



# EASTERN **CRANE** BULLETIN

**March 2016**

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

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## **Person alleged to have killed two Whooping Cranes in Beaumont, Texas, will be prosecuted under Endangered Species Act**

According to the International Crane Foundation, the case against the alleged shooter of two endangered Whooping Cranes in Texas in January has been re-filed under the Endangered Species Act, which increases the likelihood of larger penalties for the crime. It was previously thought that the case against Mr. Trey Frederick would be tried solely as a Class B Misdemeanor under the Migratory Bird Treaty Act, which was widely considered an insufficient course of action.

*The following excerpts are from a January 22, 2016 letter written to United States Attorney John Malcolm Bales by Dr. Elizabeth Smith of the International Crane Foundation before the arraignment of the alleged shooter.*

"The illegal shooting of two Endangered Whooping Cranes in Jefferson County on January 11, 2016 represents an enormous loss on multiple fronts... These birds were part of the reintroduced non-migratory flock of Whooping Cranes in Louisiana that previously numbered just 46...

...Shootings contributed to the historic decline of Whooping Cranes, and remain one of the most significant threats to Whooping Cranes today. Since 1967, when the Whooping Crane was listed as a federally endangered species, there have been 26 confirmed shooting cases of Whooping Cranes in the United States and Canada:

- Illegal shootings represent 19% of the known mortalities from the eastern migratory population of Whooping Cranes...
- The Aransas-Wood Buffalo population, the remaining wild flock that winters on the Gulf Coast of Texas, also often experiences losses through illegal shootings.
- The non-migratory, reintroduced population of Whooping Cranes that lives in Louisiana has had the highest shooting rate of any of the populations with 8 Whooping Cranes being poached since the reintroduction began in 2011....

In recent years, shooting incidents have increased at an alarming rate. Whooping Cranes typically live 20-30 years in the wild and do not begin reproducing until 4 or 5 years of age. Therefore, the loss of every individual has a devastating impact on the future of this species...."

"If we hope to deter future shootings, perpetrators must be prosecuted vigorously. In all cases of Whooping Crane shootings, we demand justice for the birds that were killed, restitution for the enormous

effort needed to bring them back, and personal penalties that match the seriousness of the crime," said Rich Beilfuss, President & CEO of the International Crane Foundation.

Read the entire statement by Dr. Elizabeth Smith, Texas Program Director for the International Crane Foundation here: [ICF statement regarding arraignment of shooter](#)

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**Editor's note:** *In thinking about the recent U.S. Fish and Wildlife Services announcement of its new plan for the Whooping Crane Eastern Migratory Population (EMP) consider the extraordinary time and expense (private and federal) already invested in a reintroduction program that has resulted in minimal growth of the eastern flock. The old adage, "Don't put your eggs all in one basket," is behind the EMP reintroduction program. The wild Whoopers could be just one oil spill, hurricane, fire, severe drought or regulated water use change away from disaster. Any of these natural or man-made events would have devastating effects on the population.*

*While work done by the Whooping Crane Eastern Partnership and others on behalf of the eastern flock(s) of Whooping Cranes should be applauded and given continued support, there is also urgent need for funding on behalf of the self-sustaining, wild population. Current studies and surveys indicate a slow but steady growth of the wild Whooper population and with that growth comes the need for additional, safe wintering habitat.*

## **Funding needs to include the wild population of Whooping Cranes**

Years ago, the Whooping Crane was on the brink of extinction, in part due to unregulated hunting and loss of wetlands habitat. Now, decades later, Whooper deaths are from illegal poaching, collisions with power lines and an unprecedented acceleration in the rate of habitat loss driven in part by the explosion of wind-farm construction and the ever-increasing demand for an already limited water supply.

Crucial habitat needed by the Whoopers to rest and refuel on their yearly 5,000-mile round trip between breeding grounds in [Wood Buffalo National Park](#) in Canada and their winter home at [Aransas National Wildlife Refuge](#), on the Gulf coast of Texas is quickly disappearing.

Through collaborative work begun last fall by [Friends of the Wild Whoopers](#) and the [Gulf Coast Bird Observatory](#) (FOTWW- GCBO) team, efforts to identify, protect and manage Whooping Crane stopover habitats on military installations continue. After visiting eight military bases, seventy "ponds" have been determined to be "Whooper friendly" stopover habitats. And more "ponds" on these same bases can become good habitats with proper management. Establishing these rest-and-refueling stations for the Whooping Cranes is possible, in part, through the [U.S. Department of Defense Partners in Flight program](#), a federally funded habitat-based management effort.

The U. S. Department of Agriculture and Natural Resources Conservation Service (USDA-NRCS) is working to secure wetlands against development in Refugio County, TX (*to read more see the [December 2015 issue of the Eastern Crane Bulletin, USDA helps Refugio families conserve wetlands](#)*).

[The Crane Trust](#) continues its work begun in 2009 of monitoring GPS transmitters to learn the timing of the cranes' movements, where they stop during migration, and how they use their winter and nesting habitat. The results of this study will give a better understanding of crane migratory behavior and help scientists assess the risks Whooping Cranes face on their yearly 5,000-mile round trip.

***Based solely on reported numbers of Whoopers fledged each year at Wood Buffalo NP, the self-sustaining wild, migratory Aransas/Wood Buffalo population continues to be the best opportunity to increase Whooping Crane numbers.***

Read about the 32 Whooping Cranes fledged in 2014 at Wood Buffalo National Park, here: <http://friendsofthewildwhoopers.org/number-whooping-cranes-fledged-wood-buffalo-canada/>

Read about the 23 Whooping Cranes fledged in 2015 at Wood Buffalo National Park, here: <http://friendsofthewildwhoopers.org/wood-buffalo-whooping-crane-fledgling-survey-completed/>

The work of Friends of the Wild Whoopers and the Gulf Coast Bird Observatory was covered in January 2016 by CBC Canada. Chester McConnell, an Alabama-based wildlife biologist with Friends of the Wild Whoopers was interviewed for the story. Read the story here: <http://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/north/military-solution-whooping-cranes-1.3397856>

**Become a "Friend" of the Wild Whoopers** and help their continuing work to secure stopover resting habitats along the 2,500- mile migration corridor and winter habitat around Aransas Refuge, here: <http://friendsofthewildwhoopers.org/support-fotww/become-friend-wild-whoopers/>

Read more about research work by the Crane Trust here: <http://cranetrust.org/conservation-research/research/>

Learn more about the Crane Trust's "Whooper Watch" here: <http://cranetrust.org/conservation-research/whooper-watch/>

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## Do you give a whoop?

Join craniacs across the country who are stepping up to protect Whooping Cranes. As part of the International Crane Foundation's "Keeping Whooping Cranes Safe" program is a pledge to do our part to help. [Sign the "I Give a Whoop" pledge, click here!](#) Together, we are committing to do what it takes to make sure Whoopers across North America are safe.

By signing the pledge we are committing to:

1. Be able to accurately identify a Whooping Crane. ([Large Waterbirds ID chart](#))
2. [Click here](#) to immediately report any suspicious activity that appears to harm or disturb a Whooping Crane, or here [cranereport@savingcranes.org](mailto:cranereport@savingcranes.org)
3. Tell your friends, family, and networks, about the plight of the Whooping Crane.

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## Adult Whoopers to take lead in future EMP migrations

It was announced in January 2016 that the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) plans to shift its captive Whooping Crane breeding and release program in hopes of better helping the birds. In an explanation from USFWS, all hand-raising methods had been put under the microscope, and it became clear that human parents weren't raising normal cranes.

"It seems we're falling short on really teaching a bird how to be a bird."

According to Peter Fasbender, USFWS Field Office Supervisor, who made the decision to end the ultralight-led migration program, the Eastern Migratory Population (EMP) experimental reintroduction is considered successful at least on the level of releases (*Thank you Operation Migration! – the Editor*) as there are now approximately 100 Whooping Cranes in the east.

Unfortunately, most of the EMP cranes have not yet bred successfully. In fact, from 2006 until today, only 10 chicks from over 200 nests in Wisconsin have fledged— all from the same six mated pairs. This

leaves 52 pairs in the population that have failed to raise viable chicks. Currently there are only 3 wild-born Whooping Cranes in the Eastern Migratory Population – cranes # [W1-06](#), # [W10-15](#) and # [W18-15](#). While this might be a good start, the USFWS end goal of having a self-sustaining reintroduced population in the east is still far from being a reality.

Moving forward, the following two USFWS program options are under consideration: Direct Autumn Release (DAR) method started in 2005. Captive-raised juvenile cranes will continue to be released near adult Whoopers with the hope that the adult birds will then lead the juveniles in the fall on the migratory routes south.

An "adoption program" will be tested at the [Necedah Wildlife Refuge](#) release site in Wisconsin. Captive-born colts will be placed with Whooping Crane pairs that have lost their own chicks in the hope that the adults will then raise the young birds.

*To read the document by the International Crane Foundation that "addresses questions you may have about these recent changes and what they mean for Whooping Cranes and your investment in the species and the International Crane Foundation," go here:*

[Changes to the Whooping Crane Eastern Partnership: Your Questions Answered](#)

*Read more from Audubon here:*

<http://www.audubon.org/news/in-new-plan-baby-whooping-cranes-be-led-parents-not-planes>

*Read the USFWS strategic plan here:* [The Eastern Migratory Population of Whooping Cranes FWS Vision for the Next 5 year Strategic Plan](#)

*Read Operation Migration's announcement of the end of the ultralight guided releases here:* <http://operationmigration.org/InTheField/2016/01/23/end-of-ultralight-guided-migration/>

*Watch the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation's video [Flight to Survive: Saving Whooping Cranes](#) or here:* <http://www.getlinkyoutube.com/watch?v=Ye4Swf3-yDM>

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## Eastern Whooping Crane Update/January 2016

According to the [Whooping Crane Eastern Partnership's](#) January report, the adult cranes had all arrived on their wintering grounds (see [January Update Map](#)), the last Ultralight-led migration was still underway (for updates see [Operation Migration's Field Journal](#)), and the Direct Autumn Release (DAR) birds had all migrated from Horicon NWR (see [DAR 2015 Movement Map](#)). As of January 2016, the Eastern Migratory Population of Whooping Cranes was 99 birds (52 males, 45 females and 2 unknown – the 2015 wild-born juveniles not yet banded).

*Read the full report on the wild and parent-reared chicks as well as the DAR cohort here:*

<http://www.bringbackthecranes.org/technicaldatabase/projectupdates/2016/jan2016.html>

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## Endangered Species Act agencies claim "innovative" policy

The two federal agencies charged with Endangered Species Act (ESA) implementation have announced policy changes regarding increased state collaboration and the use of new landowner conservation tools. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration hail the [policy](#) updates published February 22, 2016 as innovative.

The changes, part of a series of actions that have been gradually implemented since they were first outlined in 2011 and frequently met with resistance by environmentalists, include the requirement that

petitioners solicit information from state wildlife agencies before submitting their petitions to the federal listing agencies.

Another policy change and two new rules involving critical habitat designation seemingly favor developers, weakening the protections already provided by the ESA, which has a track record of some success. The policy change considered by some conservationists as a huge blow to protecting critical habitat for listed species since it will now be a death by a thousand cuts by developers and federal agencies.

Read the "*Revised Inter-agency Cooperative Policy Regarding the Role of State Agencies in Endangered Species Act Activities*" here: <https://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/pkg/FR-2016-02-22/html/2016-03541.htm>

Read more about the proposed changes here: <http://www.courthousenews.com/2016/02/22/esa-agencies-say-latest-changes-are-innovative.htm>

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## Arizona:

### **"Pastel" Sandhill at Whitewater Draw WLA**

A very rare "pastel" Sandhill Crane has spent the winter at the Arizona Game and Fish Department's [Whitewater Draw Wildlife Area](#). The Sandhill was spotted by Southeastern Arizona Bird Observatory (SABO) Director/Naturalist Tom Wood on January 31 during the flock's midday fly-in and photographed by SABO member Michelle Cook.

Pigment abnormalities of any kind are seldom observed in Sandhill Cranes, affecting fewer than one in 200,000 individuals. "Pearl," (named by SABO employees) sports very pale plumage, a condition known as dilution. This particular form of dilution, known as "pastel," occurs when both the pigment eumelanin responsible for blacks, grays, and dull browns, and the red-brown pigment pheomelanin are present but at greatly reduced concentrations. Typical for dilute birds is that "Pearl's" bill and legs are also paler than those of a normal crane. On its forehead, some pale orange skin shows through pale beige juvenile feathers. The red skin color of adults is created by carotenoid pigments unaffected by dilution mutations, so "Pearl" should have a normal-looking red forehead if it survives to adulthood.

*For a photo, to read more about "Pearl" and to learn the differences between "dilution," "progressive graying," "leucism" and "albinism," click here:*  
<http://sabo.org/2016/02/a-very-special-crane-at-whitewater-draw/>

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## Florida:

### **Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission plan will aid declining species in Polk County**

57 Florida wildlife species — 16 of which are found in Polk County — have been listed as endangered, threatened or species of special concern by the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission. In a draft report called the *Florida Imperiled Species Management Plan*, circulated earlier this year for comment, the status of all of these species has been re-evaluated, resulting in some species being taken off the list.

It recommended keeping the Florida Sandhill Cranes classified as a threatened species because of continued threats from habitat loss. An increase in protected habitat is being considered because an estimated 85 percent of the remaining breeding pairs live on private land vulnerable to conversion to

either more intense agricultural uses or development. The plan envisions working with private landowners, whose land is occupied by many of these species, to set up voluntary programs — including financial incentives through wildlife grant programs — to encourage them and to give them technical advice on how to protect wildlife on their land.

Another focus of the proposal is to make roadside areas less attractive to foraging Sandhills therefore reducing vehicle mortality. Electric transmission lines are to be better marked to reduce power line collisions.

*Read more about the plan and species included on the list here:*  
<http://www.theledger.com/article/20160104/NEWS/160109823>

*Learn about the Florida Bird Conservation Initiative here:*  
<http://myfwc.com/conservation/special-initiatives/fbci/>

*and, Florida Conservation Plans and Initiatives, including specific species plans here:*  
<http://myfwc.com/conservation/special-initiatives/fbci/plans-and-initiatives/>

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## Louisiana:

### **Cohort-6 update**

Eleven juvenile Whooping Cranes were released into the wild at the White Lake Wetlands Conservation Area (WCA) near Gueydan on December 29, 2015. The juvenile cranes joined 35 adults that are part of an experimental population being monitored by the [Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries \(LDWF\)](http://www.louisiana.gov/department-of-wildlife-and-fisheries/).

The cranes were delivered to southwest Louisiana on December 3 from the U.S. Geological Survey (USGS) Patuxent Wildlife Research Center in Laurel, Md. LDWF has been working cooperatively with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, USGS and the Louisiana Cooperative Fish and Wildlife Research Unit since 2011 to establish a non-migratory population in the state.

*Watch as the juveniles were released from their pen for the first time in December:* <https://www.facebook.com/lawhoopingcranes/?fref=photo>  
*or here:* <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1hamkkSJlx>

Sadly, juvenile female L1-15 had to be euthanized in late February 2016 after being found in the marsh weakened, unable to fly and having difficulty breathing. A necropsy found she suffered from airsacculitis (inflammation of the air sacs), likely caused by the fungus aspergillus.

*For photos of L1-15 before her death and more information go to* <https://www.facebook.com/lawhoopingcranes/?fref=photo>

### **Nesting time!**

On a happier note, during tracking flights in the second week of February, LDWF discovered that L1-13 and L3-11 had prepared **FIVE** different nesting platforms in Allen Parish. The next day they were reported with one egg. LDWF is optimistic that this year Louisiana could have 10 breeding pairs of Whooping Cranes!

*For aerial photos of the nests and an incubating WHCR check out this link:*  
<https://www.facebook.com/lawhoopingcranes/?fref=photo>

## Restoring a Louisiana Treasure, Protect Whooping Cranes

Following Texas's example, Louisiana started a PSA billboard campaign in 2011 to bring awareness to the Whooping Cranes in the reintroduction program. The Lamar Advertising Company provides the space for free and the billboards get moved around to new locations every so often, so watch for them! Have YOU seen one? Spread the word to keep Louisiana's Whoopers safe!

**Please report and Whooping Crane sightings with the LDWF Whooping Crane Reporting Form, here: <http://www.wlf.louisiana.gov/webform/whooping-crane-reporting-form>**

*Remember, the Whooping Crane is protected under the federal Endangered Species and Migratory Bird Treaty Acts and by state law. Anyone encountering a whooping crane is advised to observe the bird from a distance and to report their sighting to LDWF (<http://www.wlf.louisiana.gov/webform/whooping-crane-reporting-form>).*

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## Nebraska:

### **A Chorus of Cranes**

This month, [Dr. Paul A. Johnsgard](#) will mark his 55th consecutive spring pilgrimage to the Platte River to witness, what many consider one of the world's greatest natural spectacles, the largest congregation of Sandhill Cranes anywhere in the world. Johnsgard, a retired University of Nebraska ornithologist in Lincoln, has spent a lifetime studying waterfowl, especially Sandhill Cranes, across North America, particularly in Nebraska.

In collaboration with award-winning nature photographer [Tom Mangelsen](#) the two naturalists have produced "A Chorus of Cranes: The Cranes of North America and the World," published by the University Press of Colorado, detailing the natural history, biology and conservation issues surrounding the abundant Sandhill Crane and the endangered Whooping Crane. The book is dedicated to George W. Archibald, co-founder of the International Crane Foundation.

On March 19 during Audubon's Nebraska Crane Festival in Kearney, Johnsgard and Mangelsen will speak about their new book.

*To read more about the book and many events scheduled for the Nebraska Crane Festival click here:*

[http://www.omaha.com/living/as-cranes-return-to-sand-hills-naturalists-deliver-a-chorus/article\\_76b261bb-4e6a-5c56-9e05-83e1c0e5d9d9.html](http://www.omaha.com/living/as-cranes-return-to-sand-hills-naturalists-deliver-a-chorus/article_76b261bb-4e6a-5c56-9e05-83e1c0e5d9d9.html)

*To read a wonderful profile of Dr. Paul A. Johnsgard go here:*

<http://www.prairiefirenewspaper.com/2009/06/a-profile-of-dr-paul-a-johnsgard>

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## Texas:

### **River authority, environmental group make peace after long legal battle**

For nearly 10 years, Guadalupe-Blanco River Authority General Manager Bill West and [Aransas Project \(TAP\)](#) attorney Jim Blackburn fought in court about what it means to be a good steward of the Guadalupe River system and San Antonio Bay.

Litigation between West and Blackburn made national news in 2010 when Blackburn sued the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality on behalf of the [Aransas Project \(TAP\)](#), a nonprofit membership organization with the mission of protecting Whooping Crane habitat.

The Aransas Project claimed the state suffocated endangered Whooping Cranes' marsh habitat by allowing too much freshwater to be taken out of the San Antonio and Guadalupe rivers resulting in the subsequent deaths of 23 Whooping Cranes of the Aransas-Woods Buffalo wild flock.

But at a meeting on February 24 the two men gave their word that their organizations would work together to simultaneously ensure current and future water needs are met and natural resources are protected. They co-signed the document, [White Paper: Water, Habitat, Economy– A Shared Vision of the Future for the Guadalupe Water System and San Antonio Bay](#) documenting how the two sides agree to examine how water rights in the basin are used, the pricing of water, the prospects for desalination, the habitat for endangered species and conservation opportunities.

Timeline: The Guadalupe Blanco River Authority and the Aransas Project (visual timeline by San Antonio Express-News)  
<https://readymag.com/499855/>

Read more about how the two sides came together and issues facing the new partnership here:  
<https://www.victoriaadvocate.com/news/2016/feb/24/unlikely-partnership-sprouts-between-parties-invol/>

and here:  
<http://www.expressnews.com/news/local/article/Groups-set-aside-legal-battle-over-rivers-6851579.php>

For additional coverage of the litigation over the 2008-2009 Whooping Crane deaths see the [September 2014](#) and [September 2015](#) issues of the *Eastern Crane Bulletin*.

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## Wisconsin:

### [The Milwaukee County Zoo welcomes Holly](#)

The Milwaukee County Zoo recently welcomed Holly, a female juvenile Sandhill Crane with a wing injury sustained in the wild that prevented her re-release after rehabilitation. She arrived at the Zoo in December 2015 and has become a companion to an older resident Sandhill named "Sparky." Hatched last spring Holly still has the rusty plumage of a juvenile Sandhill Crane.

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## **Habitat Matters!**

### Alabama:

#### [Wheeler National Wildlife Refuge](#) a local gem

The 35,000-acre refuge near Decatur, stretching over three counties, is a diverse area created by President Franklin Roosevelt on July, 7, 1938, to conserve and manage wildlife. It is the home of thousands of waterfowl and wildlife, and offers opportunities ranging from bird watching, fishing, boating and managed hunting to walking trails and educational programs for the public.

The number of Sandhill Cranes wintering at [Wheeler Wildlife Refuge](#) jumped from 26 in 1997 to about 14,000 this year. The cranes begin arriving in late November, and the numbers peak in early January. Along with the Sandhills there is now a good chance to see Whooping Cranes from the reintroduced Eastern Migratory Population.

In January 2006, two Whoopers from one of the Operation Migration cohorts were discovered on the

refuge. Since that time, Whooping Cranes have wintered there each year. During the winter of 2012-2013, up to 12 Whoopers spent a portion of their winter on the refuge. Last winter (2014-2015), a total of 36 whooping cranes were reported in Alabama before the birds began their northward migration in March and April. It is hoped that this season the total will be more than 40 Whoopers.

Simply by attending the Wheeler NWR *Festival of the Cranes*, an individual helps protect Whooping Cranes by showing their support for the cranes in the north Alabama region. This year's two-day festival drew an estimated 4,000 people on opening day on a Saturday. "The success of that festival was huge this year," said Melinda Dunn of the Decatur Morgan County Convention and Visitors Bureau.

An estimated 650,000 people visit the refuge each year. Last year, the Visitors Center alone registered 35,000 guests. According to Dunn, the refuge's annual economic impact for the community is \$5 million.

*Read more about this year's Festival of the Cranes here:*

<http://kyc4sandhillcranes.com/2016/01/31/4th-wheeler-nwr-festival-of-the-cranes-a-success/>

*and the refuge here:* [http://www.decatordaily.com/news/wheeler-national-wildlife-refuge-a-local-gem/article\\_0d40cb02-5b95-5cd0-9b58-fb38a945d4d2.html](http://www.decatordaily.com/news/wheeler-national-wildlife-refuge-a-local-gem/article_0d40cb02-5b95-5cd0-9b58-fb38a945d4d2.html)

## Arizona:

### **Sandhill Crane Cam, [Whitewater Draw Wildlife Area](#)**

As part of its Watchable Wildlife Program, which seeks to connect and engage the public with wildlife, the Arizona Game and Fish Department installed the solar-powered Sandhill Crane Cam. The solar-powered camera provides a live feed of up to tens of thousands of Sandhill Cranes at their wintering grounds at Whitewater Draw Wildlife Area in southern Arizona.

The best time to view the birds is a half-hour before sunrise and up to a half-hour after, just before they leave the roost to feed for the morning. Or, when the cranes return to Whitewater Draw sometime in the late morning, generally before noon and remain at the wildlife area for the remainder of the day. The camera will be available for public viewing from October (when cranes first start to arrive at Whitewater Draw) through March or early April when they leave for their northern migration to the nesting grounds.

*The live stream can be viewed at [www.azgfd.gov/sandhillcranes](http://www.azgfd.gov/sandhillcranes).*

*or here: <https://www.azgfd.com/wildlife/viewing/sandhillcranes/cranecam/>*

## California:

### **Rice leftovers bring Sandhill Crane bonanza to Sacramento Valley property**

When Bob Brown bought his property between Chico and Oroville, CA in 1992 he knew the soil quality was poor but worked to make improvements on the property to increase wildlife habitat. Then, a few years ago the Butte County Rice Growers Association approached him about taking rice byproducts to spread on his land. The truckloads of material he receives are literally rice industry dust (a lot of it) and bits of the rice plants. In bulk, the material is spread and then rain helps turn the material into mulch.

While Brown's initial goal was to add nutrients to the soil, he inadvertently succeeded in making the area attractive to large numbers of Sandhill Cranes, swans and other waterfowl that can be seen combing through the mulch for worms and other prey. A recent count tallied 2,000 cranes at the location. According to biologists, California hosts approximately 9,000-15,000 Sandhill Cranes each year, making the number on Brown's field covered with rotting rice dust 10-20 percent of all the cranes in California.

*To view photographs of the area and Sandhills feeding click*

*here: <http://media.chicoer.com/2016/02/23/photos-sandhill-cranes/#1>*

## Illinois:

### **Grassy Lake Forest Preserve, Lake Barrington**

Three rare and valuable natural features of the Grassy Lake Forest Preserve include Wagner Fen, Flint Creek and wooded bluffs. Oak woodlands surround the fen and creek, providing habitat for songbirds, woodpeckers and hawks. (A fen is a type of wetland, similar to a marsh but with a low nutrient level.)

In 2001, the 55-acre Wagner Fen portion of Grassy Lake owned by the Lake County Forest Preserves was dedicated as an Illinois Nature Preserve, along with 45 acres previously dedicated by an all-volunteer, Barrington-based Citizens for Conservation (CFC). Combined, the Wagner Fen nature preserve complex totals 100 acres.

The fen provides habitat for eight endangered and threatened species and hosts Sandhill Cranes during migration. CFC and Forest Preserve natural resource crews have worked together to preserve and restore Wagner Fen by eliminating invasive purple loose strife and buckthorn. Successful buckthorn removal in another area of the preserve resulted in a sedge meadow that is now considered one of the top ten in Lake County, IL.

## Kansas:

### **Wild Whooping Crane stopover faces increasing threats**

Whooping Cranes “stopover habitats” are facing growing threats on [Quivira National Wildlife Refuge](#), in Kansas. [Quivira National Wildlife Refuge](#) was established in 1955 to protect migratory waterfowl. Its 22,135 acres feature a unique combination of rare inland salt marsh and sand prairie. 7,000 acres of wetlands attract hundreds of thousands of ducks and geese annually.

The Refuge's location in the middle of the Central Flyway places it on the main migratory pathway for many species of shorebirds as well as the only wild population of the endangered Whooping Crane. It is a crucial stopover area for the Whooping Cranes during their 5,000-mile round trip migration between the Wood Buffalo NP, Canada nesting grounds and their winter habitat of Aransas Wildlife Refuge, TX and surrounding areas.

Mike Oldham, Quivira's manager estimates a million birds came through the refuge during the 2015 fall and winter. Among those were 61 Whooping Cranes that stopped there last fall during migration. Quivira officials want to make sure it remains like that.

The refuge is experiencing conflicts with neighboring farmers who want to use more water from a diminishing supply. Oldham claims, “We're not receiving the water based on the seasonal needs of wildlife and habitat.” If there is not ample water thousands of migratory birds could be adversely affected – including the endangered Whooping Cranes.

*Read more here from the Friends of the Wild Whoopers:*

<http://friendsofthewildwhoopers.org/whooping-cranes-stopover-habitats-facing-threats/>

## Michigan:

### **Big Marsh Lake wetland gains 80 acres of Sandhill habitat**

Michigan Audubon's [Bernard W. Baker Sanctuary](#) recently received an additional 80 acres of protected lands thanks to a collaborative \$180,000 grant, from The Conservation Fund and Ducks Unlimited. The new area will be closed to the public to protect the sensitive species that breed there.

Acquisition of this property safeguards the final unprotected piece of the 700-acre Big Marsh Lake wetland complex that attracts thousands of migrating Sandhill Cranes each fall. The Bernard W. Baker Sanctuary is recognized by the National Audubon Society as a state Important Bird Area for migrating Sandhill Cranes.

*Read more here:*

[http://www.mlive.com/news/kalamazoo/index.ssf/2016/02/bird\\_sanctuary\\_to\\_gain\\_80\\_acre.html](http://www.mlive.com/news/kalamazoo/index.ssf/2016/02/bird_sanctuary_to_gain_80_acre.html)

## Nebraska:

### **Platte River Sandhill Crane cam**

Witness the spectacle via the live Crane Cam at Audubon's Rowe Sanctuary. From the beginning of March through mid-April, a camera on the Platte River provides views of Sandhill Cranes roosting by the thousands in the shallow water. The rest of the year, the camera provides views of eagles, deer and other wildlife, and the ever-changing river.

*Check out the Crane Cam here:* <http://rowe.audubon.org/crane-cam>.

## New York:

### **Seneca Meadows Landfill - Wetlands Preserve**

Wetlands were lost when construction of the Seneca Meadows landfill was undertaken. The industry standard for wetlands mitigation projects is a 3:1 exchange ratio (3 acres of created wetland per 1 acre of wetland destroyed). However, in 2007, Seneca Meadows did better than that standard by using an 8:1 ratio. The project involved a 576-acre wetlands creation and enhancement project by the U.S. Corp of Engineers and the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation. The project restored and enhanced 157 acres of existing wooded wetlands, and created 419 acres of new wetlands.

In addition to the 576-acre wetlands preserve (450 acres created from farmland), Seneca Meadows also dedicated 500 acres of floodwater conveyance wetlands for permanent preservation. This land, which was not part of a mitigation measure, runs along a section of stream on the property, and connects to the wetlands preserve, bringing the total preserved land to 1,100 acres.

Wildlife surveys at the preserve conducted by Applied Ecological Services since 2010 recorded 35 of New York's bird "Species of Greatest Conservation Need" at the preserve in 2015 with 13 of the species using the site as a breeding ground. Two state endangered species, the Peregrine Falcon and Short-eared Owl were observed on the preserve, as well as five state species of concern, the Osprey, Red-shouldered Hawk, Sharp-shinned Hawk and Common Nighthawk. Researchers also saw a pair of Sandhill Cranes performing courtship displays in 2015, and while no nests were confirmed, future nesting may not be out of the question.

In 2014, the preserve was designated an Important Bird Area by Audubon New York due to the large number of breeding Pied-billed Grebes, American Bitterns, Least Bitterns and wintering Short-eared Owls.

Once the Seneca Meadows Landfill is no longer in operation, Audubon New York will assume the care and management of the wetlands preserve.

For a video of the impressive conservation effort of the Seneca Meadows Wetlands Preserve click here: <http://senecameadows.com/wetlands.php> or here: <https://youtu.be/pv3kYxEvbdw>

Read more about the preserve here:

[http://www.fltimes.com/news/seneca-meadows-wetlands-preserve-survey-updates-bird-count/article\\_d62b1446-da41-11e5-9759-9bb5e2330d40.html](http://www.fltimes.com/news/seneca-meadows-wetlands-preserve-survey-updates-bird-count/article_d62b1446-da41-11e5-9759-9bb5e2330d40.html)

## Oregon:

### **Occupation of Malheur Refuge threatened more than Sandhill Cranes**

Originally known as the "Lake Malheur Reservation" when created by President Theodore Roosevelt in 1908 (19th of 51 wildlife refuges created during his tenure as President), the now 187,000-acre Malheur National Wildlife Refuge supports the largest population of Greater Sandhill Cranes (about 250 pairs) of all national wildlife refuges.

[Malheur, designated an Important Birding Area \(IBA\)](#), is critically important to over a million migrant waterfowl and tens of thousands of breeding waterfowl and other waterbirds. The illegal occupation of Malheur threatened not only the ability of refuge staff to provide approximately 50,000 acres of managed wetland habitat for birds dependent on the refuge during migration, but also denied the public access to the refuge. During the occupation the refuge faced the possibility of a habitat shortfall that would prevent many crane pairs from nesting and greatly reduce the capacity of Malheur to support bird populations. Reduced habitat would be both a disaster for species relying on the refuge and a failure of the refuge mission.

Read a report on the state of the refuge by Chad Karges, Malheur Refuge manager, here:

<http://www.opb.org/news/article/malheur-refuge-manager-its-one-big-mess/>

Read an account by Dr. Gary Ivey, International Crane Foundation Research Associate based in Oregon and leader of the West Coast Crane Working Group, here:

<https://www.savingcranes.org/occupation-of-malheur-refuge-in-oregon-threatens-sandhill-cranes/>

Read more in the always informative [Birding Community E-bulletin - February 2016](#), under "Access Matters: Lost Access At Malheur NWR" and the "IBA NEWS: Malheur Again."

[Read the February 2016 Birding Community E-bulletin here](#)

For a summary on the efforts that inspired the refuge's creation and some amazing early photographs: <http://tinyurl.com/InspiringMalheur>

For archived issues of the Birding Community E-bulletin, click here:

<http://refugeassociation.org/news/birding-bulletin/>

## Rhode Island:

### **Sapowet Marsh hosts lone Sandhill for winter**

A lone sandhill crane has spent the entire winter in fields around [Sapowet Marsh Wildlife Preserve](#). According to Rachel Farrell, a member of the Rhode Island Bird Records Committee, the birds have become annual visitors in the past five or six years and are staying for longer and longer periods. Farrell said the increasing frequency of Sandhill Cranes in the Ocean State probably has to do with the species' eastward range expansion. Cranes were reported breeding for the first time in Pennsylvania in 1998, Maine in 2000, Vermont in 2002, New York in 2003, Massachusetts in 2007 and New Hampshire in 2014.

Sandhill Cranes are not yet confirmed breeders in Rhode Island, though there is speculation that a pair spent last summer on private property in West Greenwich, where access to birdwatchers was prohibited.

Read more here: <http://www.ecori.org/natural-resources/2016/2/26/sandhill-cranes-becoming-regular-visitors-to-ocean-state>

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## Science news:

### Changes in the number and distribution of Greater Sandhill Cranes in the Eastern Population

Co-authored by Anne E. Lacy, Jeb A. Barzen, Dorn M. Moore, and Kristin E. Norris

#### ABSTRACT:

"Once nearly extirpated, the Eastern Population (EP) of Greater Sandhill Cranes (*Grus canadensis tabida*) has increased in number and expanded its range in breeding and wintering areas. Data from Christmas Bird Counts (CBCs) and Breeding Bird Surveys (BBSs) were used to delineate changes in the wintering and breeding area distributions during the period from 1966 to 2013. Crane densities were plotted to the centroid of CBC circles or BBS routes, and the Geographic Mean Centers (GMCs) for wintering and breeding populations were calculated. The number of Greater Sandhill Cranes detected during the breeding season has steadily increased since 1966, with just six birds observed in 1966 and 1046 observed in 2013. The GMC of the Sandhill Crane breeding population has remained in Wisconsin during the 47-yr time frame. The total number of Sandhill Cranes counted in the eastern United States during CBCs grew from 423 in 1965-1966 to 46,194 in 2012-2013, with a peak number of 55,826 in 2011-2012. The GMC of wintering Greater Sandhill Cranes was located in Florida during the periods from 1966 to 1977 and 1978 to 1989, but shifted north-northwest by nearly 4° of latitude (into Georgia) by 1990-2001. By 2002-2013, the GMC had shifted an additional degree north as well as almost a degree west in longitude. Greater Sandhill Cranes in the EP may continue to winter further north and remain in more northerly areas later in the fall before migrating further south. Factors such as annual weather, long-term climate change, and changes in land use may influence future population trends and changes in both the breeding and wintering ranges of the EP of Sandhill Cranes."

*Changes in the number and distribution of Greater Sandhill Cranes in the Eastern Population*

PDF download available from Jeb Barzen

at: [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/284663849\\_Changes\\_in\\_the\\_number\\_and\\_distribution\\_of\\_Greater\\_Sandhill\\_Cranes\\_in\\_the\\_Eastern\\_Population](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/284663849_Changes_in_the_number_and_distribution_of_Greater_Sandhill_Cranes_in_the_Eastern_Population)

### Computed Tomographic Anatomy and Characteristics of Respiratory Aspergillosis in Juvenile Whooping Cranes

Co-authored by Tobias Schwarz, Cristin Kelley, Marie E. Pinkerton and Barry K. Hartup

#### ABSTRACT

"Respiratory diseases are a leading cause of morbidity and mortality in captivity reared, endangered whooping cranes (*Grus americana*). Objectives of this retrospective, case series, cross-sectional study were to describe computed tomography (CT) respiratory anatomy in a juvenile whooping crane without respiratory disease, compare CT characteristics with gross pathologic characteristics in a group of juvenile whooping cranes with respiratory aspergillosis, and test associations between the number of CT tracheal bends and bird sex and age. A total of 10 juvenile whooping cranes (one control, nine affected) were included. Seven affected cranes had CT characteristics of unilateral extrapulmonary bronchial occlusion or wall thickening, and seven cranes had luminal occlusion of the intrapulmonary primary or secondary bronchi. Air sac membrane thickening was observed in three cranes in the cranial and caudal

thoracic air sacs, and air sac diverticulum opacification was observed in four cranes. Necropsy lesions consisted of severe, subacute to chronic, focally extensive granulomatous pathology of the trachea, primary bronchi, lungs, or air sacs. No false positive CT scan results were documented. Seven instances of false negative CT scan results occurred; six of these consisted of subtle, mild air sacculitis including membrane opacification or thickening, or the presence of small plaques found at necropsy. The number of CT tracheal bends was associated with bird age but not sex. Findings supported the use of CT as a diagnostic test for avian species with respiratory disease and tracheal coiling or elongated tracheae where endoscopic evaluation is impractical."

Schwarz, T., Kelley, C., Pinkerton, M. E. and Hartup, B. K. (2016), COMPUTED TOMOGRAPHIC ANATOMY AND CHARACTERISTICS OF RESPIRATORY ASPERGILLOSIS IN JUVENILE WHOOPING CRANES. *Veterinary Radiology & Ultrasound*, 57: 16–23. doi: 10.1111/vru.12306

To read the article or for a PDF download go here: <http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/vru.12306/full>

## Whooping Cranes' Predatory Behavior Key for Adaptation, Survival

Historically, both a resident and migratory population of Whooping Cranes were present in Louisiana through the early 1940s. These cranes inhabited the marshes and ridges of the state's southwest Chenier Coastal Plain, as well as the uplands of prairie terrace habitat to the north. Within this area, Whooping Cranes used three major habitats: tall grass prairie, freshwater marsh, and brackish/salt marsh. The Louisiana crane population was not able to withstand the pressure of human encroachment, primarily from conversion of their nesting habitat to agricultural acreage but including decimation from hunting and specimen collection, both widespread in North America during that time.

While participating in the ongoing Whooping Crane reintroduction project in Louisiana, Vladimir Dinets, a University of Tennessee at Knoxville assistant professor of psychology, had the opportunity to observe the captive-raised cranes. Due to the fact that little of the historic natural habitat remains surrounding the White Lake Wetlands Conservation Area, the birds have had to adapt to foraging largely in an agricultural landscape.

Dinets found that these cranes regularly hunt frogs and snakes, and occasionally took lizards and baby turtles. In early spring, some cranes would enter forests to feast on tadpoles and froglets in temporal pools. And, in late spring, when countless reptiles were basking on the edges of rice fields and crayfish ponds, the cranes took advantage of this readily available food source.

To read Vladimir Dinets's research article, "Predation on Amphibians and Reptiles by Reintroduced Whooping Cranes (*Grus americana*) in Louisiana," and download a pdf, click here: <http://www.bioone.org/doi/abs/10.1674/amid-175-01-134-137.1>

### Article citation:

Vladimir Dinets (2016) *Predation on Amphibians and Reptiles by Reintroduced Whooping Cranes (*Grus americana*) in Louisiana*. [American Midland Naturalist, January 2016, Vol 175 \(1\) pp 134–137](#)

## Upcoming Events:

### 46th annual Audubon's Nebraska Crane Festival

**Date:** March 17-20

**Location:** Audubon's Rowe Sanctuary, Kearney, Nebraska

For more information, go to <http://nebraskacranefestival.org>

Learn about the cranes, waterfowl, and other bird species by attending concurrent sessions, visiting a crane viewing blind and participating in one of the many field trips. Featured speakers include the nature photographer [Tom Mangelsen](#); ornithologist [Paul Johnsgard](#); Brian Trusty, executive director of Audubon Texas; and Marian Langan, executive director of Audubon Nebraska. For more speaker information go here: <http://nebraskacranefestival.org/speakers/>

### Restoration of Wisconsin's Iconic Whooping Cranes

Learn the history and future of Whooping Crane conservation from George Archibald, co-founder of the International Crane Foundation (ICF). Since 2005, approximately 70 Whooping Crane chicks have been released in Wisconsin to create an eastern migratory population as a backup to the last remaining wild migratory population in Texas. The ICF plays a leading role in Whooping Crane conservation, from captive breeding and release to reducing threats along flyways.

**Date and Time:** Tuesday, April 12th 7:00 PM to 8:30 PM

**Location:** [Menomonee Valley 3700 W. Pierce Milwaukee, WI 53214](#)

**Price:** For adults | \$5 (Nonmembers: \$10)

**To register:** <http://urbanecologycenter.org/programs-events-main.html?id=9155&view=event>

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