



# EASTERN CRANE BULLETIN

## Eastern Crane Bulletin - July 2013

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

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### Whooping Crane news...

Eight more Whooping Cranes arrived in Wisconsin last week. The eight young cranes arrived in central Wisconsin from Patuxent Wildlife Research Center, where the chicks were hatched in Maryland. The chicks are preparing for their ultra-light led migration south this fall with Operation Migration. The eight chicks, along with another nine chicks are being raised at the International Crane Foundation through the parallel Direct Autumn Release Program, represent the next class of chicks to be released in the eastern US under the efforts of the Whooping Crane Eastern Partnership. You can follow the new group of chicks as they train for migration at <http://www.ustream.tv/migratingcranes> and learn more about Whooping Crane conservation at <http://www.savingcranes.org/whooping-crane-conservation.html>.

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### Sandhill Crane hunting in Tennessee?

In Tennessee, the SACR has always been considered a non-game species. At the urging of a small but enthusiastic group of hunters, the Tennessee Wildlife Resources Agency (TWRA) is considering changing that status to a hunted species. Now is the time to write letters expressing your opinion about crane hunting in Tennessee and send them to [TWRA.Comment@tn.gov](mailto:TWRA.Comment@tn.gov) (with the subject line "Sandhill Crane"). The agency is accepting comments until August 10, 2013 and a vote by the TN Fish and Wildlife Commission will take place on August 22 and 23 in Knoxville, if TWRA recommends there be a hunt.

Uncontrolled hunting at the turn of the last century decimated both Sandhill and Whooping Cranes in Eastern North America. The eastern Whooping Crane population was extirpated from its range and the small western population that nests in Canada and winters in Aransas, Texas was among the first species listed under the Endangered Species Act. Sandhill Cranes have made a slow but steady comeback. The rebound has been slow because Sandhills produce, at best, one chick per year, they don't reach breeding age until they are five to seven years old and unlike most birds, the young are dependent on the adults for 10 months, migrating, roosting, and foraging next to them during the entire non-breeding season.

The Eastern Population of Sandhill Cranes now numbers between 50,000 and 90,000 birds and virtually every one of them migrates over, or winters at the Hiwassee Wildlife Refuge located in Meigs County, TN at the confluence of the Hiwassee and Tennessee Rivers. The refuge is managed by the TWRA. Hiwassee is bordered on two sides by hunt clubs visible from the observation gazebo where thousands come each year to watch the visiting Sandhill and Whooping cranes from Thanksgiving to the end of March. While no hunting would be allowed on the refuge itself, no buffer zone for the surrounding land is suggested in the proposed hunt plan.

Hiwassee Wildlife Refuge is the best place in eastern North America to see and photograph cranes. These birds should continue to be promoted and celebrated as the most watchable wildlife species in the state. This is not an anti-hunting issue but a PRO-CRANE-WATCHING ISSUE.



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To read more about the proposed Tennessee season, for contact information and letter talking points, please visit:

<http://kyc4sandhillcranes.com/eastern-states/tennessee/>

[http://www.tn.gov/environment/tn\\_consv/archive/sandhill\\_cranes.pdf](http://www.tn.gov/environment/tn_consv/archive/sandhill_cranes.pdf)

"The Gift of Cranes" video

<http://www.youtube.com/embed/ZfotugphXSc?rel=0>

"No hunting of cranes in Tennessee" petition

<http://www.thepetitionsite.com/538/586/914/no-hunting-of-cranes-in-tennessee/>

Find what made the 2013 TN Sandhill Crane Festival a success

<http://www.tncranefestival.org>

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## **Fort Smith man stands on guard for whooping cranes – Canadian Wildlife notes whoopers expanding nesting range**

by Renée Francoeur - The Northern Journal, Fort Smith, NT, Canada

Almost every evening from May to September, Ronnie Schaefer of Fort Smith, NT, Canada, can be found in his hip waders slogging through marshes on Salt River First Nation reserve land, just down from Lobstick Creek. His mission – completely voluntary – is to watch over the tallest birds in North America, the whooping cranes, which nest in the area after a 2,500-mile summer migration from Texas.

Canada is home to the world's largest migratory population of whooping cranes. These cranes make their nests in the traditional breeding grounds in the northeastern corner of Wood Buffalo National Park. Their nests are counted every year by the Canadian Wildlife Service, in partnership with Environment Canada and Parks Canada. This year, 74 nests were counted, according to Mark Bidwell, a species at risk biologist with Environment Canada. That number is one less than the record set in 2011 at 75. It was estimated by the Whooping Crane Conservation Association that only 16 whooping cranes were left on the entire planet in 1941-1942.

"Counting the nests gives us an idea of how the birds are doing and it helps us track their movement.. "The number of nests goes up and down from year to year, but over long periods of time, it's continuing to tick upwards. That's a positive." Bidwell estimates about 150 birds are breeding out of the 300 in the flock. Bidwell noted, the population continues to expand outside the park. Eight nests were discovered outside Wood Buffalo's perimeters this year – one more than ever recorded. Additionally, breeding pairs, known to go back to the same nest year after year, are making nests in new locations, never before monitored by surveyists. Four to six new nests were recorded this year.

"What this means is the population is moving increasingly into areas that are not formally protected. It's not a critical situation yet as most birds are still using the park and the ones using areas outside the park, those locations are still quite remote. In Texas, however, where they spend the winter, it's different and they are coming into more contact with people and development." More possibilities of human interaction with the cranes also worries Schaefer.



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Meanwhile, Schaefer said he plans to keep a close eye on Snowflake and Snowball's rusty-brown colored chick, who just hatched last week. "They know me. I can read them. I know when to back off when they're in protective mode. I think they know I'm looking out for them," he said.

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## **What to do if you see a banded crane**

Many researchers across North America band cranes for study of their migration routes, habitat selection, and other ecologically relevant purposes. Often they rely on the public for information about the location of Whooping and Sandhill Cranes on their breeding, migration, and wintering areas. This information is invaluable to researchers, who may often never see a bird again after it is banded. If you happen to see a banded crane, The International Crane Foundation would love to hear about it. ([www.savingcranes.org](http://www.savingcranes.org))

First identify the species...Whooping, Sandhill...note the order of the bands on the leg from top to bottom as well as what leg is sporting what combination of bands. ICF will then be able to determine "who" banded the crane and "where" it was banded and how far it "traveled" when you saw it. An easy way to be a "citizen scientist" and help with crane research.

Report a Whooping Crane sighting form: <http://www.fws.gov/midwest/whoopingcrane/sightings/sightingform.cfm>

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If you have any friends or co-workers who want to get onto the monthly E-bulletin mailing list, have them contact:

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