



EASTERN CRANE BULLETIN

December 2014

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

Whooper vs. Sandhill – Correct identification is crucial

With the second of a three-year experimental Tennessee Sandhill Crane season (November 22-23, 2014 and Nov. 29, 2014-January 1, 2015) now in full swing, and the "fourth" experimental Sandhill season starting soon here in Kentucky (December 13, 2014-January 11, 2015) the chance of accidental shootings of Whooping Cranes increases. Kentucky and Tennessee are the ONLY states in the Mississippi Flyway to have Sandhill seasons. Hunters in both states were assigned permits for the Sandhill seasons *only* after successfully passing online ID tests. And, while this is a commendable effort by Fish and Wildlife to avoid wrong identifications by hunter in the field, it should be viewed as a first step in the effort to educate not only hunters but the general public as well about the federally endangered Whooping Cranes and, in particular, the reintroduced Eastern Population of Whooping Cranes.

As a resident of Kentucky I know firsthand that there is an ongoing need for public education when it comes to species identification. In November 2013 a mated pair of Whooping Cranes was shot on their wintering grounds in Hopkins County by "joy-killers." Then, in early December 2013, [an adult and juvenile Tundra swan were shot](#) and left in a ditch in Warren County. Evidence suggested the shootings were possible mistaken identification by waterfowl hunters – there is a legal Kentucky season on Snow Geese but no season on Swans.

Learn the difference between endangered Whooping Cranes, Sandhill Cranes and similar species from the "*Large Water Birds: An Identification Guide*" developed by the [International Crane Foundation](#): www.savingcranes.org/images/stories/site_images/conservation/whooping_crane/large_water_birds_1600.jpg

The Problem of Leucistic Sandhill Cranes

The following is from the Oct 2014 issue of *The Birding Community e-Bulletin* and gives insight into the identification of cranes some of us may have observed in the wild and been confused about.

"While rare, white Sandhill Cranes have been described by several observers. Birds with non-eumelanin schizochorism, a genetic pigmentation condition producing a leucistic (i.e., pale or white appearance), have been described from Saskatchewan, New Mexico, Nebraska, Kentucky, Tennessee, Florida, and elsewhere. Some such cranes are almost totally white with a red forehead and brown wings, while others are white with only a scattering of gray feathers on their wings and back. Still other cranes have only the wings and back white....

...While researchers in the past have speculated that one of these leucistic Sandhill Cranes could be mistaken for a Whooping Crane, it is also possible that a Whooping Crane could be mistaken for a leucistic Sandhill Crane."

To read the complete article and access archived *The Birding Community e-Bulletins* click here: <http://refugeassociation.org/news/birding-bulletin/>

To see photos of a leucistic Sandhill Crane at Bosque del Apache NWR click here. ['White' crane among the Sandhill Cranes at Bosque del Apache NWR](#)

The [Friends of Wild Whoopers \(FOTWW\)](#) has put together a page on its site to help individuals learn to identify Whooping Cranes (WHCR) versus the birds often mistaken for Whoopers. The page covers field marks; information on Whooping Crane look-alikes, a photo gallery of these birds in flight and a quiz to test one's identification skills: <http://friendsofthewildwhoopers.org/whooper-indentification/>

Between December 2010 - December 2013, **ELEVEN** Whooping Cranes in the eastern migratory and Louisiana non-migratory populations were shot and killed. The two killed in Kentucky were shot before the 2013-14 Sandhill crane season had begun. Rewards are offered for information leading to the apprehension and conviction of those responsible for the shootings but there has yet to be resolution to any of these cases. **Please share the following information with any and all you know in an effort to spread the word and stop these senseless killings.**

Read about the International Crane Foundation's ***Keeping Whooping Cranes Safe program*** to better understand the risks and reduce hazards the cranes face: <https://www.savingcranes.org/road-to-recovery.html>

December 2013 – Green County, IN

[DAR #35-09](#) was shot and killed in southwestern IN.

\$5,000 reward. If you have information, you can reach law enforcement officers at 1-800-TIP-IDNR (847-4367) or [317-346-7016](tel:317-346-7016).

[Read more in September 2014 Eastern Crane Bulletin, click here.](#)

November 2013 – Hopkins County, KY

Male [#33-07](#) and his mate [#5-09](#) shot on wintering grounds.

\$16,000 reward. Special Agent Bob Snow at [502-582-5989, ext. 29](tel:502-582-5989), or the Kentucky Department of Fish and Wildlife Resources dispatch at 1-800-25ALERT ([800-252-5378](tel:800-252-5378)).

[Read more in June 2014 Eastern Crane Bulletin, click here.](#)

February 2013 – Jefferson Davis Parish, LA

Mated pair of Whooping Cranes were shot and killed (L4-11 female died immediately and L3-10 male was later euthanized due to injuries).

\$20,000 reward. Anyone with information on this incident can contact the Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries (LDWF) Enforcement Division by calling [1-800-442-2511](tel:1-800-442-2511) or using the tip411 program.

April 2013 – Red River area, northwest LA

L5-10 was found on the bank of the Red River; her carcass had been scavenged so predation was initially thought to be the cause of death, but the necropsy revealed she had been shot.

\$15,000 reward.

January 2011 – Cherokee County, Alabama

[Crane #412 \(12-04\)](#) was shot dead on his winter territory in eastern Alabama.

Federal wildlife officials are offering a **\$6,000 reward** for arrest and conviction of the person who killed this bird.

February 2011 – near the Georgia/Alabama border

[DAR #22-10](#) was found shot and killed in mid-February after another member of her wintering group was found shot. Authorities believe the deaths are related.

December 2010 – near Albany, Georgia

[DAR #20-10](#), [DAR #24-10](#) and [DAR #28-10](#) were shot and killed on wintering grounds.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the Georgia Department of Natural Resources and others are investigating the shooting deaths of these endangered birds, and a reward is offered for information leading to arrest of the shooters. The public is asked to report any tips. Contact U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Special Agent Terry Hasting at [404-763-7959](tel:404-763-7959) (ext. 233).

Eastern Flock Losses By Calendar Year (data provided by the Whooping Crane Eastern Partnership): http://www.learner.org/jnorth/tm/crane/WCEPStats_LossesYr.html

Please remember

For all Whooping Crane sightings, if you have a scope that, from a safe distance, will allow you to identify the band color sequence on the Whooping Crane's legs, the [International Crane Foundation \(ICF\)](#) monitors are interested in receiving that information to help identify and track the migration progress of the eastern whooping crane population. However, never approach cranes in order to get the band colors!

Send information to: <http://www.savingcranes.org/banded-crane-sighting.html>

Florida:

Cub Scouts respond to plight of Sandhill cranes

In the June 2014 issue of the Eastern Crane Bulletin we included a story of a civics class at Umatilla Middle School taking action to get a Sandhill Crane crossing sign installed in the hopes of slowing traffic to protect local Sandhills. Another story now comes from Palm Beach, Florida. After observing an adult crane's extreme distress upon the deaths of its two colts from either a lawnmower or car, a fifth-grader in Cub Scout Pack 157 at Jupiter Farms Elementary School decided the troop needed to work for the installation of a sign warning both landscapers and drivers to watch for cranes.

Read here how a collaborative effort between Cub Scout Pack 157 and local government made it happen: http://www.palmbeachpost.com/news/news/local/sign-of-the-times-plight-of-sandhill-cranes-lead-s/nhnX2/#_federated=1

Love is a complicated thing

In April 2011, after seven sedentary years as part of Florida's non-migratory flock of Whooping Cranes, Whooping crane #1343 decided to accompany the lovely #519 (19-05) on her spring trip home to Wisconsin. Both cranes had wintered together in Paynes Prairie, Florida where #519 (19-05) obviously caught his attention. Crane #1343's amazing journey was brought to the attention of crane trackers at the International Crane Foundation when the pair was identified from a photograph taken on a private farm pond near Bloomington, Indiana on April 6, 2011. After an adventure lasting 10 days and an estimated 2,400 miles, #1343 returned home to Paynes Prairie, Florida and remained there (with his old mate).

To learn more of their tangled web of love, click here:
http://www.learner.org/jnorth/tm/crane/519_mixed_pair.html
<http://otwtb.birdwatchersdigest.com/uncategorized/a-whooping-crane-soap-opera/>

Louisiana:

Waterfowl Hunters Advised to Be Alert for Whooping Cranes

The Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries' (LDWF) Whooping crane reintroduction program has released cranes into the wild from White Lake Wetlands Conservation Area each year since 2011. The birds have dispersed over time to locations that include east Texas, but there are whooping cranes situated in Acadia, Avoyelles, Rapides, Vermilion, Jefferson Davis, Calcasieu and Cameron parishes.

Hunters are encouraged to report whooping crane sightings to assist the department in tracking their movements. Location information can be reported to the White Lake WCA office at [337-536-9400, ext. 4](tel:337-536-9400) or szimorski@wlf.la.gov.

Anyone witnessing whooping cranes being pursued, harassed, captured or killed is urged to call the LDWF Enforcement Division's Game Thief hotline at [1-800-442-2511](tel:1-800-442-2511) to report what they've seen. Read the November 2014 LDWF press release here: <http://www.wlf.louisiana.gov/news/38547>

Michigan:

Please don't feed the cranes

Whenever wildlife is forced to live in close proximity to humans, whether due to habitat loss or some other disruptive event, behavioral changes may occur. Such is the case in the Blackman Township of Michigan where Sandhill cranes roost in a swampy area near town. It is now commonplace for Sandhill cranes to frequent local businesses where they seemingly are not only accustomed to, but expect to be, fed by the well-meaning area residents. Cranes peck at car windows and approach people, scaring them, looking for handouts. Unfortunately, through no fault of their own, the birds are increasingly viewed as a nuisance and "bad for business." Currently the township plans to install red and white "Don't Feed the Cranes" signs sporting an image of a Sandhill Crane at area businesses. Hopefully in the near future both residents and cranes will be healthier for it.

Mississippi:

Sandhill cranes raised in New Orleans, released in Jackson County

Raised in New Orleans by a team from the Audubon Nature Institute, four, six-month-old Mississippi Sandhill cranes were released in late October 2014 in the [Sandhill Crane Wildlife Refuge in Jackson County](#). For thirty days the cranes, banded and fit with radio transmitters remained in an enclosed pen as they adjusted to their new surroundings. Slated to be released in early December, the birds will continue to be monitored and tracked by researchers. The crane release program began in 1981 at the refuge.

To see photos and read more click here: <http://www.wlox.com/story/26868207/sandhill-cranes-raised-in-new-orleans-released-in-jackson-county>

New Hampshire:

"Oscar" + "Olive" = nesting success

There have been confirmed reports of nesting Sandhill Cranes in Maine, Vermont and Massachusetts but it wasn't until this year that New Hampshire joined the list. Known as "Oscar" to locals the male was first seen in the Connecticut River Valley in 1999 but was always alone. That is until last year when he arrived in the company of a female referred to by locals as "Olive." This year the pair successfully nested and fledged one colt.

Listen to the NPR story sound clip: <http://nhpr.org/post/something-wild-sandhill-cranes-new-hampshire>

Wisconsin:

Whooping cranes should be treasured

According to Ted Dremel, the DNR's conservation warden in Waupaca Co., the 2-year-old Whooping crane, [DAR #14-11](#), killed by Matthew Larsen in July 2013 was hatched in 2011 by the International Crane Foundation (ICF), and was the only Whooping crane to live in Waupaca County in 2013. She was also one of only eight whooping cranes to spend at least part of their lives in Waupaca County from 2008 through 2013, according to the ICF. She was released at [Horicon NWR](#) in early autumn 2011.

"This was really a shame, especially considering that Wisconsin is the home of reintroduction efforts for Whooping cranes," Dremel said. "It's a point of pride for many Wisconsin residents to take the time to better understand these amazing birds."...

"It seemed everyone we interviewed about the dead Whooping crane admitted they'd killed a Sandhill crane at some point," Dremel said... If landowners are having problems with crop damage, the DNR and feds have protocols for handling crop-damage problems. You can't just go out and start whacking cranes."

Dremel said landowners should contact the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service at [\(608\) 837-2727](#) to learn more.

And if you see someone shoot or harass cranes, realize both acts are federal offenses. Dremel encourages citizens to report such violations on the DNR hotline: (800) 847-9367; or by text message: TIP 411 (847411), and then write "TIPWDNR," [space] followed by the tip; or email the violation to le.hotline@wisconsin.gov.

For photos and the entire [greenbaypressgazette.com](http://www.greenbaypressgazette.com) article click here: <http://www.greenbaypressgazette.com/story/sports/outdoors/2014/10/03/whooping-cranes-treasured/16678371/>

Habitat matters!

Canada:

Wetland donation sited as historic conservation agreement

The Rural Municipalities of Lakeview and Westbourne have made the largest land donation in Manitoba history in order to preserve important wetland habitat. Big Grass Marsh is part of the Lake Manitoba wetland ecosystem. According to Conservation and Water Stewardship Minister Gord Mackintosh, this is the largest conservation agreement of its kind in Canada. "This internationally recognized wetland has exceptional biological diversity and watershed values," said John Whitaker, chair for Manitoba Habitat Heritage Corporation.

The two municipalities have signed conservation agreements with the Manitoba Habitat Heritage Corporation which will permanently protect 45,000 acres of wetland and aspen parklands near the south basin of Lake Manitoba from future development and cultivation. Known as an internationally birding destination it will also continue to be managed for hunting, trapping and grazing cattle.

Read more here: <http://www.portagedailygraphic.com/2014/11/26/lakeview-and-westbourne-wetland-donation-largest-to-date>

California:

Valley drought, disease, shrunken habitats await migratory birds

After flying thousands of miles from the north this fall and winter, Sandhill Cranes along with other migrants will find drought-depleted wetlands at the 26,800-acre San Luis National Wildlife Refuge on the west side of the San Joaquin Valley. This important stop along the ancient flight path of the Pacific Flyway, the bird migration route from Alaska to Patagonia at the southernmost region of South America, will not only be half the usual wetland area migrants have grown to depend on but they will find insufficient food.

Greatly reduced habitat means that large numbers of birds will crowd into the best remaining marshes to feed and roost. In a twist to California's destructive drought, starvation, avian cholera and botulism, both bacterial infections, may be bigger killers than usual. Cholera spreads quickly through crowds of birds. Bodies of infected birds that have died must be collected before decomposition occurs as cholera bacteria can be spread through the water. In past, widespread outbreaks as many as 50,000 birds have died within several weeks.

Read more in this Fresno Bee article about water allotment for the refuges; environmental reform law and the Central Valley Project and the impact drought has on wildlife: http://www.fresnobee.com/2014/10/25/4195066_drought-disease-wait-in-valley.html?rh=1

Illinois:

Nygren Wetlands attracts Whooping Cranes

Two adults and a juvenile Whooping Cranes were seen mid-November 2014 on the 721-acre Nygren Wetland preserve west of Rockton, Illinois. It was only the third sighting record of the cranes at the wetland since it was purchased in 2000 by the [Natural Land Institute](#). The cranes were members of the Eastern Population of Whooping Cranes raised at the [Necedah Wildlife Refuge](#).

Once farmed wetland, restoration of more than 700 acres of wetlands, prairies, forests and savanna by the Natural Land Institute has increased habitat for a broad array of plant and animal species. In 2004 Sandhill Cranes successfully nested in the restored wetlands.

Read about the history of the Carl & Myrna Nygren Wetland here www.naturalland.org/nygren.htm

Minnesota:

Conservationist Virgil Voigt honored for lifetime of work improving natural resources

Virgil Voigt is a lifelong conservationist, hunter and a leader in the McLeod County area of central Minnesota widely known for his tireless work to improve Minnesota's natural resources. Voigt converted his 160-acre family farm (started by his grandfather in 1858), where he grew up and developed his devotion to nature, into a wildlife mecca with prairie grasses and restored wetlands dominating the landscape.

"I saw 13 trumpeter swans, 25 Canada geese and that many mallards the other day," he said. "We have had sandhill cranes nesting there, and bald eagles. The wildlife doesn't show up overnight; it took a long time to learn this is a good place to hang out."

Voigt was honored in September 2014 when the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources and Pheasants Forever (PF) dedicated a 112-acre addition to a local wildlife management area in his name. The Virgil C. Voigt Tract, part of the 192-acre Rich Valley Wildlife Management Area, includes woods and restored grasslands and wetlands.

"It's one of the greatest things to ever happen to me in my life," he said of the dedication. "And it will be a lasting legacy."

To read the entire MN StarTribune article about Voigt click
here: <http://www.startribune.com/sports/outdoors/278461601.html?page=all&prepage=2&c=y#continue>

Nebraska:

Threatened by water diversions, both Sandhill and Whooping cranes have benefited from decades of work by [National Wildlife Federation \(NWF\)](#) and its partners

Like millions of other migrants moving north in the Central Flyway, sandhill and whooping cranes depend on the Platte as a critical stopover to feed and rest. From late February through mid-April, some 600,000 sandhills visit trust-managed lands along the Big Bend reach of the river in south-central Nebraska. Roosting on vegetation-free sandbars at night (where they are relatively safe from coyotes and other predators), the cranes fatten on waste corn in surrounding farm fields during the day. This annual visitation by the long-legged, gray birds is the world's largest concentration of cranes and one of the great wildlife spectacles of North America.

Read the complete National Wildlife Federation article, *A Tale of Two Cranes* here:
<http://www.nwf.org/news-and-magazines/national-wildlife/birds/archives/2014/cranes.aspx>

The [Crane Trust](#) video, *Nebraska's Great Sandhill Crane Migration* gives the viewer a glimpse into the amazing spring migration of Sandhills as they congregate along the Platte River to rest on their journey north: <http://youtu.be/dvC6xsacncA>

Experience more of the beautiful Platte area in this video: *Discover the Crane Trust*
<http://youtu.be/-kcJTVK514>

NWF Priority: Water for Wildlife

Find out more about efforts by the Federation and its partners to ensure adequate supplies of freshwater for cranes and other wildlife by visiting the following sites:

- NWF's Texas Living Waters Project: www.nwf.org/TexasLivingWaters
- NWF's Platte River Programs: www.nwf.org/Platte
- Nebraska Wildlife Federation: www.NebraskaWildlife.org
- The Crane Trust: www.cranetrust.org

Texas:

Wintering territories and sea level rise pose new concerns for Whoopers

As the population of the wild flock of Whooping cranes has increased, numbering 304 as of this spring, scientists have noted an expansion of the cranes' winter territories – away from the protected salt marsh areas of Aransas and Matagorda Island National Wildlife Refuges. Approximately 50% of the flock is now wintering on surrounding, privately-owned land. Many scientists see the lack of protected winter habitat as the greatest obstacle for the continued growth of the Aransas-Wood Buffalo flock of Whooping cranes. And, to make matters worse, a recent study projects that about half of the potential whooping crane habitat along the South Texas coastline will be lost to sea level rise.

“With the growing population, we’ve seen the cranes use a broader array of habitat types than just the coastal marsh,” said Wade Harrell, Whooping Crane Recovery Coordinator, USFWS. “The last few years we’ve seen a few whooping cranes actually winter on a freshwater reservoir about two miles inland from the coast with different food and vegetation.”

According to Dr. Felipe Chavez-Ramirez, Director, Conservation Programs, Gulf Coast Bird Observatory "There are potential conservation issues that must be considered when such a large proportion of the Whooping Crane population will be spending the winter on non-protected lands. Human activity on private lands is greater, generally unrestricted, and may pose actual or potential threats to wintering Whooping Cranes.

Whooping Cranes on private lands may be exposed to direct and detrimental threats. For example, disturbance factors associated with roads, boating, and hunting. In the past 3 years there have been at least 10 direct shootings and killings of Whooping Cranes while on their wintering grounds, in migration, and within the reintroduced populations. While direct killing was considered a serious problem in the past it was not considered to be a conservation issue at present until recently."

Harrell said the acquisition of the 17,351-acre Powderhorn Ranch (directly across from the whooping crane's winter home at the National Aransas Wildlife Refuge which stretches across 115,000 acres of wetlands and is protected by nearby Matagorda Island) means the state is providing a wider range of safe habitat for the species by establishing one of the few zones along the coast that isn't privately owned.

Read more in this post by [Friends of the Wild Whoopers](http://norj.ca/2014/10/whooping-cranes-fly-south-to-increased-refuge-area): <http://norj.ca/2014/10/whooping-cranes-fly-south-to-increased-refuge-area>

Click here for a map of potential high use Whooping Crane habitat along central Texas coast: <http://friendsofthewildwhoopers.org/private-lands-important-whooping-crane-wintering-along-texas-coast>

A new study lead by Elizabeth Smith, conservationist biologist for the International Crane Foundation (ICF), and Dr. Chavez-Ramirez found that coastal marsh with food the cranes like and access to drinking water is mostly north of the Aransas National Wildlife Refuge. Unfortunately, about three-fourths of the habitat identified is unprotected land half of which could be lost to sea level rise. The study is one of the first to quantify the cost of sea level rise to wildlife.

Read more about the *Gulf Coast Prairie Landscape Conservation Cooperative's 2012-2014* study (by principal investigator Elizabeth Smith, ICF) of the effects of sea level rise in coastal Texas on coastal habitats and the endangered Whooping crane, here: <http://gulfcoastprairielcc.org/science/science-projects/studying-the-effects-of-sea-level-rise-in-coastal-texas/>

See how the study may help researchers focus their conservation efforts on the area's most important to wildlife survival through land easements or acquisition here: <https://www.victoriaadvocate.com/news/2014/nov/22/half-of-future-whooper-habitat-could-be-lost/>

Water wells needed to provide water on Aransas refuge

Historically, lower salinity marshes and man-made rain collection hallows on the Blackjack peninsula have provided Whooping cranes with drinking water. But the ongoing drought has instigated a search for more secure water sources across the Aransas National Wildlife Refuge.

With only about 50 percent of the population now wintering on public land, the refuge and partnership are reaching out to surrounding private land owners to facilitate land management practices that will allow the growing flock to thrive.

For photos and to learn more about what is involved with making water wells on the Refuge a reality click here: <https://www.victoriaadvocate.com/news/2014/oct/28/wildlife-advocates-enter-state-water-wars/>

How to help

To contribute to the "Water for Wildlife" initiative and help install water wells on the Aransas refuge, contact James Dodson at 361-649-1518 or jdodson27@gmail.com

Report on Whooping Crane Recovery Activities (2013 breeding season-2014 spring migration) By Wade Harrell, Whooping Crane Recovery Coordinator, USFWS and Mark Bidwell, Whooping Crane Recovery Coordinator, Canadian Wildlife Service, October 2014

This in-depth report includes information on the Aransas Wood-Buffalo Whooping crane population, the

reintroduced, non-migratory flocks in Florida and Louisiana, the Eastern migratory population and a condensed 2013 annual report of the Whooping Crane Eastern Partnership.

<http://friendsofthewildwhoopers.org/report-whooping-crane-recovery-activities/>
http://www.fws.gov/uploadedFiles/WC%20Recovery%20Activities%20Report_Sept-April%202014_Sub4.pdf

Technology used to gain insight into lives of Whooping Cranes

From traditional banding of the birds to satellite GPS tracking and aerial surveys by drones – different methods of gathering information with the same end goal – expand what scientists already know about Whooping Cranes, add to it and take that knowledge to the next level. What can be done to help the Whooping Cranes beyond conserving their breeding/nesting and wintering habitats?

Biologists from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Texas Parks & Wildlife, U.S. Geological Survey, Crane Trust, the Platte River Recovery Implementation Program, and the International Crane Foundation have teamed up to tag and monitor 37 adult Whooping cranes in the Aransas-Wood Buffalo population to learn more details about their everyday life. The adult cranes will be tracked using satellite GPS technology which can uncover unknown migration stops, habitat use, nesting areas, and more.

Watch this excellent video by Texas Parks and Wildlife, *Whooping Cranes, On the Right Track*:
<http://youtu.be/oPjPmdVf36k>

Watch how and where biologists are tracking Sandhill Cranes in the Pacific Northwest click here:
<http://www.outdoorproject.com/blog-news/sandhill-cranes-pacific-northwest>

To learn how scientists with the Nature Conservancy are using drones to get accurate head-counts of the threatened greater Sandhill Crane at the Staten Island bird preserve in the Sacramento-San Joaquin River Delta, CA click here:
http://www.mercurynews.com/business/ci_27045788/drone-helps-conservation-group-threatened-sandhill-crane

However, in some cases, not so much...

[Operation Migration](#) tried an experiment to see if backpacks were a viable attachment method for transmitters on three juvenile cranes in the Class of 2014. Backpack transmitters are used on many wild birds because their antennas point in the right direction to reach the satellite receivers, they can be fitted with solar chargers and they are larger for more batteries. The down side is that they are fastened on using Teflon straps around the wings and they seem to disrupt the airflow over the bird's back. That pulls the feathers up destroying the lift and well as creating drag. Whether it was the weight, the straps, or the disrupted laminar airflow, the young Whoopers were unable to fly the way they once had and even hesitated venturing far from the pen. So, after five training sessions and no improvement in flight from the three juveniles, the backpacks were removed.

Read the entry from *In the Field with Operation Migration*, here:

<http://operationmigration.org/InTheField/2014/09/25/7161/>

and here:

<http://operationmigration.org/InTheField/2014/09/27/backpack-transmitters-removed/>

Proposed North Dakota Wind Energy Project threatens Whooping Cranes

Two leading bird conservation groups, [American Bird Conservancy](#) (ABC) and the [International Crane Foundation](#) (ICF), sent a joint letter November 17 to Noreen Walsh, Director of the FWS Mountain-Prairie Region / U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) voicing strong concerns about renewed consideration of the Merricourt wind energy project in North Dakota.

Several major concerns raised by both ABC and ICF include:

- Proposed wind turbine project will be located in a key migratory corridor of two federally endangered species,

the Whooping Crane and Piping Plover

- Companies, when on private property, are not required by FWS to apply for permits authorizing killing or impacting wildlife so how will there be an accurate assessment of wildlife mortality?
- How will FWS assess the impact of the proposed 100 large, commercial turbines when 5,000 already exist in the migratory corridor and 18,518 are planned?
- The long industry list of bird and bat mortality mitigation techniques have yet to be tested for effectiveness

The North Dakota Public Service Commission has scheduled a public hearing on the proposal for December 22, 2014.

Read more of the ABC/ICF letter here:

<http://www.theoutdoorwire.com/story/1416774312qegrkfgm8k6>

Learn about the American Bird Conservancy's policy of *Bird-Smart Wind Energy* here:

http://www.abcbirds.org/abcprograms/policy/collisions/wind_policy.html

Friends of the Wild Whoopers

[Friends of the Wild Whoopers \(FOTWW\)](#) is a relatively new organization formed with the mission to help the only wild, self-sustaining population of Whooping Cranes in the world – the flock that migrates between Aransas, TX and Wood Buffalo, Canada – by protecting their disappearing habitat along the Central Flyway.

Dr. Felipe Chavez-Ramirez, [Director for Conservation Programs at the Gulf Coast Bird Observatory](#) recently partnered with FOTWW as its “Whooping Crane Science Advisor.” In an effort to provide science-based information to the public concerning the wild Whooping Cranes, a [“Ask Dr. Felipe”](#) page can be found on the FOTWW site. Questions from the public and Dr. Chavez-Ramirez’s responses will appear there. He will also provide the organization with guidance on conservation and management as it pertains to the future needs of the Aransas-Wood Buffalo population.

Visit the FOTWW website for more information on how you can help:

<http://friendsofthewildwhoopers.org/mission-saving-whooping-crane-habitat/>

For additional information about the FOTWW, read this blog post from earlier this year by *The Badger and the Whooping Crane*: <https://badgerandwhoopingcrane.wordpress.com/2014/06/01/blogtalk-friends-of-the-wild-whoopers/>

KUDOS:

We know groups such as [Operation Migration](#), the [International Crane Foundation](#) and the [Whooping Crane Eastern Partnership \(WCEP\)](#) work tirelessly on behalf of the Eastern Population of Whooping Cranes and cranes in general. In addition to these groups we feel it is important to recognize others who spread the word about our cranes through a range of media.

Southern Company continued commitment to Operation Migration's annual Whooping crane journey

Thanks to the [Southern Company's Power of Flight program](#) those interested can follow, through Operation Migration's *EarlyBird* e-bulletin newsletter, the daily journey of the ultralight-led juvenile Whoopers. "The support we receive from the Southern Company Power of Flight program is instrumental to helping us restore the whooping crane population," said CEO and co-founder of [Operation Migration](#) Joe Duff. "What's equally important about this partnership is that it helps educate the public and the conservation community on our

efforts, which increases awareness." The website also includes a migration map, live crane cam and other information. To sign up for the free electronic newsletter, go to operationmigration.org/inthefield.

Chicago school children pay tribute to Jacob Valentine II, "father" of the Mississippi Sandhill Crane Refuge

In just seven short minutes, a group of talented young students grab our attention and pay tribute to the life of Jacob (Jake) M. Valentine II (1917-2001). From his involvement as a youth in the Civilian Conservation Corps (C.C.C.) during the Great Depression, to having Aldo Leopold as a professor and mentor while in college, Valentine went on to join the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service where he was assigned as regional wildlife biologist for the Gulf Coast. The moving force behind the establishment of the [Mississippi Sandhill Crane National Wildlife Refuge](#), Valentine will be remembered as the man who saved from extinction the Mississippi Sandhill Crane, a non-migratory, sub-species of Sandhill cranes, and in doing so strengthened the 1973 Endangered Species Act. His motto, "consider nature first" is one to remember whenever preservation of critical habitat and the wildlife found there is discussed.

Kerin Motsinger's 2nd through 5th grade students at Chicago's Community Consolidated School District 89 produced this wonderful video. Perhaps the seeds for future conservationists/environmentalists have been planted through their experience? To learn more, please watch *Unsung Hero Jacob Valentine II*: http://youtu.be/5D2MI_gzQtc

Discover Birds Activity Book

Discover Birds Activity Book, sponsored by the [Tennessee Ornithological Society](#) and created specifically for kids by Cyndi Routledge and [Vickie Henderson](#) for the Tennessee Sandhill Crane Festival was recently featured by the American Birding Association in its call for conservation and community milestones nominations. Content includes familiar backyard birds and species that migrate south to wintering grounds including the Sandhill and Whooping cranes. Not only are there illustrations to color but activities such as word search, word scramble, draw-a-nest, matching, message decoding, crossword and others. A vocabulary list is provided along with a list of books for young readers and websites with more information about birds and related activities. An excellent teaching tool!

To find out more about the Discover Birds Project click here: <http://www.tnwatchablewildlife.org/discoverbirds.cfm>

2015 Crane Festivals

Festival of the Cranes

[Wheeler National Wildlife Refuge](#)

January 10, 2015

Decatur, Alabama

<http://www.friendsofwheelerrefuge.org/events/?eventID=74&date=01/10/2015>

Tennessee Sandhill Crane Festival 2015

January 17-18, 2015

Birchwood, Tennessee

<http://www.tn.gov/twra/sandhilldays.shtml>

Whooping Crane Festival

February 19-22, 2015

Port Aransas and Mustang Island, Texas

<http://www.whoopingcranefestival.org/>

The 45th annual Audubon's Nebraska Crane Festival

(Formerly known as *Rivers and Wildlife Celebration*)

March 19-22, 2015

Kearney, Nebraska

<http://nebraskacrane festival.org/>

If you have any friends or co-workers who would like to receive this quarterly E-bulletin please have them contact:

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For archived issues of the *Eastern Crane Bulletin* click here:

<http://kyc4sandhillcranes.com/eastern-crane-bulletin/>

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