

Co-founded 50 years ago by ornithologists George Archibald, Ph.D., and Ron Sauey, Ph.D., the International Crane Foundation (ICF) works worldwide to conserve cranes and the ecosystems, watersheds, and flyways on which they depend. The Foundation provides knowledge, leadership, and inspiration to engage people in resolving threats to cranes and their diverse landscapes. From its 300-acre headquarters in Baraboo, Wisconsin, the ICF reach extends across the globe, with offices and staff in China, Uganda, Kenya, Zambia, and South Africa, as well as Texas. It

works through strong partnerships with local organizations, governments, universities, businesses, and others in these regions. More than 125 ICF staff and partners work with a network of hundreds of specialists in 50 countries on five continents.



Sandhill Cranes landing in Horicon Marsh, Wisconsin. Painting by Terrill Knaack

The Foundation is committed to a future where all 15 of the world's crane species are secure. Through the charisma of cranes, ICF envisions a future where people work together for wild crane populations and the landscapes they depend on – and by doing so, find new pathways to sustain our water, land, and livelihoods. Visit savingcranes.org for more information and to support the work of ICF.

Sandhill and Whooping Cranes, North America's only species of cranes, are currently migrating south to warmer climates giving rise to the opportunity to see and hear cranes flying over the Chicago region the next several weeks.

Exhibition works that help tell the story of the International Crane Foundation and its mission to save cranes will include:

Whooping Cranes in Wisconsin

Artist: Victor Bakhtin, born in the Soviet Union (1951-2016)

Victor Bakhtin created moving stories of nature through his art, including many pieces for the International Crane Foundation. Archibald met Bakhtin while working to protect cranes in the former Soviet Union, and he helped him emigrate to the United States, where his paintings of cranes furthered their mutual mission. Today, about 70 Whooping Cranes nest on wetlands in Wisconsin and winter mainly in southern Indiana and northern Alabama.

Cranes of the World

Artist: David Rankin, Ohio (b. 1945)

The International Crane Foundation uses his painting to illustrate the world's cranes. Cranes are among the oldest living birds, dating back millions of years. Today, cranes are among the most endangered families of birds, with 10 of the 15 species threatened by extinction. David Rankin uses his gift for watercolor to inspire appreciation of nature and further conservation.

Sandhill Cranes

Artist: Terrill Knaack, Wisconsin (b. 1950)

Terrill Knaack is a native of Wisconsin's Horicon Marsh area, where Sandhill Cranes breed and nest. Sandhill Cranes are a crane success story. In the early to mid-1900s, Sandhill Cranes were in danger of

going extinct. Today, though still threatened by the loss of wetlands and power line collisions, Sandhill Cranes have made an inspiring comeback. They now number in the hundreds of thousands and are found coast to coast.

Symbolic Petition of Chippewa Chiefs, 1849

Artist: Unknown

A version of this print was carried to Washington, D.C., in 1849, when the Ojibwe (Chippewa) tribe petitioned the United States to adjust the boundaries of the 1842 Treaty of LaPointe. The image represents Ojibwe clans with a crane leading the group. The original is at the Wisconsin Historical Society.

For over 165 years, The Chicago Academy of Sciences and its Peggy Notebaert Nature Museum have served a unique role in the city of Chicago connecting people of all ages to nature and science through immersive exhibits, fun family events, important conservation research and in-depth education programs, inspiring the wonder in all of us. Serving over 300,000 visitors per year, it was formed to create a positive relationship between people and nature through collaborations, education, research and collections, exhibitions, and public forums to grow the Chicago region's urban connection to the world of nature and science. Visit naturemuseum.org for more information.

Call to All Louisiana Artists: Whooping Crane Art Show and Contest!

In honor of the Louisiana Whooping Crane Reintroduction Project / Presented by the Louisiana Wildlife and Fisheries Foundation



The last wild Louisiana Whooping Crane died in 1950, and there were no cranes on the Louisiana landscape for over 60 years. But in 2011, the first cohort of Whooping Cranes were released into southwest Louisiana. Now, as these cranes have reproduced and new cranes have continued to be released into the wild, there are about 80 wild cranes. Please help us celebrate the reintroduction project by creating beautiful art.

SUBMISSION DEADLINE: January 6, 2024

Eligibility: To enter, must be 18 years or older and a resident of Louisiana.

Media: Any 2-dimensional art inspired by the Louisiana Whooping Crane Reintroduction Project, including drawings, paintings, photographs, or wall hangings. All media accepted.

Prizes include:

- First prize: \$500, plus a crane release experience at White Lake Wetlands Conservation Area.
- Second prize: \$250, plus a crane release experience at White Lake Wetlands Conservation Area.
- Third prize: \$100, plus a crane release experience at White Lake Wetlands Conservation Area.

Winners will be announced at a private gala event on February 17, 2024.

For additional contest information and application forms, see following:



Juvenile and adult Whooping Cranes in Louisiana wetlands. Photo courtesy of the Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries

Adult artists:

<https://static1.squarespace.com/static/579a1d2520099e24a49a4ed8/t/654aa0dba21ba408bf0188d1/1699389659528/Call+to+Artists+and+Entry.pdf>

Student artists:

<https://static1.squarespace.com/static/579a1d2520099e24a49a4ed8/t/654aa0d2a21ba408bf018141/1699389650652/Call+to+Student+Artists+.pdf>

Go to: www.lawff.org/whoopingcraneshow to submit your artwork.

Upcoming Events:



Sandhill Cranes at Monte Vista Colorado. Art by Mike Ross.

Festival of the Cranes 2023

Dates: December 6-9, 2023

Bosque del Apache National Wildlife Refuge, New Mexico

For more information go to the festival website: <https://friendsofbosquedelapache.org/festival/>

Holiday with the Cranes - Coastal Bend Audubon Society

Dates: December 9-10, 2023

Location: Galveston Island, TX

For a unique holiday experience, spend a wild weekend in Galveston celebrating the return of the Island's Sandhill Cranes at Holiday with the Cranes, Dec. 9 - 10, 2023. Join us for our indoor and outdoor nature activities combined with the ambience and warm hospitality of historic Galveston Island!

Galveston Island Nature Tourism Council is a membership organization that connects people with Galveston's natural environment. One of the ways we do that is through our events like Holiday with the Cranes. **The festival has SOLD OUT!**

For more festival information go here: <https://www.galvestonnaturetourism.org/>

Festival of the Cranes / Wheeler National Wildlife Refuge

Dates: January 12 - January 14, 2024

Location: Wheeler National Wildlife Refuge

3121 Visitors Center Road

Dacula, AL 35601

For a list of festival events and locations, and more information of the upcoming festival, go here:

<https://www.friendsofwheelernwr.org/events>

Over 14,000 Sandhill Cranes, along with a growing number of Whooping Cranes from the eastern migratory population, now spend the winter at Wheeler NWR. Festival attendees are able to view the cranes from an enclosed, heated observation tower.

Wings Over Willcox

Dates: January 11-14, 2024

Location: Willcox, Arizona

The 30th "Wings Over Willcox" (WOW) Birding & Nature festival is the perfect opportunity to see winter migrants and other wildlife of southeastern Arizona. The festival includes tours for photography, geology, history, botany, agriculture and, of course, thousands of Sandhill Cranes. Free admission. For tour fees and registration, call or register on-line.

For more information and to register, go here: (520) 384-2272, and www.wingsoverwillcox.com

Tennessee Sandhill Crane Festival / Hiwassee Wildlife Refuge

Dates: January 13-14, 2024

8:00 a.m.- 4:00 p.m. EST daily

Location: [Hiwassee Wildlife Refuge](#) and the Birchwood Community Center

545 Priddy Rd, Birchwood, Tennessee

For the festival agenda go [here](#).

As many as 12,000 cranes have overwintered at the confluence of the Tennessee and Hiwassee Rivers. Whether you're an avid birder or you've never seen a Sandhill Crane before, the Tennessee Sandhill Crane Festival represents an extraordinary opportunity to witness a natural phenomenon that is truly unforgettable. Experience the migration of the Sandhill Cranes and many other waterfowl, eagles, White Pelicans, and Whooping Cranes. Stop by the International Crane Foundation booth to learn about the work it is doing with Whooping and Sandhill Cranes throughout the United States as well as its global conservation programs.

Free buses run the short distance from the Birchwood Community Center to the Hiwassee Refuge and Cherokee Removal Memorial. Volunteers and scopes are set up at each location for birders and curious visitors.

Winter Wings Festival

Dates: **FYI - There will be no festival in 2024, please see the following announcement.**

Location: The festival is headquartered at the Oregon Institute of Technology, Klamath Falls, Oregon.

A 21 September 2023 announcement from festival organizers:

"Just want all of our followers to know that the Winter Wings Festival is taking 2024 off. The Klamath Basin Audubon Society (KBAS) board and WWF coordinators have decided to use the remainder of 2023 and the 2024 calendar year to restock its volunteer pool and solicit suggestions on the next iteration of the WWF from its previous supporters and attendees. In the meantime, we hope all of you will enjoy all the other species that make year-round birding in the Klamath Basin so unique. Please feel free to contact us at wingskf@gmail.com with your suggestions."

Whooping Crane Festival - 2024 / Port Aransas

Dates: Thursday, February 22 - Sunday, February 25, 2024

Location: Port Aransas and Mustang Island, TX

Each year since 1996, the Whooping Crane Festival in Port Aransas, Texas has celebrated the annual return of the cranes to their wintering habitat at the Aransas National Wildlife Refuge. The Texas Coastal Bend is the only place where you can see the world's last naturally occurring population of Whooping Cranes. In 2024, the festival is back and ready to celebrate its 27th anniversary!

The four-day event will feature renowned speakers, birding trips, boating trips, nature tours, photography workshops, a trade show, and much more.

For more information and to register and buy tickets for festival events (already selling out!), go here:

<https://www.portaransas.org/whooping-crane-festival/the-2024-festival/>

Marsh Madness Sandhill Crane Festival

Dates: February 16-17, 2024

Location: Goose Pond Fish and Wildlife Area

13540 County Road 400S, Linton, IN 47441

Greene Co. Indiana, near Linton

Friends of Goose Pond is proud to present the 15th annual Marsh Madness Sandhill Crane Festival, celebrating the spring migration of Sandhill Cranes, Whooping Cranes, and numerous waterfowl to the Goose Pond Fish and Wildlife Area, a 9000-acre wetland complex south of Linton, Indiana.

Marsh Madness features a variety of cultural, educational, and wildlife conservation-oriented experiences. There's something for everyone: migrating cranes and waterfowl, wetland driving tours, educational exhibits at the Goose Pond Visitors Center, wildlife art display, and family and kid's nature activities.

For the festival agenda, go here:

<https://friendsofgoosepond.org/marsh-madness-schedule/>

For a map of Goose Pond FWA, go here:

https://www.in.gov/dnr/fishwild/files/fw-gpfa_waterfowl_draw_map.pdf

Learn more about the conservation, restoration, and education work by Friends of Goose Pond group here: <http://www.friendsofgoosepond.org/>

Iain Nicholson Audubon Center at Rowe Sanctuary – Nebraska Crane Season

Dates: March 9 - April 6, 2024

Location: Audubon Rowe Sanctuary

44450 Elm Island Road

Gibbon, NE 68840

Every March, over a million Sandhill Cranes converge on the Platte River Valley in central Nebraska to fuel up before continuing north to their nesting grounds. Audubon's Rowe Sanctuary is at the heart of this magnificent crane staging area.

Rowe Sanctuary offers daily guided tours at sunrise and sunset to view the spectacular concentrations of Sandhill Cranes on their river roosts from new discovery stations strategically placed along the Platte River close to Sandhill Crane roosts. Nature enthusiasts, bird lovers, and photographers will have multiple ways to experience this historic migration.

Experience the amazing migration as more than 1 million Sandhill Cranes stop along the Platte River. Reservations for the 2024 crane season will open online at 9:00 am Central time, on Wednesday, January 3, 2024. To learn more and to make reservations, go here: <https://rowe.audubon.org>

41th Monte Vista Crane Festival – Where the Cranes Meet the Mountains

Dates: March 8-10, 2024
Location: San Luis Valley
Monte Vista, Colorado

Every year, like clockwork, nearly 20,000 Sandhill Cranes descend on Colorado's scenic San Luis Valley for a six-week stopover to rest and refuel before continuing their northward spring migration. In 2023, join us in person again for photography workshops, interpreter-led bus tours to view the cranes, raptors, and places of interest. The festival is a collaborative effort between The Friends of the San Luis Valley National Wildlife Refuges (slvrefuges.org), The Monte Vista Chamber of Commerce, and the City of Monte Vista. A visit to the Monte Vista Crane Festival is an opportunity to see an amazing natural spectacle as well as experience a unique local community.

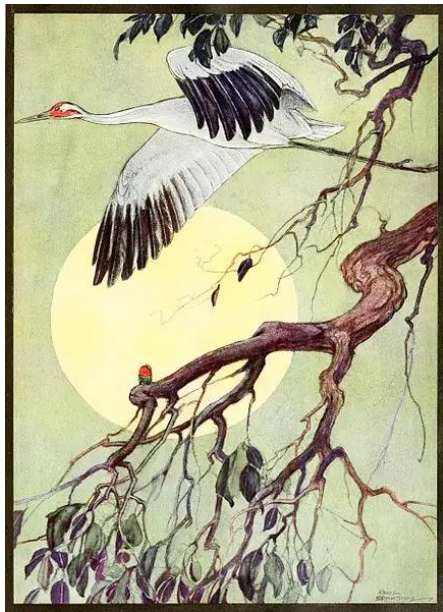
For more information, go here: mvcranefest.org

Othello Sandhill Crane Festival

Dates: Friday March 22 - Sunday March 24, 2024
Location: Columbia National Wildlife Refuge, Othello, Washington

For more than two decades we have celebrated the annual return of nearly 35,000 Sandhill Cranes to Othello, Washington, every March as they migrate north to their breeding grounds in Alaska. The festival offers an incredible opportunity to view the cranes up-close, with tours led by local experts. The festival also boasts other specialty tours of the flora, fauna, and geology of the area, and many lectures, as well as children's activities. The festival has grown over the years with returning participants attending from across the country.

For more information, go here: <https://www.othellosandhillcranefestival.org/festival-updates>



A note from the Editor:

After ten years + an issue or two, this is the final issue of the *Eastern Crane Bulletin*. It was begun in 2013 as a source of information – to bring awareness to readers about the status of, and the challenges faced by both Whooping and Sandhill Cranes. Perhaps some readers have been moved to learn more about cranes and the habitats on which they depend, and in doing so, join in providing them with a voice.

Thanks to all who read the bulletin through the years and for those who gave feedback.

For issues of the *Eastern Crane Bulletin* go here:

kyc4sandhillcranes.com

Or here: <https://kyc4sandhillcranes.com/eastern-crane-bulletin/>

Please check out the following groups and consider supporting their ongoing work on behalf of cranes:

- The International Crane Foundation, <https://savingcranes.org>
- North American Crane Working Group, <https://www.nacwg.org>; *Unison Call* newsletter
- Whooping Crane Conservation Association, <https://whoopingcrane.com>; *Grus Americana* newsletter

*May cranes forever swirl high above
and grace landscapes all around.*

The Eastern Crane Bulletin was issued quarterly 2013-2023 (March, June, September, and December).

Mary W. Yandell, *Editor*
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Or

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Specializing in banding Winter Hummingbirds
www.southeasternavianresearch.org
The Tennessee Ornithological Society
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For archived issues of the *Eastern Crane Bulletin* click here:
<http://kyc4sandhillcranes.com/eastern-crane-bulletin/>

We never lend or sell our E-bulletin recipient list.



Best wishes to all in the New Year!