



# EASTERN CRANE BULLETIN

**March 2018**

*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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## Eastern Migratory Population of WHOOPERS

### **Tackling Whooping Crane chick mortality**

*Excerpt from the International Crane Foundation, 2017 Annual Report*

“Reintroduced Whooping Cranes are now nesting in Wisconsin. They are successfully laying eggs and hatching chicks. Unfortunately, we are losing far too many of these chicks to predators. Our biologists are concerned that Whooping Cranes raised by humans may be less adept at protecting their chicks from predators than Whooping Cranes raised by actual cranes. This past year marked the first year we could rear the entire cohort of chicks with their Whooping Crane parents, rather than with surrogate parents (humans) in costumes. Interactions with human handlers were greatly minimized during the captive period prior to release. Our aviculturists helped assess appropriate release locations, conducted the releases, and then monitored the released chicks. They were then tracked with their adult migration guides to learn more about this reintroduction technique. The information we collect from these releases will help us learn more about how chicks fare in the wild, and whether their rearing method is a factor in their survival.”

### **Conservation and cranes**

*From the International Crane Foundation / Notes from the President, December 2017*

*Conservation is likewise about finding balance in challenging circumstances – that elusive balance that results in win-win solutions for people and wildlife and thereby builds broad public support for conservation.*

“Back at home, we’ve been reaching out to political leaders to provide a balanced perspective on the policies and regulations that wildlife most depend on. We know that the Endangered Species Act isn’t perfect, but it remains our most powerful tool for biodiversity conservation. We know that not every wetland is created equal, but many wetlands are invaluable for fish and wildlife and for storing and purifying our waters. Regulations protecting wetlands and clean water help us safeguard these values for today and tomorrow. To keep our abundant Sandhill Cranes flourishing on farmlands, we must find new ways to counterbalance their impact on the farmers’ bottom line. We are working with state representatives across the political spectrum to help compensate farmers for their investment in *Avipel*, the non-toxic seed treatment we helped develop that prevents cranes and other wildlife from damaging new corn seedlings without harming them.” – Rich Beilfuss

## Whooper chicks winging their way back to Wisconsin

In a recent press release by the [Whooping Crane Eastern Partnership](#) (WCEP), it was reported that sixteen young Whooping Cranes released in 2017 successfully migrated south for the winter. The cranes represented a mix of birds hatched in the wild, birds hatched in captivity and raised by adult cranes at the [International Crane Foundation](#) in Baraboo and the U.S.G.S Patuxent Wildlife Research Center in Maryland, and birds hatched at Patuxent and raised by Operation Migration's costumed handlers in Wisconsin and released over the summer into the company of adult cranes.

Of the group, only Whooping Crane 38-17, a captive-reared juvenile, released in Wisconsin last fall, failed to migrate. With frequent checks by the monitoring team and supplemental food, the juvenile successfully toughed it out through a bitter winter in Wisconsin. These cranes are resilient!

Historically Whooping Cranes have begun spring migration in February. WCEP is optimistic that the coming breeding season will exceed the results seen in 2017 – two wild chicks that hatched and survived to fledge, and a young pair nested for the first time in an area referred to by biologists as the Wisconsin Rectangle in the southeastern part of the state. WCEP has focused on placing birds in this area that includes Horicon Marsh and White River Marsh since 2011.

*To read more, go here:*

<https://www.bringbackthecranes.org/newsroom/2018/nr12Feb2018.html>

*Or here:*

<https://www.savingcranes.org/most-2017-whooping-crane-chicks-migrated-and-will-soon-begin-spring-migration-to-wisconsin/>

*For more information on the project and its partners, visit the WCEP website:*

[www.bringbackthecranes.org](http://www.bringbackthecranes.org)

## Proper viewing etiquette of Whooping Cranes

Whooping Cranes will be migrating beginning in February. [Whooping Crane Eastern Partnership](#) (WCEP) asks anyone encountering a Whooping Crane in the wild to please give them the respect and distance they need.

- Do not approach birds on foot within 200 yards; remain in your vehicle;
- Do not approach in a vehicle any closer than 100 yards;
- Please remain concealed and do not speak loudly enough that the birds can hear you;
- Do not trespass on private property in an attempt to view or photograph Whooping Cranes.

**If the cranes you are viewing change their behavior, such as going from feeding and relaxing to being alert, walking away, or flying away, you are too close to the cranes.**

*To report Whooping Crane sightings, visit the WCEP Whooping Crane observation webpage "Report a banded Crane," go here: <https://www.savingcranes.org/report-a-banded-crane/>*

## Whooping Crane Eastern Migratory Population Update – March 2018

The [Whooping Crane Eastern Partnership](#) (WCEP) reports that currently, the estimated eastern population size is 103 (48 F, 52 M, 3 U). As of 1 March, 1 Whooping Crane is still in Wisconsin, 1 in Michigan, 4 in Illinois, 39 in Indiana, 11 in Kentucky, 7 in Tennessee, 20 in Alabama, 4 in Georgia, 7 in Florida, and 2 in Louisiana.

## 2017 Wild-hatched chicks

W3\_17 (U) is still with its parents (24\_09 and 42\_09) in Hopkins Co, Kentucky  
W7\_17 (F) is still with her parents (14\_08 and 24\_08) in Morgan Co, Alabama

*For information about Parent-Reared 2017 Cohort, Costume-Reared 2017 Cohort, Parent-Reared 2016 Cohort, mortality, and for a map of where the birds were in March, go here:*

<https://www.bringbackthecranes.org/technicaldatabase/projectupdates/2018/01March2018.html>

*For 2000-2018 Project Updates, go here:*

<https://www.bringbackthecranes.org/technicaldatabase/projectupdates/index.html>

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## Aransas-Wood Buffalo WHOOPERS

### Tom Stehn named "Whooping Crane Science Advisor"

[Friends of the Wild Whoopers \(FOTWW\)](#) has announced that Tom Stehn is now the "Whooping Crane Science Advisor" for the group in an effort to provide scientifically accurate information to the public. Stehn will not only answer questions from the public about Whooping Cranes, but provide guidance to FOTWW concerning conservation, management and future needs of the Aransas-Wood Buffalo population of Whoopers.

Stehn, a retired U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) biologist, received the [L.H. Walkinshaw Conservation Award](#) in January 2017 (see [Eastern Crane Bulletin, March 2017](#), "KUDOS" pg 15) in honor of his 32 distinguished years with USFWS. 29 of those years were spent as the U.S. Whooping Crane Coordinator studying the cranes on their wintering grounds in [Aransas, TX](#). His work helped give a complete picture of Whooping Crane population dynamics, as well as improving habitat management of their crucial wintering areas.

*To learn more about Tom Stehn's work while with USFWS, go here:*

<http://friendsofthewildwhoopers.org/tom-stehn-whooping-crane-science-advisor/>

*To submit a question and/or to read "Ask Tom Stehn," go to the FOTWW website here:*

<http://friendsofthewildwhoopers.org/ask-tom-stehn/>

### Using cellular towers to track Whooping Cranes

This past summer 2017 in [Wood Buffalo National Park](#), (WBNP), ten juvenile Whooping Cranes were trapped and fitted with solar-powered Cellular Tracking Platforms, (CTPs). In January 2018, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and U.S. Geological Survey biologists trapped and banded 7 more cranes on their wintering grounds at [Aransas National Wildlife Refuge](#), (ANWR).

When a crane is captured, biologists place a CTP on one leg and a [unique combination of 3 colored bands](#) on its other leg. A wildlife veterinarian then checks the heart rate, measures the wing chord (length of the wing), and weighs the bird. DNA (saliva) and blood samples are also taken to measure stress hormones, potential contaminants, and to sex the bird. All of that information is recorded, along with the bird's CTP number and color band combination, so that it can be identified from a distance.

The new CTPs worn by the banded Whoopers will collect precise location data every half-hour, resulting in 48 data points collected daily. When the bird is within range of a cellular tower, location data points are transmitted to biologists who will use the information to track migration routes, stopover locations, and habitat use on the breeding grounds at WBNP and wintering grounds at ANWR. From this data biologists hope to gain a better understanding of the habitat Whooping Cranes prefer and in doing so help wildlife

agencies, and landowners better manage coastal prairies and wetlands for Whooping Cranes and other resident wildlife.

Key partners on this project include the U.S. Geological Service ([Northern Prairie Wildlife Research Center](#)), [Canadian Wildlife Service](#), and [Parks Canada](#), with veterinary assistance from the [Dallas Zoo](#) and the [International Crane Foundation](#).

*To see photos and for more about the capture and banding process, go here:*  
<https://medium.com/@USFWS/can-you-track-me-now-6397ae7f9f22>

## **Webinar: Whooping Cranes in the Central Flyway**

On December 6, 2017, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) hosted a webinar on the topic "Whooping Cranes in the Central Flyway – Relevance for Military and Civil Works Projects During Migratory Stopover." Aaron Pearse (USGS) and Wade Harrell (USFWS) were the guest speakers.

The presentation covered recent USGS and USFWS research on Whooping Cranes, the current status of the migratory Aransas-Wood Buffalo population in the Central Flyway, and opportunities that civil and military land managers have to support Whooping Crane habitat in the central flyway.

Friends Of The Wild Whoopers (FOTWW) President, Chester McConnell, discussed the vital habitat assessments FOTWW has done and continues to do in cooperation with military installations, Indian reservations and currently with [U.S Army Corps of Engineers](#) lakes.

*To listen to a recording of the webinar, go here:*  
<http://friendsofthewildwhoopers.org/whooping-cranes-central-flyway>

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## **Canada:**

### **Whooping Crane program at the Calgary Zoo – another successful year**

Canada's only facility, the [Devonian Wildlife Conservation Centre \(DWCC\)](#), dedicated to breeding the endangered crane for release into the wild, currently houses seven pairs of Whooping Cranes. Curator Mike Teller reported, "We have had fertile eggs from three new pairs this year and all seven of our pairs either laid eggs or incubated eggs – a first for the DWCC with all pairs participating in the breeding program." Unfortunately, in December 2017, one of the Whooping Crane juveniles was euthanized after suffering a spinal injury.

According to the Calgary Zoo, 2017 was one of the best years in the 28-year history of the zoo's Whooping Crane program. Nine eggs from the Calgary Zoo were flown to the Patuxent Wildlife Research Center in Maryland and hatched on arrival. Another milestone was the release of three of the zoo-reared cranes into the non-migratory flock in Louisiana, one in February and two in November.

In 2016 the Calgary Zoo along with the International Crane Foundation, the San Antonio Zoo and the Audubon Nature institute won the American Zoo Association's North American Conservation Award for the Whooping Crane program accomplishments.

## Alabama:

### **Whooper outreach in Alabama**

Originally from Atlanta, Amber Wilson spent the majority of 2015 at the [International Crane Foundation \(ICF\)](#) headquarters in Wisconsin learning all about the world's 15 crane species. In 2016 Amber was an ICF Interpretive Naturalist Intern.

Then in winter 2017, Amber was hired by the International Crane Foundation as one of its two outreach coordinators (James Kawlewski in Indiana is the second), to conduct outreach programs near the Whooping Cranes' wintering areas. In this position Amber was tasked with reaching out to Audubon groups, community organizations, refuge visitors, and sportsmen and women to share information about Whooping Crane conservation and identification, thereby supporting the International Crane Foundation goal to develop communities that care about Whooping Cranes and take pride in having this endangered species as a neighbor.

Another facet of her work was to assist Wheeler Wildlife Refuge Supervisory Park Ranger Teresa Adams in conducting a bi-weekly waterfowl survey at the refuge to help biologists manage the waterfowl population. The count gives biologists and park staff a sense of the food resources available to waterfowl as well as trends in the population. The counts also show the areas of the refuge most used by the wintering Whooping Cranes.

### **Why did wintering Whooping Cranes choose Wheeler NWR?**

Whooping Cranes first appeared in north Alabama in 2004 surprising park rangers, researchers and the bird-watching community. "No one chose Wheeler for the Whoopers. Wheeler was chosen by the Whoopers," said Teresa Adams, [Wheeler National Wildlife Refuge](#) supervisory park ranger.

In 2001 and the start of the [Operation Migration](#) ultralight-led fall migration, biologists planned a route for the eastern migratory population of Whooping Cranes from Wisconsin to Florida where they would winter in habitat very similar to coastal Texas with its salt marshes and blue crabs. But gradually over the years, the Whoopers choose to winter in states other than Florida. Currently, 90-percent of the wintering eastern population can now be found in Kentucky, Tennessee, Indiana, Illinois and northern Alabama.

The diet of the wild Aransas-Wood Buffalo population of Whooping Cranes wintering in the Aransas coastal area of Texas includes blue crabs and wolfberries from salt or brackish marshes there. While none of these things are found in northern Alabama, the question posed is what exactly attracted the Whooping Cranes to the area in the first place, and what continues to bring them back each winter?

In search of the answer to this question, 35-year-old doctorate student Andrew Cantrell, a wildlife research coordinator with Alabama A&M, has studied and monitored the Whooping Cranes at Wheeler for the past four years. This year he was joined this year by 25-year-old intern Joe Lamb. While the cranes are on the refuge, Cantrell and Lamb have attempted daily to locate all 22 Whooping Cranes and at the same time conduct habitat and food availability surveys. The cranes are tracked using telemetry but can be in areas not easily accessible, making for long days in all sorts of weather for the biologists. Together the researchers hope to discover what makes Wheeler the Whooper magnet it seems to be.

*To read more, go here:*

[http://www.decatordaily.com/news/morgan\\_county/decatu/crane-a-mania-researchers-investigating-whooping-cranes-wintering-at-wheeler/article\\_a7c0fed0-8b74-5c2b-b28f-76730af14f92.html](http://www.decatordaily.com/news/morgan_county/decatu/crane-a-mania-researchers-investigating-whooping-cranes-wintering-at-wheeler/article_a7c0fed0-8b74-5c2b-b28f-76730af14f92.html)

## Refuge makes "Festival of Cranes" fly high

Despite temperatures hovering around freezing, and lower, over 2,300 people braved the cold to attend the sixth annual "Festival of the Cranes" January 13-14, 2018 at Wheeler National Wildlife Refuge. Visitors were able to view thousands of Sandhill Cranes in the surrounding fields and catch glimpses of several of the 22 endangered Whooping Cranes wintering on the refuge, all from the heated observation building.

All in all, the festival celebration was an amazing success thanks to the hard work of sponsors, partners, refuge employees, friends, and dedicated volunteers.

To read a review of the festival, go here:

[http://www.decatordaily.com/opinion/editorials/refuge-makes-festival-fly-high/article\\_ec2542d2-ca5e-57cb-925f-d22af44f0acc.html](http://www.decatordaily.com/opinion/editorials/refuge-makes-festival-fly-high/article_ec2542d2-ca5e-57cb-925f-d22af44f0acc.html)

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## Colorado:

### Writing contest focuses on Yampa Valley Sandhill Cranes

The Colorado Crane Conservation Coalition (CCCC), presenter of the annual Yampa Valley Crane Festival, is sponsoring a new writing contest open to all high school seniors in Routt and Moffat counties, Colorado. Interested high school seniors are invited to submit an original piece of writing inspired by the Greater Sandhill Cranes of the Yampa Valley to [ccccwritingcontest@gmail.com](mailto:ccccwritingcontest@gmail.com).

Submissions may be one of the following:

- Poetry: a group of three poems
- Fiction: a short story or one-act play between 750 and 1,500 words
- Non-fiction: a personal or academic essay between 750 and 1,500 words.

The work must be original and accurately reflect the physical characteristics, behavior and habitat of the species. The first-prize award is a \$1,500 scholarship. Second and third place winners will receive a certificate and a book about cranes. Deadline for submissions is April 1, 2018.

Visit [coloradocranes.org/programs-2/writing-competition/](http://coloradocranes.org/programs-2/writing-competition/) for complete contest guidelines.

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## Indiana:

### Whooping Crane trunk – a tool to better understanding

With funds from a Duke Energy Foundation grant, James Kawlewski, a Whooping Crane Outreach Program assistant with the [International Crane Foundation](http://InternationalCraneFoundation.org), was able to make five [Crane Trunks](#) full of educational items available this year for distribution to various groups in Bloomfield, Indianapolis, Bloomington and Terre Haute, Indiana. Trunks include a movie about Whooping Cranes, a replica of a crane egg and a crane skull, a captive-rearing crane costume as well as examples of some food that cranes eat, and more. Each trunk comes with an explanatory manual that is geared toward grades 4-8 students but can be adapted for both younger students as well as older youth and adults.

Indiana and Alabama are the only two states that have outreach programs to educate residents about Whooping Cranes. Both are stopover states for Whooping Cranes and in both, people have shot and killed these endangered cranes. Illegal shootings are one of the threats Whoopers face, and January is the month, historically, when many of those deaths occur. In the past five years, nearly 40 percent of all Whooping Crane shootings happened in January.

In late December 2016 or early January 2017, a female Whooping Crane was killed near Lyons in Greene County. A \$15,000 reward is still available for information leading to an arrest and conviction of the person or people responsible for killing the bird. That was the second Whooping Crane found dead in Greene County in recent years; the first was in early January 2012.

As part of his outreach, Kawlewski spoke to various groups around Indiana – from hunters to birders and photographers. With the help of the educational trunks a connection between individuals and Whooping Cranes can be established, offering a unique opportunity for individuals to explore the many aspects of crane conservation.

To learn more about the Whooping Crane Trunks and how to go about reserving one, go here: <https://www.savingcranes.org/education/whooping-crane-trunk/>

To view a list of trunk contents, go here: [https://www.savingcranes.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/01/crane\\_trunk\\_contents.pdf](https://www.savingcranes.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/01/crane_trunk_contents.pdf)

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## Kentucky:

### **Whooping Crane #70-16, aka “Bryce” update**

Hatched in May of 2016, [Parent-reared Whooping crane #70-16](#), aka “Bryce,” was initially held back at the International Crane Foundation (ICF) due to a wing injury. After successful treatment he was released in Marathon County, WI but for some reason did not follow the older cranes, as hoped, on their fall migration south that year. Ultimately it was decided to capture Bryce and drive him the 800 miles south to [Wheeler National Wildlife Refuge](#) in north Alabama, where he spent the winter in the company of thousands of Sandhills and other Whooping Cranes.

Tracked by telemetry, the [Whooping Crane Eastern Partnership](#) knows that after leaving Wheeler NWR in the spring of 2017, Bryce headed north on his own and flew to Hardin County, TN for a few days before flying about 250 miles northeast to Knox County, KY. He spent the summer, fall and even part of the winter moving around the area before he was discovered tangled in a fence in February 2018.

The Liberty Nature Center of Somerset, KY retrieved Bryce and found the crane had suffered a fractured wing that had healed in such a way that a large calcification inhibited his flight. He also suffered from an injured leg after being tripped up and tangled in the fence. USFWS and the [International Crane Foundation](#) arranged for #70-16 to be transferred to the Louisville Zoo for specialized care.

Upon further examination senior veterinarian, Zoli Gyimesi, found the crane had dislocated a hip and had a foot with impaired blood-flow and what appeared to be dead toes and damage from frostbite. The zoo team performed two surgeries to repair the hip, but the bird was unable to stand on his own, making recovery very unlikely, Gyimesi said.

Sadly, after consultation with federal officials and the International Crane Foundation, Bryce was euthanized on February 21, 2018. A necropsy and pathologic exam will be performed at the USGS National Wildlife Health Center in Madison, Wisconsin.

### **Unfortunate changes to Kentucky Sandhill season are in the wind**

Hundreds more Greater Sandhill Cranes could be hunted in [Kentucky](#) under a proposal from state wildlife officials. The new plan would:

- End a 400-bird limit on harvest and allow as many as 1,400 cranes to be taken each year, based on overall USFWS population estimates for the eastern states;

- Increase the length of the hunting season from 30 to 56 days, extending it by two weeks to the end of January;
- Create a no-hunting zone in Green River Lake to protect a newly discovered area where the birds gather to rest.

The changes are headed for approval to the Kentucky Fish and Wildlife Commission, which has its next meeting March 9, 2018. Changing crane-hunting regulations would require approval from the commission and the General Assembly. All proposed changes fall within management plan parameters established by USFWS.

**Editor’s note:**

*One may question the reason there should be an increase in SACR bag limit and season length when:*

- *Over the course of the Kentucky Sandhill season from 2011 until 2017-2018, the total take per season has never reached 200 cranes (119 cranes in the 20178-18 season);*
- *Increasing the length of the season coincides with the time Whooping Cranes are known to be wintering in Kentucky;*
- *“No-hunting zones” will only work until the extremely wary cranes feel threatened by surrounding hunting and move on in search of safe areas to roost and feed. The KDFWR’s stated intent to provide non-consumptive individuals with “more wildlife viewing opportunities” may fall flat.*

*The bottom line is the changes in the season seem geared to “hunter opportunity” alone. Nothing more.*

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Louisiana:

**Nesting has begun!**

In 2016 Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries (LDWF) biologists documented the first Whooper nest started on February 12, and then February 11 in 2017. This year February 12<sup>th</sup> marks the first as L10-11 and L11-11 were found sitting on their nest! Soon after, a new pair, L5-14 and her young mate, L12-16 were found on a nest. This is the first nesting attempt for either of them. Additionally, L7-11 and L8-11 were found with their first egg of the year on the February 22, 2018! Whoop! Whoop!

**Surviving the first year**

When released on February 16, 2017, male L26-16 represented a couple of firsts for the Louisiana reintroduction project. He was the first “parent-reared” chick (raised by a pair of cranes in captivity at The Calgary Zoo) released in Louisiana, as well as the first chick “hard-released” (as opposed to being kept in and then around a release pen for several months). Juvenile cranes are most vulnerable when they’re first on their own and when moving to new areas, so it is not uncommon to see higher rates of mortality in the first 6-9 months after they’re released. Survival rates go up if they make it through that first year. Another reason to celebrate for L26-16!

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

**Editor’s note:** *The following are article excerpts from 1947 and 1950 issues of the “Louisiana Conservationist.” These excerpts are slices of history, glimpses into the plight of the Whooping Crane nationwide, and how that impacted the remaining Whooping Cranes in Louisiana.*

**Vanishing Whooping Crane Stirs vast air hunt for hidden nesting ground; two of them are found in Louisiana**

*“Louisiana Game, Fur and Fish” (formerly the “Louisiana Conservationist”) January 1947, Volume 5, Number 2*

“An all-out hunt from Mexico to the Arctic Tundra is underway in an effort to help a vanishing North American, the whooping crane, stage a comeback.

“...The U. S. Wildlife Service and the National Audubon Society are jointly sponsoring a continental survey much of it by air, to locate whooping crane breeding grounds. The birds have not been found nesting since 1922.

“Through the efforts of John H. Flynn, airplane pilot of the Wild Life and Fisheries Department, a pair of these rare birds, the Whooping Cranes, were found in Louisiana in the marshes west of Iberia Parish.

“...Starting last December at the Arkansas [sic] National Wildlife refuge near Austwell, Texas, Dr. Pettingill observed the birds at wintering grounds where he counted but 25.

“...If larger than expected members of the species are observed in Canada and it appears that the main wintering ground, heretofore believed to be Texas and Louisiana, has not been located, Dr. Pettingill expects to take to the air again next fall to scout remote sections of North-Central Mexico for the southern destination of the whooping crane.”

[http://laconservationist.wlf.la.gov/past\\_issues/1947-vol-5-no-2/](http://laconservationist.wlf.la.gov/past_issues/1947-vol-5-no-2/)

## **Audubon Society reports Whooping Crane increase**

*Louisiana Conservationist, January 1950, Vol.2, No.5*

“New York – Four young whooping cranes have returned with 29 adults to their wintering grounds in Texas, giving the big white birds new headway in their race against extinction, it was reported recently by John H. Baker, president of the National Audubon Society.

“The continental whooping crane population now stand at 36, including two captive birds at the Aransas National Wildlife Refuge on the east coast of Texas and one in Louisiana....

“...In 1942 the whooping crane population was down to 22 birds. The slow rise in numbers is attributed by the National Audubon Society to increased protection on their wintering grounds and lessened shooting of the cranes, owing to widespread publicity along their migration route.”

[http://laconservationist.wlf.la.gov/past\\_issues/1950-vol-2-no-5/](http://laconservationist.wlf.la.gov/past_issues/1950-vol-2-no-5/)

## **Louisiana's lone "Whooper" captured**

*“Louisiana Conservationist” / March-April 1950, Volume 2, No. 7-8, Page 22; includes photo of Whooping Crane being held in helicopter after capture*

Article by Arthur Van Pelt

“...Most of those appear now to be congregated in the Aransas Wildlife Reserve, an ideal habitat for them, east of Corpus Christi in the coastal marshes of Texas. Until a few days ago, though Louisiana could lay claim to one lone Whooper, – a beautiful big bird which seemed to prefer to remain in solitary dignity, in the open marshes of Vermilion and Cameron Parishes rather than to join the other of his kind in Texas.

“...We literally tired the bird out by chasing it and finally it alighted in the marsh. Quickly the helicopter dropped down above it and I believe Nick Schexnayder was out of the helicopter and dropping before it was within 20 feet of the marsh. But he was within reach of the bird when he landed and caught it by the upper neck to prevent it striking him with its dagger-like bill. We handled it carefully and got back into the plane [helicopter] and came back to Lafayette. Then we drove non-stop to Aransas Pass, Texas, that

same evening and night to place that valuable specimen among its relatives in the best possible condition. Nick literally cuddled that big bird in his arms the whole way, on that trip...

“...In 1935 there were five of these immense birds known to be living in that great prairie country. I personally saw them in the Gueydan prairie just once many years ago. They looked like five men dressed in white out in the marsh. By 1940 their numbers had increased to 13 birds. But that same year there came a great storm and tidal wave that drove the birds in to the rice fields and most of them were shot by hunters or killed by the storm. Only three remained and of those two have since then, been lost. Only this one old bird remained....”

[http://laconservationist.wlf.la.gov/past\\_issues/1950-vol-2-no-78/](http://laconservationist.wlf.la.gov/past_issues/1950-vol-2-no-78/)

## **Help the LDWF by reporting all Whooping Crane sightings**

To report your sighting, go here: <http://www.wlf.louisiana.gov/webform/whooping-crane-reporting-form>

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## Pennsylvania:

### **Sandhill numbers on the rise in Pennsylvania**

Since 2013 the Pennsylvania Game Commission (PGC) and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service have been conducting Sandhill Crane surveys every fall. This year’s survey yielded 170 cranes during the October/November survey period, four more cranes than were observed last year and 72 more since the project began in 2013.

In 2017 cranes were spotted in six counties – the northwest region a stronghold with cranes observed in Crawford and Lawrence counties. But the northeast counties of Bradford, Lackawanna, Sullivan and Wyoming accounted for the other sightings in the 2017 survey.

According to PGC wildlife biologist Lisa Williams, the shift to the northeast is significant, as it may indicate a new migration pathway is emerging as the cranes search for new territory. Sandhill Cranes spend the summer in eastern Canada and migrate down through the United States to winter in Florida. Typically, during migration, the cranes funnel down through the Great Lake states staying west of the Appalachian Mountains. But ideal habitat in the northwestern and northeastern parts of the Pennsylvania could be an attraction for the cranes.

While still considered migratory based on the fact that the majority of Sandhill sightings have been in the fall, there are a few records of nesting pairs primarily in the northwest area of the state. This is also the area where there have been reports of cranes overwintering.

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## Tennessee:

**Editor:** *The following tribute is by Cyndi Routledge of the Tennessee Ornithological Society and Southeastern Avian Research.*

### **In memory of “Craniac” Tony King**

“Craniac” Tony King of Lenoir City, Tennessee passed away on February 27, 2018 after a short illness.

Tony, or “the King” as he was affectionately known, truly loved Cranes. He was a staunch supporter of all things Whooper and during Operation Migration’s tenure was one of their biggest cheerleaders. He was

an active member of the Knoxville Chapter of the Tennessee Ornithological Society and at the Annual State Spring meetings we always knew Tony would be there to give a detailed report on the status of the Whooping Crane in the East and make a hearty plea for “mile money” as Operation Migration prepared to lead the newest class of juvenile Whooping Cranes south.

Tony had a one of a kind personality and zest for life. His wonderful sense of humor and dry sarcasm always made me smile and at times puzzled others – but that was Tony through and through. He was a forester by profession and a bird hike with him always revealed and taught us so much more. Tony was a true steward of the land he loved; there wasn't a bird walk or hike where he wasn't looking for birds while picking up the flotsam and junk left behind by other just because it was the “thing to do.”

Our most heartfelt condolences to Tony's family and dear friends for they knew and loved him best.  
*Fly high Tony, soar high on the thermal winds of forever.*

## **2017-2018 Sandhill season results**

While the number of Sandhill Cranes killed during the 2017-2018 Tennessee season has not been finalized, a February 22, 2018 TWRA report show the following “harvest” totals:

Southeast Crane Zone: 569 (487 adults, 82 juvenile)  
Remainder of State: 175 (158 adults, 17 juvenile)  
County Totals: Bradley-1, Coffee-1, Franklin-10, Hamilton-4, Jefferson-1, Meigs-19, Obion-23, Rhea-104, Rutherford-1, Weakley-9, White-1

Statewide Total: 744 (645 adults, 99 juvenile)

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## Texas:

### **Houston Zoo to fund Whooping Crane outreach coordinator position**

When the Whooping Cranes arrived in Texas this past fall after their 2,400-mile journey from their nesting grounds in Canada, they returned not only to vegetative damage from Hurricane Harvey storm surge, but increased salinity in the inland freshwater ponds that they rely on for drinking. Notified of the situation, the Houston Zoo donated to the [International Crane Foundation's Hurricane Harvey rebuild in Rockport](#) campaign. The Zoo also partnered with the [International Crane Foundation's Texas office](#) to establish a Whooping Crane Outreach Coordinator position that will be funded by the Zoo.

Corinna Holfus of Houston, Texas was hired to fill the outreach position. Her role includes working with partners like the Houston Zoo, as well as forming new partnerships with hunters, landowners and other members of the community to develop awareness of Whooping Cranes as well as to foster their commitment to safeguard the cranes in their areas.

With the establishment of this position, Tim Grunewald, International Crane Foundation's North American Program Director, stated, “The uniqueness of having the world's only naturally producing flock of Whooping Cranes choosing to winter on the Texas coast is something to cherish, take pride in and celebrate. Thanks to the incredible generosity of the Houston Zoo allowing the hiring of Holfus we'll now be able to greatly accelerate and expand our efforts to increase the appreciation, awareness, and protection of this still fragile, slowly expanding flock.”

### **Whooping Cranes spotted at Port Aransas**

The last recorded sighting of Whooping Cranes on Mustang Island, was in the 1950's. Since then, there have been reports of birds flying over Port Aransas, but never on the ground in the area. That is until January of this year when there were a number of sightings in the vicinity of Charlie's Pasture of a pair of Whooping Cranes.

In an effort to encourage the cranes to stay and return next year, [Port Aransas Nature Preserves](#) and the [International Crane Foundation](#) encouraged anyone encountering a Whooping Crane, to observe the cranes from at least 100 yards away.

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## Habitat Matters!

### Kansas:

#### **Wildlife refuges key to Whooping Crane recovery**

The last wild migratory flock of Whooping Cranes – the Aransas-Wood Buffalo population – is gradually making a recovery and national wildlife refuges are contributing to it.

Whooping Cranes occur regularly each fall at Quivira Wildlife Refuge, from late October through the month of November. Each fall season varies in terms of the total number of cranes reported, but the average through the season is 30-40 birds. Although sightings of 10-12 birds in one flock occur occasionally each year, most group sizes average 2-5 birds. Most occur overnight and are gone from the area by mid-morning. A few groups, or individuals, may stay a week or more before moving on. There are records where a Whooping Crane remained on the refuge into December or into the new year.

Spring migration is typically not as dynamic, with the birds passing through the Quivira area quickly. Sightings in spring are fewer, and of much shorter duration, than in the fall. Nevertheless, the season is not without its history of surprises: in spring 2010 a total of 76 Whooping Cranes were reported on the Refuge on April 1.

Of the estimated 431 individuals in this population, 167 (nearly 40%) visited [Quivira National Wildlife Refuge](#) in Kansas as a stopover area during their 2017 fall migration. This total far exceeds the refuge's record of 110 individuals recorded during fall 2016. The greatest number of individuals observed in a single day this fall was 66 on November 2, including 42 whooping cranes in one location. The refuge's Whooping Crane fall migration began October 19 and ended December 5, 2017. In addition to Whooping Cranes, [over 300 other bird species](#) have been recorded at Quivira, including a wide variety of waterfowl, shorebirds, and migratory birds.

*To learn more about the 2011-2017 Whooper sightings at Quivira, go here:*  
[https://www.fws.gov/refuge/Quivira/what\\_we\\_do/science/whooping\\_crane\\_sightings.html](https://www.fws.gov/refuge/Quivira/what_we_do/science/whooping_crane_sightings.html)

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### Montana:

#### **Local Potomac Valley cattle rancher teams up with Missoula nonprofit to protect land from development**

Cattlegwoman Anna Marie Hayes's great-grandfather first homesteaded the land in the late 1800s, and it's been a working ranch ever since. "It's beautiful out here," she said. "It's great, almost too great, for the

deer and elk. I have a lot of local people that hunt out here. And I see Sandhill Cranes on the wetlands in the summer. I want to keep it the way it is.”

The nonprofit [Five Valleys Land Trust](#) in Missoula recently won approval from the Missoula County Board of Commissioners to use \$295,000 of taxpayer-funded [Open Space Bond](#) money, along with \$569,000 worth of federal funding and cash contributions from the landowner, to place a conservation easement on 569 acres of the historic Hayes Family Ranch.

To secure the federal funding from the Natural Resources and Conservation Services' [Agricultural Land Easement Program \(ALE\)](#), the project is scored on a points-based system. Some of the criteria include how great the soils are, the level of threat from development pressure, wildlife habitat and how the land connects other protected areas.

“The working landscape with 94-percent important agricultural soils includes grassland, forest and wetland habitats that connect with other private, protected lands,” said Vickie Edwards, Five Valleys conservation projects manager. “This easement exemplifies that voluntary, private land conservation and conservation easements are effective tools in conserving important agricultural soils in Missoula County.”

*To learn more about the Five Valley Land Trust, go here:*  
<https://www.guidestar.org/profile/23-7182055>

*See some land protected by the Five Valleys Land Trust, go here:*  
[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jvc\\_kUSmduU](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jvc_kUSmduU)

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## Texas:

### **Benbrook Lake, surprise stopover habitat for Whooping Cranes in Texas**

Chester McConnell, Wildlife Biologist for the Friends of the Wild Whoopers group (FOTWW) is currently visiting [U.S. Army Corps of Engineer](#) (USACE) lakes, small ponds and wetland habitat found in the 7 mid-western states that make up the Whooping Crane migration corridor, to evaluate their suitability for stopovers. The group's goal is to identify existing stopover habitat, recommend improvements when needed and ultimately help protect it for the wild Aransas-Wood Buffalo population of Whooping Cranes. In addition to the current review of USACE sites, FOTWW has already visited and made assessments on military bases and Indian Reservations along the migration corridor.

McConnell was a bit skeptical that a lake on the southwest edge of the densely populated city of Fort Worth would be a place that Whooping Cranes would use as a stopover during their annual migrations. However, during a recent visit to evaluate [USACE Benbrook Lake](#)'s suitability he was pleasantly surprised, finding excellent habitat in several locations at the lake.

Based on information from a recent U.S. Geological Survey study, 58 radio-tagged Whooping Cranes provided data on 2,158 stopover sites over 10 migrations and 5 years (2010-14). Several of these additional stopover sites were also in the general vicinity of Benbrook Lake. And one Whooper has been recorded on the lake.

For those living in the area, Whoopers normally migrate over or near Benbrook Lake during March - April (northward migration) and fall during October - November (southward migration). The cranes usually stopover to rest late in the afternoon and depart the following morning.

*To read more about Benbrook and see photos of the habitat there, go here:*  
<http://friendsofthewildwhoopers.org/benbrook-lake-surprise-stopover-habitat-for-whooping-cranes-texas/>

To support the crucial habitat work done by FOTWW on behalf of the Aransas-Wood Buffalo population of Whooping Cranes please consider becoming a supporter of the Friends of the Wild Whoopers by going here: <http://friendsofthewildwhoopers.org/support-fotww/>

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## **ENVIRONMENTAL impact issues:**

### Louisiana:

#### **Oil Spill near White Lake Whooping Cranes**

On January 30, 2018 the Coast Guard reported nearly 1,300 gallons of oil spilled from a flow line at the oil production facility, Peak Operating Company, adjacent to White Lake Louisiana wetlands near the area where young endangered Whooping Cranes are released into the wild.

The spill was about 5½ miles (7 kilometers) southeast of the nearest edge of the [White Lake Wetlands Conservation Area](#), where 11 juvenile cranes were brought November 9, 2017 for gradual release, and about 12 miles (19 kilometers) from the [Rockefeller Wildlife Refuge](#), where another dozen juveniles were brought November 14, 2017. Rockefeller covers about 71,000 acres (28,700 hectares) along the Louisiana coast, and the White Lake conservation area covers about 72,000 acres (29,000 hectares) north of White Lake.

According to Sara Zimorski with the Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries, none of the cranes were near the spill. Zimorski said biologists will be keeping an eye on the juvenile cranes' electronic trackers to make sure they continue well away from the spill.

A containment boom was deployed around the spill just east of White Lake to prevent oil from entering adjacent waterways, and clean-up efforts began. The cause of the leak is under investigation.

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## **Science News:**

**Note:** *Friends of the Wild Whoopers thanks David Meyer, Hugh T. MacKie and the Saskatchewan Archaeology Society for allowing them to publish an abridged version of "Whooping Cranes and Ft. Rivière Tremblante (1791-98)," a 2017 article published in the Saskatchewan Archaeology Quarterly, Volume 3, Number 4.*

### **Whooping Cranes and Ft. Rivière Tremblante (1791-98)**

by David Meyer\* and Hugh T. MacKie\*\* (January, 2018)  
Saskatchewan Archaeology Quarterly, Volume 3, Number 4, 2017

#### **Summary**

Whooping crane leg bones, likely from the same bird, were recovered in the course of the 1968 excavation season at Ft. Rivière Tremblante. Historically, the summer range of the whooping cranes included the aspen parkland of eastern Saskatchewan and extended north into the Saskatchewan River delta in the southern boreal forest. Therefore, the Ft. Rivière Tremblante individual may have been taken in its local breeding territory or during its migration through the area. The whooping crane was well known to the indigenous peoples of this region and effective hunting techniques were practiced. While the cranes and their eggs were a source of food, they were also a source of material for important ceremonial objects such as flutes made from long bones and fans fashioned from wings.

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*To read the abridged version of the paper, go here:*  
<http://friendsofthewildwhoopers.org/whooping-cranes-ft-riviere-tremblante-1791-98/>

## **USFWS Forensics Laboratory's Feather Atlas**

Pepper Trail is a senior forensic scientist and ornithologist at the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Forensics Laboratory in Oregon. The lab is the world's foremost facility dedicated to solving crimes against wildlife. And it provides wildlife-related crime laboratory services to wildlife law enforcement officers at federal, state and international levels, so criminals can be successfully prosecuted.

An outreach project of the Forensics Lab is "The Feather Atlas of North American Birds." This website promotes feather identification, research, and appreciation by providing high-resolution scans of the flight feathers (wing and tail) of more than 325 species of North American birds. This is an ongoing project, and new species are added regularly. It is used by law enforcement, refuge biologists, ornithologists, artists and the general public.

### **Whooping Crane feathers:**

[https://www.fws.gov/lab/featheratlas/feather.php?Bird=WHCR\\_primary\\_male](https://www.fws.gov/lab/featheratlas/feather.php?Bird=WHCR_primary_male)  
[https://www.fws.gov/lab/featheratlas/feather.php?Bird=WHCR\\_tail\\_male](https://www.fws.gov/lab/featheratlas/feather.php?Bird=WHCR_tail_male)  
[https://www.fws.gov/lab/featheratlas/feather.php?Bird=WHCR\\_secondary\\_male](https://www.fws.gov/lab/featheratlas/feather.php?Bird=WHCR_secondary_male)

### **Sandhill Crane feathers:**

[https://www.fws.gov/lab/featheratlas/feather.php?Bird=SACR\\_primary\\_adult](https://www.fws.gov/lab/featheratlas/feather.php?Bird=SACR_primary_adult)  
[https://www.fws.gov/lab/featheratlas/feather.php?Bird=SACR\\_secondary\\_adult](https://www.fws.gov/lab/featheratlas/feather.php?Bird=SACR_secondary_adult)  
[https://www.fws.gov/lab/featheratlas/feather.php?Bird=SACR\\_tail\\_adult](https://www.fws.gov/lab/featheratlas/feather.php?Bird=SACR_tail_adult)

*To read more about the Feather Atlas, go here:*  
<https://www.fws.gov/lab/featheratlas/index.php>

*To read more about Pepper Trail and his work, go here:*  
<https://www.fws.gov/news/blog/index.cfm/2014/10/15/at-our-forensics-lab-pepper-trail-fights-wildlife-trafficking>

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## **In Memoriam:**

### **"Father Goose" flies away home**

Known to many as "Father Goose," Canadian Bill Lishman's incredibly creative and eclectic life was sadly cut short by leukemia on December 30, 2017. Regardless, his legacy will continue in the reintroduced

eastern migratory population of Whooping Cranes. Due to Lishman's persistence and dedication, many Whoopers migrating now in the eastern U.S., do so, in large part, because of Lishman and his ultralight.

In the late 1980's Bill taught himself to fly which led to his ultralight work with Canada Geese and eventually to Whooping Cranes. He produced a homespun video in 1989 called "[C'mon Geese](#)" which won international awards and attracted the attention of Dr. George Archibald, co-founder of the International Crane Foundation. Whooping Cranes learn migration behavior by following their parents but when the birds that once used the Eastern Flyway were wiped out years ago, those routes were lost. Lishman's efforts to lead geese held the key to human taught migration. Bill's adventurous flights and Dr. Archibald's insight led to the 100+ Whooping Cranes that now migrate in the east, the first in over a century.

[Joseph Duff](#), [Operation Migration](#) co-founder and C.E.O., joined Bill Lishman in 1993 and helped him conduct the first human-led bird migration. The two "artists turned naturalists" used ultralight aircraft to lead 18 Canada geese from Ontario to Virginia. The success of this initial study led to the founding of Operation Migration the following year, and the making of "Fly Away Home" in 1995.

A man of many talents Lishman was an established sculptor, designer, filmmaker, public speaker and environmental activist. He will be missed.

*To learn more about Bill Lishman, go here:*

<https://www.theglobeandmail.com/news/national/father-geese-bill-lishman-loved-to-fly-with-thebirds/article37492203/>

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## **Kudos:**

### **Doug Pellerin- "Craniac" extraordinaire**

Sometimes conservation efforts are bolstered with help from unexpected sources. Years of commitment to the eastern Whooping Crane reintroduction effort began for Doug Pellerin and his family by a chance meeting with [Operation Migration's Joe Duff](#) at the Necedah NWR observation tower where Pellerin was photographing distant cranes.

From the very beginnings of the ultralight release method until today, Pellerin has worn many hats for the organization. For years he helped build the pens and clear blue stem at White River Marsh, ran water hoses and prepared netting on the pens each spring and spent numerous pre-dawn hours driving long distances to the site to help release the juvenile Whoopers while wearing a crane costume. Currently Pellerin coordinates access to the observation blind and acts as a crane ambassador in his interaction with visitors. He is also part of the Operation Migration tracking team that monitors the cranes while they are in Wisconsin.

[Operation Migration](#) is indeed fortunate to have such a dedicated "CRANIAC" in Doug Pellerin – constantly watching out for our Whooping Cranes. Thank you, Doug!

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## **BOOKS:**

### **Taking Flight: A History of Birds and People in the Heart of America**

By Michael Edmonds

Author and birder Michael Edmonds has combed archaeological reports, missionaries' journals, travelers' letters, early scientific treatises, the memoirs of American Indian elders, and the folklore of hunters,

farmers, and formerly enslaved people throughout the Midwest to reveal how our ancestors thought about the very same birds we see today.

“...Fifteen years later, in 1912, Hornaday [of the New York Zoological Society] performed another survey, which showed that twenty-five birds species had become extinct in at least one Midwestern state where they had once been common. Three – the Carolina parakeet, passenger pigeon, and whooping crane – were entirely gone from the region. Although most birds killed for the millinery trade came from the Atlantic Coast or the South, a fair share came from the Midwest; the snowy egret, American white pelican, sandhill and whooping cranes, and trumpeter swan had all been decimated in the heart of the continent...”

To find out more about Taking Flight and how to order a copy, go here:  
[https://www.wisconsinhistory.org/whspress/books/book.asp?book\\_id=576](https://www.wisconsinhistory.org/whspress/books/book.asp?book_id=576)

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## Upcoming Events:

### 2018 Marsh Madness Sandhill Crane Festival

Date: March 2-3, 2018  
Location: Goose Pond Fish and Wildlife Area  
Greene Co. near Linton, Indiana

Join Friends of Goose Pond for its 8th annual Marsh Madness Sandhill Crane Festival. From the kickoff banquet Friday evening featuring keynote speaker Lizzie Condon, Whooping Crane Outreach Coordinator for the International Crane Foundation; an exhibit by local photographers including Marty Jones; special presentations about Indiana raptors, snakes and bats; bus tours of the amazing wildlife management area and arts, crafts and kid activities, there is something for everyone interested in our natural world. Festival admission tickets are required for some of the cabin presentations and activities.

*Fees/Admission:* Visit <https://friendsofgoosepond.org/about-marsh-madness/> for complete details.  
For a schedule of festival events, go here: <https://friendsofgoosepond.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/01/2018-Schedule-of-Events.pdf>

For an interview about the Marsh Madness festival with James Kawlewski, outreach coordinator with the International Crane Foundation, go here:  
<http://www.mywabashvalley.com/news/live-at-five/live-at-five-guest-marsh-madness-1/1001380664>

### Monte Vista Crane Festival

Dates: Friday March 9-Sunday March 11, 2018  
Location: Monte Vista National Wildlife Refuge, San Luis Valley, Colorado  
<http://mvcranefest.org/crane-tour-info/>

Registration deadline March 7, 2018; For festival information call MV Chamber 719-852-2731

### Audubon's Nebraska Crane Festival

When: March 22-25, 2018  
Where: Various locations in central Nebraska  
Admission: \$150 for adults, \$60 for students and \$20 children  
For more information, and to register go here: <http://ne.audubon.org/birds/crane-festival>

In its 48th year, Audubon's Nebraska Crane Festival Audubon's Nebraska Crane Festival will take place March 22-25, 2018, bringing together hundreds of crane lovers from around the country to Kearney, Nebraska, to interact with a wide range of environmental speakers, take part in incredible birding trips, and, best of all, experience the world's largest gathering of Sandhill Cranes!

To receive periodic e-mail updates on festival news and activities, please write [nebraska@audubon.org](mailto:nebraska@audubon.org). If you can't make the festival but still want to see the Sandhill Cranes, call Audubon's Rowe Sanctuary, (308) 468-5282, to learn about more crane viewing options.

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