



THE UNISON CALL

- Newsletter of the North American Crane Working Group -

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President's Report

The North American Crane Working Group held the 14th North American Crane Workshop in Chattanooga, Tennessee, on 12-13 January, preceded on 11 January by a social at the Chattanooga Zoo, and followed by field trips to nearby Hiwassee Wildlife Refuge on 14 January and to Wheeler National Wildlife Refuge (near Decatur, Alabama) on 15 January. There were 70 registrants. The strong scientific program consisted of 38 oral and 14 poster presentations on North American cranes. Board member David Aborn did an outstanding job with local planning and local arrangements (see his article on page 3).

Proceedings of the 13th North American Crane Workshop, held in Lafayette, Louisiana, in 2014, were available without additional charge to registrants of that Workshop. They were also for sale at the Chattanooga Workshop and can be purchased from the International Crane Foundation for \$30.00 postpaid. The 140-page volume includes 10 research papers, 5 brief communications, and 47 abstracts of oral and poster presentations not represented by a published paper. Many thanks to David Aborn as Editor-in-Chief, the outside reviewers, and the technical editing group (Richard Urbanek, Daryl Henderson, Barry Hartup, and Tommy Michot) who did final proofreading and produced the book.

The Workshop banquet provides the forum in which our organization recognizes the truly great achievers among those committed to saving cranes and their

habitats. At this workshop I was proud to be among those presenting our group's highest honor, the L. H. Walkinshaw Crane Conservation Award, to Tom Stehn, retired U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service biologist at Aransas National Wildlife Refuge, the winter home of the only natural population of Whooping Cranes. Tom retired in 2011 after 32 years in the Service, including 29 years as Aransas biologist and 14 years as U.S. Whooping Crane Coordinator. Tom was introduced by George Archibald (International Crane Foundation and current Recovery Team member) followed by an impassioned acceptance speech by Tom. Under Tom's careful watch and documentation, the Aransas/Wood Buffalo population grew from 70 to more than 300 birds. His knowledge of the population through extensive surveys and observation plus his commitment to biology rather than to politics provides an example of what a true professional crane biologist should be. The current flock is a testament to his work, which we hope will be a foundation for continued protection and growth of the population. Also honored at the Workshop with a Special Recognition Award was local crane enthusiast Ken Dubke, retired from National Park Service and a leading member in the Tennessee Ornithological Society. He was instrumental in forming the role of Hiwassee Wildlife Refuge as a major Sandhill Crane migration stopover and wintering area, starting the annual crane festival, and rousing local support for Sandhill and Whooping Cranes (see more in article by David Aborn, page 3).

President's Report *continued*



Richard Urbanek, Barry Hartup, and George Archibald present the L. H. Walkinshaw Crane Conservation Award to Tom Stehn (second from left). Photo: Glenn Olsen

The Workshop is also the site of our general membership meeting. The membership voted to increase size of the Board of Directors from 7 to 11 with emphasis on including at least one student member. Seven current Board members were re-elected: David Aborn, Barry Hartup, Daryl Henderson, Sammy King, Tommy Michot, Glenn Olsen, and Richard Urbanek. Four new elected members were George Archibald, Megan Brown, Paige Smith, Hillary Thompson—the latter three being graduate students. The general membership was updated on various business issues, which the Board further addressed at a conference call meeting on 7 March (see below). Nominations for site of the next workshop, projected to be in 2020, were opened. Preference was for a western site, and suggestions so far include the Southwest (Aransas NWR, Texas, or Bosque del Apache NWR, New Mexico); Portland, Oregon, or Vancouver, Washington; and Victoria, British Columbia, or Port Angeles, Washington. A decision has not yet been made, and the Board remains open to considering additional nominations. At a brief Board meeting following the general membership meeting, the following officers were elected to serve a term which will conclude at the next workshop: Richard Urbanek (President), Daryl Henderson (Secretary), and Barry Hartup (Treasurer). Sammy King was elected Vice-president conditional on and not effective until approval of his employer. Daryl and Barry were reelected to their previous positions, at which they have done an outstanding job. Daryl has also been excellent as editor of *The Unison Call* and will continue in that position.

Weather during the Workshop was about 20 degrees F above normal, resulting in excellent field trips, both coordinated with local crane annual festivals. At Birchwood, Tennessee, the program varied from wildlife presentations to live country music; and all participants were able to view flocks of Sandhill Cranes along the Tennessee River landscape at Hiwassee Wildlife Refuge as well as learn of the historical events memorialized at the adjacent Cherokee Removal Park. On Saturday, the field trip was to Wheeler National Wildlife Refuge, 150 miles downriver in Alabama. Thousands of Sandhill Cranes were easily visible at close range. Although a few Whooping Cranes were present but not readily visible at Hiwassee, 18 Whooping Cranes from the reintroduced Eastern Migratory Population were present at Wheeler, creating a truly memorable experience for Workshop participants and members of the local community.

The new NACWG Board met by conference call on 7 March. The final wording of the amendment increasing the number of Board members from a minimum of 7 to a maximum of 11 was approved. Although the Working Group is in

good financial shape, expenses of hosting Workshop 14 plus publishing Proceedings of Workshop 13 exceeded income by \$2,300. Most previous workshops have made a small profit or broken even. Unlike previous workshops, Workshop 14 had no sponsors; this situation will need to be remedied in the future. Annual membership due structure will be changed to Student (\$10), Active (\$20), Sustaining (\$30) and Other (>\$30). Three years of membership were included in the registration fee for those attending Workshop 14. The membership list will be updated, and a version including personal information (with consent) will be distributed. Outreach efforts will be increased by distributing *The Unison Call* to target individuals, especially in crane states and groups which are currently not represented. Richard Urbanek will be updating the website soon, including clearer guidelines for author submissions to the Workshop Proceedings. A PayPal link for online payment of membership dues will be added. Hillary Thompson will lead a group including Megan Brown and Paige Smith to establish a social media presence on Facebook or Twitter.

Jane Austin and Richard Urbanek are co-editing Proceedings of Workshop 14. An initial query by Jane has so far lined up 18 papers. Manuscript submissions are due by 1 October 2017.

Richard P. Urbanek, New Lisbon, Wisconsin

Summary of the 14th North American Crane Workshop



Participants on the Wheeler NWR field trip. Photo courtesy of Hillary Thompson and Bill 'Gator' Gates.

The 14th North American Crane Workshop (NACW) was held in Chattanooga, Tennessee January 12-15, 2017. The Chattanooga workshop was attended by 70 people, and there were 38 oral presentations and 14 poster presentations. There were field trips to both Hiwassee Wildlife Refuge in Tennessee and Wheeler National Wildlife Refuge in Alabama, and as a bonus for the attendees, both trips coincided with the annual crane celebrations at the respective locations. At Hiwassee, attendees got to see about 5,000 Sandhill Cranes, while at Wheeler there were about 10,000 sandhills and the group got to see 18 Whooping Cranes! Seeing the Eurasian Wigeon (*Anas penelope*) at Wheeler was an added bonus for many, although for some of the attendees from out west, even Carolina Chickadee (*Poecile carolinensis*) was a lifer!

Another part of the NACW is the presentation of the Walkinshaw Award, which is given to someone who has made significant lifetime contributions to our understanding of and to the protection and management of North American Cranes. This year's recipient was Tom Stehn, who spent nearly 30 years as a US Fish and Wildlife Service biologist studying Whooping Cranes on their wintering grounds in Aransas, Texas. His work helped give us a complete picture of Whooping Crane population dynamics, as well as improving habitat management of their wintering areas. In addition to Tom Stehn, the NACWG wanted to recognize Ken Dubke for

all the work he has done as an advocate for the cranes at Hiwassee, so he was given a special award of recognition. As I stated in my award remarks, if it were not for Ken, the workshop would never have been held in Chattanooga because there would be no cranes or crane festival to see. Because cranes are large, vocal, and congregate in significant numbers, Ken, along with his late wife Lil, recognized the value of the cranes at Hiwassee for educating people about birds and conservation. He also used the connection between cranes and the Cherokee to raise awareness about the importance of the area to Cherokee history and culture, which led to the creation of the Cherokee Removal Memorial. For many years, Ken was the lifeblood of the annual Sandhill Crane and Cherokee Heritage Festival, and it is fortunate that such a distinguished body of crane experts and enthusiasts got to see the popularity and impact of Ken's legacy for themselves. Ken is NEVER at a loss for words; however, when he received his award, all he could say was "Very humbling".



David Aborn presents Award of Recognition to Ken Dubke (right).

Award inscription: The North American Crane Working Group presents this Award of Recognition to Ken Dubke, in gratitude for your outstanding dedication to the protection of cranes and their habitat. January 13, 2017.

Acknowledgments

Organizing even a relatively small meeting like this one requires a lot of assistance. I therefore acknowledge the following people and organizations (mention of a business does not imply endorsement by NACWG or University of Tennessee at Chattanooga): Susan Flynn and Adrienne Terry with the Chattanooga Convention and Visitors Bureau; Lynn Casey with the Chattanooga Choo-Choo; Kelsey Graham with the Chattanooga Zoo (where the opening social was held); 212 Market Restaurant (which catered the social); Mime Barnes and David Hanni with the Tennessee Wildlife Resources Agency; Dwight Cooley (retired) and Bill Gates of Wheeler NWR; Name Tag Country (made the plaque for Ken Dubke); Premiere Transportation; fellow NACWG Board members Barry Hartup, Daryl Henderson, Sammy King, Tommy Michot, Glenn Olsen, and Richard Urbanek; and all the workshop attendees.

**David A. Aborn, Department of Biological and Environmental Sciences
University of Tennessee at Chattanooga, Chattanooga, Tennessee**

The Unison Call is a forum to share updates, news and opinions. It is published twice yearly (spring/summer and fall/winter) by the **North American Crane Working Group**, a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization incorporated in Wisconsin. Both print and electronic (PDF) versions are produced; PDFs of past issues of the newsletter can be downloaded free of charge from our website (www.nacwg.org). **The views expressed in *The Unison Call* are those of the individual authors and do not necessarily represent the positions of NACWG.** Comments and contributions are always welcome.

Daryl Henderson, Editor
nysquirrel1@gmail.com

Why is NACWG part of the Ornithological Council?

In 2010, the North American Crane Working Group joined the Ornithological Council (OC). This is a non-profit organization that serves, and is supported by, the interest of its 12 member bird organizations (<http://naturalhistory.si.edu/BIRDNET/orncounc/index.html>).



So what does the OC do, and why does NACWG support this OC? And why should you as an individual ornithologist do so?

The OC provides an important voice for ornithologists, linking the scientific community with public and private decision-makers. It provides some key benefits to ornithologists and the larger world of avian conservation in the northern hemisphere. Some of the services that the OC provides:

Your go-to for help with every kind of state, federal, and provincial (in Canada) permit and all the associated paperwork and processes. The OC will walk you through every step of these increasingly complicated systems and surmount the hurdles with speed and ease.

The OC publishes [Guidelines to the Use of Wild Birds in Research](#), a peer-reviewed publication that is a key resource for you and your animal care and use committees. An update pertaining to the use of drones is in progress. OC has also published a Model Wildlife Protocol and several other guidance documents and articles about biologically appropriate application of animal welfare laws to wildlife research.

The OC publishes [permit guides](#) for federal and state permits, including those issued pursuant to the Migratory Bird Treaty Act, Endangered Species Act, CITES, and permits needed to conduct research on federal and state lands. A permit guide for Canada is in progress.

The OC represents ornithologists to the government agencies that make the policies that affect ornithological research, including permits, animal welfare, research funding, data sharing, research ethics and scientific integrity policies, and more.

Through various outreach efforts, including workshops at society meetings and notices on [OrnithologyExchange](#), OC keeps ornithologists informed about policy changes that affect ornithological research.

The OC keeps member organizations informed about proposed policies that will affect the birds we study and is available to assist with analysis and preparation of a response by member organizations to those proposed policies.

The OC is a simple organization – one talented executive director, Ellen Paul, and the council board, made up of 1-2 representatives of each member organization. NACWG contributes \$250 annually to the OC; Jane Austin currently serves as NACWG representative. (*continued on next page*)

The twelve member societies provide the Ornithological Council with about 75% of its funding. Without the additional support from individual ornithologists who contribute through the check-off box on the membership renewal form or through direct contributions, the Ornithological Council could not continue to exist.

Support for the OC is particularly important today. Concerns about changing policies about the environment, endangered species, and conservation are at an all-time high. We need to sustain this critical voice for us, to provide timely information about birds to help ensure scientifically-based decisions, policies, and management actions, to inform ornithologists of proposals and actions that affect birds or the study of birds, and to speak for scientific ornithology on public issues.

You can lend your individual support to the OC by:

- Contribute to the OC when you renew your membership in one of the member organizations
- Send a check by regular mail to 6512 E. Halbert Rd., Bethesda, MD 20817
- Contribute directly through the PayPal donation button on BIRDNET: <http://naturalhistory.si.edu/BIRDNET/orncounc/index.html>

Jane Austin, USGS, Northern Prairie Wildlife Research Center, Jamestown, ND

Announcements

Yampa Valley Crane Festival moves to Labor Day Weekend

Sandhill Cranes join forces with Steamboat's acrobatic airplanes

Soar with cranes! Soar with planes! Visit Steamboat Springs and the beautiful Yampa Valley in Northwest Colorado for the sixth annual Yampa Valley Crane Festival and the Wild West Air Fest taking place during Labor Day weekend, **Aug. 31 – Sept. 3, 2017**.

The festival celebrates the majestic Greater Sandhill Cranes as they migrate through the Yampa Valley and features guided crane viewings, nature and bird walks, expert speakers, films, bird art, workshops, children's activities, live raptors presented by HawkQuest, ranch tours, a community picnic at The Nature Conservancy's Carpenter Ranch and more.

The festival's keynote speaker is **George Archibald**, co-founder of the International Crane Foundation. Additional presentations feature naturalists/ photographers **Sandra Noll** and **Erv Nichols** and *Birding* magazine editor **Ted Floyd**.

The Wild West Air Fest brings nationally renowned pilots to Steamboat Springs for an air show, providing edge-of-the-seat excitement as they perform thrilling aerobatics and formation flying.

For a complete crane festival schedule, visit **www.coloradocranes.org** and follow Yampa Valley Crane Festival on Facebook.

CONTACT: Nancy Merrill, coloradocranes@gmail.com

Kachemak Crane Watch

A Project of the Center for Alaskan Coastal Studies

Nina Faust and Edgar Bailey, co-founders of Kachemak Crane Watch in Homer, Alaska, have recorded a number of interesting videos highlighting various behaviors of Sandhill Cranes. Here is the link to the YouTube playlist:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KBvRrQkoNtw&list=PLE5DF4095CA03BCCC>

Kachemak Crane Watch is happy to work with others who are looking for footage for educational purposes.

kachbay@gmail.com
www.cranewatch.org

One Trip, Eight Countries, all Fifteen Wild Crane Species

A pair of bird lovers has circled the globe to see every living species of crane, all 15 of them. The majority of these huge birds, 11 species total, are considered vulnerable to extinction or endangered.

Jennifer Speers, a member of the board of the International Crane Foundation, decided she wanted to see more than just “whoopers” and Sandhill Cranes, the two species that live in North America. So, she and George Archibald arranged to travel the globe and see all 15 species in a span of 6 weeks, which had never been done.

The duo started in Hokkaido, Japan, where they saw Red-crowned Cranes, slender white birds with red-and-black heads whose numbers are declining. Then they hopped across the Sea of Japan to China, to see the most endangered species: Siberian Cranes. The vast majority of these creatures winter at Poyang Lake, in north-central China, and they normally feed on aquatic plants. But scientists worry that the lake could dry up or be adversely altered by local dams. Archibald notes that the crane’s normal food wasn’t abundant this year, so most were found in nearby farm fields, feeding on lotus roots or waste rice. At Poyang they also observed White-naped, Hooded and Eurasian Cranes.

Their next destination was Bhutan, where they saw the elusive Black-necked crane. These animals live in the vicinity of the Tibetan plateau and were the last to be described by scientists (in 1876). Next, in India, they saw Demoiselle and Sarus Cranes, the latter being the largest crane species, standing six feet tall.

On to Africa, where the duo first landed in Ethiopia. Archibald marveled at the locals’ love for the native Wattled and Black Crowned Cranes. It’s taboo to harm the birds, and the animals seem to have learned not to fear locals, allowing people to get within feet of them.

They then flew down to South Africa to peep Blue Cranes and Grey Crowned Cranes. The first is a smallish bird with flowing tail-feathers, revered by the Zulu (whose royalty wear their feathers). The Grey Crowned Crane is one of the most brilliantly colored crane species, possessing a goldish plume on its head and a red sac on its chin. The pair then crossed the Indian Ocean to reach Australia, where they took in more Sarus Cranes and the Brolga, a grayish, tall species that is doing relatively well.

Finally, they returned to the United States, ending up in Texas at the Whooping Crane Festival in Port Aransas, a popular event which raises awareness about the birds. Archibald says the trip was a great opportunity to check in on crane populations around the world and to coordinate with conservationists in those countries, to help prevent the birds from becoming extinct.

Newsweek article by **Douglas Main** (publ. March 3, 2017), submitted by George Archibald. The complete article can be found at: <http://www.newsweek.com/one-trip-eight-countries-all-15-wild-crane-species-563210>



Surrounded by Demoiselle Cranes in India.



At Boyo Lake, Ethiopia, Wattled Cranes trust the local people not to harm them. Photos courtesy of George Archibald.

Effective Rehabilitation of a Distressed Species: Grey Crowned Cranes in Rwanda

NACWG members in the field

Dr. Barry Hartup & Anne Lacy, International Crane Foundation

The Grey Crowned Crane (*Balearica regulorum*) is the only species of crane in Rwanda, and faces increasing threats due to wetland conversion for rice agriculture and sustained illegal trade. The wild population in Rwanda has declined to 300-500 individuals; globally, the species is currently listed as 'Endangered' on the IUCN Red List. The Rwanda Wildlife Conservation Association (RWCA) has partnered with the Rwandan government to undertake public awareness campaigns, register cranes held in captivity, and rehabilitate and repatriate a subset of cranes to supplement a remnant wild population at Akagera National Park along the Tanzanian border. To date, RWCA has helped register 240 captive cranes and taken 102 of them for release in Akagera, with more on the way. The RWCA project is a noteworthy attempt to stem the tide of live trade of the cranes, a problem common throughout East Africa.

We recently conducted a workshop in avian conservation medicine with Dr. Olivier Nsengimana of RWCA for veterinarians and advanced veterinary students and volunteers. Our goals are to help expand the pool of qualified candidates that can assist RWCA and distressed wildlife in Rwanda. We are also collaborating on expansion of post-release monitoring efforts following the rehabilitation and soft release phase, and conducting research to inform us of challenges to the nutritional status of the birds coming from captivity and re-exposure to parasites after release. Our intent is to make a positive difference in the biological impact of the repatriation effort and increase the number and sustainability of Grey Crowned Cranes in Rwanda. Strengthening the human resources and scientific assessment of these activities reflects ICF's conservation commitment in Africa.



Top left: Our group at the workshop. **Top right:** Barry worked with RWCA veterinarian Deo Ruhagazi to examine an injured crane at Akagera NP, Rwanda. This crane was successfully released over 1 year ago, but sustained an injury and is currently undergoing treatment to hopefully allow its re-release. **Bottom right:** ICF Crane Research Coordinator Anne Lacy assists Eric Kanyamibwa in setting snares for a controlled demonstration of safe crane capture, while Richard Muvunyi looks on. **Bottom left:** After a successful capture, Devothe Uwase (left) holds her first crane, while ace handler and RWCA wildlife biologist Benard Ndayisaba is ready to release his.

Regional Reports

Summary of Aransas—Wood Buffalo Population Breeding Surveys for 2013-2016

	2013	2014	2015	2016
No. of nests detected at WBNP (May)	74	82†	68	78
No. of fledged chicks detected (Aug)	28*	32**	23*	45***
Average no. of chicks per nest [#]	0.38	0.39	0.34	0.57
Additional territorial pairs (non-nesters)	21-25	43	20-24	18
Estimated total no. of birds at Aransas NWR within the primary survey area‡	304 (95% CI 260-354)	308 (95% CI 267-350)	329 (95% CI 293-371)	?
Estimated no. of juveniles at Aransas NWR	39 (95% CI 32-42)	39 (95% CI 33-46)	38 (95% CI 33-43)	?

†Most nests ever recorded. *All family groups had a single offspring; **two families with twins; ***one family with twins

[#]20-year average is 0.48 chicks per nest.

Wood Buffalo National Park (WBNP) 2013 data are from Harrell and Bidwell (Oct. 2014), *Report on Whooping Crane Recovery Activities*; WBNP 2014 data are from *Northern Journal* (norj.ca), Sept. 1, 2014, quoting Mark Bidwell; WBNP 2015 data are from Bidwell and Conkin (March 2016), *Recovery and Ecology of Whooping Cranes: Monitoring of the Aransas-Wood Buffalo Population during the Breeding Season 2015 Report*. WBNP 2016 data are preliminary results from the Canadian Wildlife Service, with thanks to Mark Bidwell.

Aransas NWR winter data are from 'Whooping Crane Updates' at the ANWR website.

‡Estimated numbers of birds **outside** the primary survey area in 2013, 2014, and 2015 were 6, 6, and 9, respectively. (95% CI means 95% confidence interval).

We are still awaiting results from the Annual Whooping Crane Winter Abundance Survey conducted at Aransas NWR.

Some information about winter conditions on the refuge were posted by Wade Harrell on April 7, 2017. For Habitat Management: "Refuge staff burned 4 Units this winter, totaling 4,871 acres. This year's winter season was challenging given that our cold weather windows with consistent north winds were limited and the latter part of the winter brought significant rains". For Precipitation/Salinity: "The Refuge received 6.16" of rain from January-March 2017. Freshwater levels and food resources remained high throughout most of this winter season. Salinity levels in San Antonio Bay stayed in the low teens (ppt) most of the winter, but recent rains in the middle portion of the Guadalupe river watershed have dropped salinities significantly this last week".

Regional Reports *continued*

Spring Clean-up in San Antonio Bay – Removal of Blue Crab Traps

By Tom Leiden, Allan Berger and Brigid Berger

I have been involved in many spring clean-ups at home but on Saturday, February 18, 2017 I was pleased to join Allan and Brigid Berger in one of the grandest spring clean-ups: the collection of derelict crab traps in San Antonio Bay, TX. Abandoned traps continue to function, trapping fish and crabs that end up dying in an endless cycle. Picking up traps is essential to improving the health of the bays and for the wildlife, such as the Whooping Crane, that depend on it.

Norman Boyd, the San Antonio Bay Ecosystem Leader for the Texas Parks & Wildlife Department, spearheaded the overall project by seeking support from many organizations and individuals to assist in this endeavor. This is a coastal-wide effort to remove as many abandoned crab traps during the 10-day crabbing closure.

Allan, chairman of the San Antonio Bay Partnership, worked diligently to ensure that there were enough volunteers to cover our area on Saturday. We spent over 7-hours canvassing our area, collecting 38 traps. It was a lot of hard work but the weather was beautiful and the purpose sublime. A total of 56 volunteers in 19 boats removed 570 traps from the San Antonio Bay complex over the closure period – double that from last year!

I had such a good time that I joined Dr. Liz Smith and Hillary Thompson of the International Crane Foundation to collect crab traps in another section of Aransas Bay on Wednesday, February 22. It was another gorgeous day and we ended up with 21 traps.

Overall, 1,078 crab traps were removed from the coastal areas during the 10-day closure. It was truly a worthwhile endeavor and I look forward to participating in next year's collection.



Clockwise, from top left: Tom Leiden with crab trap; Allan Berger & Tom Leiden docking with a full load of traps; Soon to be liberated blue crabs (first 3 photos by Brigid Berger); ICF Team Tom Leiden, Hillary Thompson & Liz Smith (photo by Captain Tommy Moore).

Update on the Eastern Migratory Population of Whooping Cranes

Hillary Thompson, North American Crane Program Analyst, International Crane Foundation

In fall of 2016, twelve parent-reared juvenile Whooping Cranes were released into central Wisconsin prior to migration. They were released either in singles or pairs near adult Whooping Cranes, preferably breeding pairs that had lost their chicks, in hopes the pairs would adopt the captive-parent-reared colts. Nine of the twelve juveniles survived their first migration and made it to wintering areas in Florida, Georgia, Tennessee, Arkansas, Alabama, and Indiana. One juvenile, 70-16, was released near a pair of sub-adults in Marathon County, Wisconsin. When the two sub-adults left on their migration southward, 70-16 stayed behind. He also didn't leave when the rest of the Sandhill Cranes went south. As temperatures began to drop and snow began to fall, Whooping Crane Eastern Partnership partners decided to capture the young crane and translocate him to a wintering Whooping Crane hot spot at Wheeler National Wildlife Refuge. He spent the rest of winter in good habitat, associating with adult Whooping Cranes who call Wheeler NWR their winter home.

As of the end of March 2017, many Whooping Cranes have completed their northward migration back to breeding areas in Wisconsin. However, migration is still underway for some, and a few young birds are still on their wintering grounds. In the next month, we will watch as juveniles and sub-adults find their way back north and breeding pairs start to settle into their nesting territories.



Release of parent-reared Whooping Crane 70-16 at Wheeler National Wildlife Refuge (photo: USFWS).

Regional Reports *continued*

Louisiana Whooping Crane Update

Eva Szyszkoski, Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries

Autumn 2016 - As of 1 September 2016, the Louisiana non-migratory population consisted of a maximum of 37 individuals (14 males, 22 females and 1 unknown).

Unprecedented flooding in southern Louisiana in mid-August caused several breaches to the levee surrounding the White Lake refuge where the release pen is located. These breaches were unable to be fixed in time to use the pen this year. To compensate, we constructed a smaller, temporary release pen in another unit at the White Lake Wetlands Conservation Area that could accommodate a small group (8-10) of cranes.

2016 Cohort – Twenty-seven captive reared juveniles were released into the Louisiana population in the winter of 2016/17. The first shipment of 4 cranes (3 male, 1 female) arrived from the International Crane Foundation in Wisconsin on 9 November. They received their permanent bands and transmitters on the evening of their arrival and were placed in the top-netted portion of the release pen at the Rockefeller Wildlife Refuge. They were released from the top-netted pen on 21 November.

The second shipment of 10 cranes (6 male, 4 female) arrived from the Patuxent Wildlife Research Center in Maryland on 1 December. They were banded upon arrival and were placed in the top-netted section of the release pen at Rockefeller. Due to aggression at the captive center, three of these cranes had not been socialized with the rest and had to be kept separate from the larger group in a smaller sectioned off portion of the top-netted pen.

A third shipment of 11 cranes (6 males, 5 females) arrived from the Patuxent WRC on 5 December. Three cranes were brought to the Rockefeller WR; two were placed with the smaller group of aggressive cranes while one was placed in the larger portion of the pen. These new cranes were banded on 6 December and all 13 were released from the Rockefeller pen on 27 December. The remaining 8 were placed in the top-netted portion of the release pen at the White Lake WCA, banded on 7 December and released on 20 December.

The final two juveniles (2 males) were shipped from the Calgary Zoo, Alberta, Canada on a commercial Delta flight to the George Bush Intercontinental Airport in Houston, Texas on 15 February and were transported to the White Lake WCA via cargo van. They were banded that evening, held overnight in a small temporary pen and hard-released directly into the marsh the following morning. Unlike all previous captive-reared cranes, these two juveniles were hatched and reared by captive adult pairs and had no exposure to costumed humans.



Juveniles L2-16, 3-16 & 4-16 in flight with two White Pelicans over Cameron Parish, 15 March 2017. Photo by LDWF/Eva Szyszkoski.

Supplemental food was discontinued at the White Lake WCA release pen on 23 February and at the Rockefeller WR release pen on 3 March.

Return from Texas – Pair L2-12 & L14-12 returned to Louisiana from Kaufman County, Texas on 21 October.

Female L8-12 returned to Louisiana from the northern Dallas area on 12 September.

A group consisting of L10-13, L12-14 & L13-14 returned to Louisiana from Jefferson County, Texas on 13 October.

Movement to Texas – Juveniles L6, 7, 13, 23 & 24-16 moved into Jefferson Co, Texas on 3 March. They had left the Rockefeller WR on 26 February.

Juveniles L5, 8, 9, 11 & 25-16 moved into Orange Co, Texas on 3 March. They had left the Rockefeller WR on 27 February.

Female L2-15 and male L6-15 moved into Liberty Co, Texas on 14 March but returned to Louisiana the following day.

Captures – Five free-flying cranes were captured for banding and transmitter replacement or removal on 6 days of attempts between 31 January and 22 March, including wild-hatched juvenile, LW1-16.

Although LW1-16 was still with her parents on 10 February, both adults were seen displaying aggression toward her and it appears that after her capture, she separated completely from her parents, who began incubating just four days later.



Left: Male L8-13 attacking a costume as we try to capture his chick, LW1-16, in Jefferson Davis Parish, 8 February 2017. Photo by LDWF/Jim LaCour. Right: Wild-hatched female LW1-16 in Jefferson Davis Parish four days after banding, 14 February 2017. Photo by LDWF/Eva Szyszkoski.

Reproduction – Nesting again began early when pair L7-11 & L8-11 was observed with an egg on 11 February. They sat past full term and their two eggs were collected on 10 March.

Pair L6-12 & L8-13 began nesting by 14 February. They sat past full term, one egg disappeared and the second was collected on 20 March.

Pair L3-11 & L1-13 was observed with a nest and egg on 17 February. They sat past full term and their egg was collected on 22 March.

Pair L10-11 & L11-11 began nesting by 21 February. They have one egg and were still incubating as of 23 March.

Pairs L2-11 & L13-11 and L11-12 & L3-13 began nesting in mid-March.

None of the collected eggs had any detectable embryo development.

Regional Reports *continued*



Female L7-11 defending her overdue nest and eggs in Avoyelles Parish, 10 March 2017. Photo by LDWF/Eva Szyszkoski.

Mortalities – Mortalities from September to mid-March included one juvenile female, one juvenile male and one adult male in Louisiana. Three long-term missing females were also removed from the population totals.

Current Population Size – As of 24 March 2017, the Louisiana non-migratory population consisted of a maximum of 58 individuals (30 males and 28 females).

Florida Resident Whooping Crane Flock Update

Tim Dellinger, Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission

The Florida resident Whooping Crane (*Grus americana*) population numbers 14 birds (4 males, 8 females, 2 unknowns), including 4 pairs as of the writing of this update. Unfortunately, this population lost its most productive male, #1291, last fall. The 14-year-old male, with his 18-year-old mate and 4-month-old chicks, was in its nest marsh when he disappeared. We assume he met his demise protecting his family. Although breaking his leg years ago, he was a fierce defender of his territory, as we discovered each time we visited his nests. He and his mate nested and renested 14 times from 2007–2016, fledging 6 chicks. The female and twins, now 11 months old, continue to do well.

This summer we will begin a multi-year study of Florida Sandhill Cranes (*Antigone canadensis pratensis*) inhabiting some of central Florida's suburban areas and conservation lands. We anticipate tagging 40 adult cranes with cellular transmitters to examine productivity, survival, and daily movements of our resident birds.



Florida resident Whooping Crane #1291 stepping onto a nest platform; note broken left leg.

Mississippi Sandhill Crane Update

Scott Hereford, Mississippi Sandhill Crane NWR, Gautier, MS



Temporary top-netted pen inside permanent chain link pen at Fontainebleau, Mississippi Sandhill Crane National Wildlife Refuge. Photo: Scott Hereford

Autumn Crane Count — We conducted an autumn abundance survey of free-flying Mississippi sandhill cranes on and adjacent to the Mississippi Sandhill Crane National Wildlife Refuge on October 28, 2016. Twenty-five individuals counted cranes from around 0640h to 1010h CDT from stationary blinds and vehicle routes. Cranes were observed at 22 locations, including 14 on the refuge. A minimum of 89 different cranes were differentiated during the Count period, including 61 known banded and 15 unbanded birds. This was the highest one-day Count in 20 years.

Release — In 2016, seven captive-reared cranes were released onto the refuge, four at East Flat and three at Fontainebleau (Figure 3). Four captive-reared juveniles (now 1601-4) from Audubon Species Survival Center (ASSC) were transferred to the 100x150 foot temporary top-netted pen at East Flat on November 1 for pre-release acclimation. Another four captive-reared cranes (1605-8) were transferred to the Fontainebleau pen on November 8; we built a similar 100x150 foot temporary top-netted pen within the larger permanent 2-acre pen. One of the four, 1605, sustained a freak leg injury with no apparent cause, was taken to a local vet, x-rayed, and, unfortunately had to be euthanized. On December 1, we released the East Flat cohort. On December 6, we released the three juveniles in the Fontainebleau cohort. All flew well from the pen upon release. Because of top-netting, the cranes did not have to have a brail wing restraint during acclimation and were able to fly right away.

Population (January 2017) — There were 129 Mississippi sandhill cranes in the wild population, including 103 banded (USGS bands, color leg bands, transmitter leg bands) and 26 unbanded. There were 55 males, 56 females, and 17 unknown sex. Sixty-six cranes were found in the Gautier area, 47 in Ocean Springs, and 16 in Fontainebleau. There were 66 from ASSC, 22 from White Oak Conservation Center, 3 from Patuxent Wildlife Research Center, and 38 wild-hatched. There were 31 pairs (including behavioral only), 23 pairs with an experienced female (36% of population), 66 unpaired cranes, and 30 cranes (23%) are 3 years old or less. The oldest known marked crane (#920) is 28 years old.

Cranes in the News

On October 27, 2016, after a six-week trial, seven high-profile defendants in the 41-day armed takeover of Malheur National Wildlife Refuge in Oregon were found not guilty of conspiring to impede federal employees. An article by Gary Ivey about the impact of the illegal occupation on refuge wildlife appeared in vol. 26, no. 2 of *The Unison Call*. Below is Gary's reaction to the trial verdict, published in *The Register-Guard*, Eugene, Oregon, November 10, 2016 — Ed.

MALHEUR DECISION UNSETTLING

The International Crane Foundation respects the judicial process, but we are deeply concerned by the outcome of the Malheur case.

The Malheur National Wildlife Refuge is among the most important sandhill crane breeding sites in the refuge system, supporting more than 20 percent of the breeding greater sandhill cranes in Oregon.

The results of the recent trial regarding the armed occupation of Malheur has raised concerns about the future of this refuge and other public lands and the ability of federal employees to safely do their jobs, which threatens their ability to provide habitat for cranes and other wildlife.

More than half the Malheur staff have resigned or transferred, and the remaining staff might not be safe in the future from these domestic terrorists.

We are concerned about the remaining staff's ability to meet the refuge purpose, as identified by President Teddy Roosevelt in 1908, "as a preserve and breeding ground for native birds."

The trial outcome will likely encourage other illegal acts against public lands and further threaten wildlife and our natural heritage on these lands that are owned by all Americans.

We need to step up and demonstrate wide public support for our public lands and agencies who manage them.

Gary Ivey
President, Friends of Malheur Refuge
Research Associate, International Crane Foundation

JEFFERSON COUNTY MAN SENTENCED FOR KILLING WHOOPING CRANES

BEAUMONT, TEXAS (25 October 2016) – A 19-year-old Beaumont, Texas man has been sentenced for federal wildlife violations in the Eastern District of Texas announced Acting U.S. Attorney Brit Featherston.

Trey Joseph Frederick pleaded guilty on May 23, 2016 to a violation of the Migratory Bird Treaty Act and was sentenced to five years of federal probation today by U.S. Magistrate Judge Zack Hawthorn. As part of his probation, Frederick is prohibited from owning or possessing firearms, ammunition or any other dangerous weapon. He is also prohibited from hunting or fishing anywhere in the United States. In addition, Frederick has been ordered to pay restitution to the International Crane Foundation and the Texas Parks and Wildlife Foundation in the amount of \$25,815.00. Frederick must also perform 200 hours of community service.

According to information presented in court, on Jan. 11, 2016, a Texas Game Warden received two calls reporting two whooping cranes had been shot on Blair Road in Jefferson County. Further investigation revealed the defendant had been seen in the area with a hunting rifle and had claimed to be hunting geese. Federal agents contacted Frederick at his home on LaBelle Road where he admitted to killing the cranes. Whooping cranes are migratory birds and are protected under the Migratory Bird Treaty Act making it unlawful to capture, kill, or attempt to capture or kill in the United States.

“The loss of these cranes is not simply a loss for the species. It is a loss for the community, for taxpayers and for future generations deprived of an opportunity to see these magnificent birds thriving in the wild,” said Southwest Region Special Agent in Charge Nicholas E. Chavez of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. “Moreover, the killing of these two whooping cranes is not an isolated incident. Over the past five years, more than 20 whooping cranes have been shot and killed in the U.S. By bringing criminals who perpetrate crimes against wildlife to justice, we hope to prevent future tragedies like this from occurring.”

“Justice was served here in no small part due to the strong partnership between Texas Parks and Wildlife Department game wardens and the United States Fish and Wildlife Services special agents, whose thorough and collaborative investigation of the heinous crime illustrates their commitment to protecting our shared natural resources, particularly endangered species like the whooping cranes,” said Colonel Craig Hunter, TPWD Director of Law Enforcement. “The fact that this act of senseless cruelty was universally condemned by the local community, who along with landowners played a vital role in this case being solved quickly, sends a strong message to future game law criminals; your actions will not be tolerated, nor will they go unpunished. We also appreciate the assistance from the United States Attorney’s Office and Assistant United States Attorney Joe Batte for making this case a priority.”

News release (edited), U.S. Department of Justice, Eastern District of Texas

TEXAS JUDGE’S DECISION A WIN FOR WHOOPING CRANES

BEAUMONT, TEXAS (25 October 2016) – In an unprecedented decision, Federal District Court Magistrate Judge Zack Hawthorn handed down a heavy sentence for Trey Joseph Frederick, a 19-year-old Beaumont man who admitted to shooting and killing two endangered Whooping Cranes. The International Crane Foundation (ICF), a nonprofit organization working on behalf of Whooping Cranes internationally, assisted in the case and hopes this decision will be a sobering reminder that these animals desperately need protection. As of today, only 450 of the rare birds exist in the wild across North America.

Frederick’s sentence includes: \$25,815 in restitution to be shared among Texas Parks & Wildlife Foundation and ICF; 200 hours of community service (the most ever ordered by this court). This time is to be spent with Texas Parks & Wildlife and/or the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service; the maximum of five years’ probation; an order that Frederick turn over all firearms; the rescinding of Frederick’s hunting license for the next five years in all states.

“This ruling has set a powerful precedent for the future of Whooping Crane conservation,” said Rich Beilfuss, President and CEO of the ICF. “This was not hunting. This was an act of criminal vandalism, and we are encouraged that Judge Hawthorn treated it as such. We hope the decision will be a strong deterrent to anyone considering a similar crime.”

While ICF is encouraged by the overall ruling, the nonprofit is disappointed that Judge Hawthorn did not require a higher restitution amount. ICF previously recommended a fine of \$113,886 per bird, based on the cost of raising a Whooping Crane in human care and reintroducing it into the wild in Louisiana, where the birds originated. The U.S. Probation Office supported this assessment and recommended the amount to the Judge as well.

“The shooter did not just illegally kill two birds; he stole an intensive monetary investment by federal and state governments and nonprofit organizations in the United States and Canada, as well as saddened and outraged the public through this thoughtless and brazen act,” wrote Liz Smith, Texas Program Director of the ICF, in a letter to Judge Hawthorn.

Despite the reduced amount, ICF looks forward to sharing the ordered restitution and working alongside Texas Parks & Wildlife Foundation in the future on Whooping Crane conservation efforts. Aside from working to secure coastal habi-

tats for Whooping Cranes in Texas, and rearing cranes for release in Louisiana and Wisconsin, ICF and its conservation partners are engaging local communities and encouraging involvement in protecting this iconic species.

“Protecting a species like Whooping Cranes takes commitment and support from the community, and we hope people recognize that if we can’t save Whooping Cranes, we all lose,” said Beilfuss.

Press Release (edited) of the International Crane Foundation. ICF contact: Sara Gavney Moore

WHOOPING CRANE SHOT IN INDIANA

LOUISVILLE, KENTUCKY (10 January 2017) — The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is taking the lead in the shooting death of a rare whooping crane that was wintering in Indiana, the fifth such poaching incident in the state since 2009.

It is offering a \$2,500 reward (now up to at least \$15,600 — Ed.) for tips leading to a conviction.

The female bird was one of only about 100 whooping cranes that comprise the Eastern Migratory Population.

Initial reports are that the bird was killed with a high-powered rifle. The bird’s remains were sent to the USFWS forensics lab in Oregon for confirmation as part of the investigation, said agency spokeswoman Tina Shaw.

Shaw said the USFWS is working with the Indiana Department of Natural Resources on the case. Indiana DNR said the bird was found dead January 3rd in a field a few miles south of Lyons in Greene County and likely shot over the New Year’s weekend.

The whooping crane was part of an effort to establish an eastern continental flock on a migratory path between Wisconsin and Florida that takes them through Indiana.

The female crane, known as 4-11, was hatched in 2011 at the Patuxent Wildlife Research Center in Maryland and released that year in Wisconsin.

The International Crane Foundation said the bird hatched her first chick this summer in central Wisconsin and continued to raise the chick on her own after the unexpected death of her mate on their nesting grounds. The chick almost lived to independence, but died earlier last year, said Sara Gavney Moore, an ICF spokeswoman.

“The loss of a breeding female is tragic for this population,” said Anne Lacy, the foundation’s crane research coordinator. “This female not only successfully hatched a chick this year but also raised the chick to near independence on her own. This shooting isn’t just the loss of an individual in this population, it is the loss of future generations that this female would have produced.”

No. 4-11 migrated to her wintering area at the Goose Pond Fish and Wildlife Area in mid-December, according to ICF. Nationally, more than 20 whooping cranes have been shot in the United States in the last five years, including the first shooting in the Goose Pond area in 2009.

ICF tracks criminal enforcement of crane poaching and reports that the defendant in the 2009 shooting was fined just \$1 plus court fees. That was in sharp contrast to October 2016 rulings on two whooping crane shootings in eastern Texas, where a defendant was fined \$25,000 and ordered to work 200 hours of community service, with loss of license and firearms for five years. Shaw said the 2009 shooting was perpetrated by a juvenile and USFWS was not involved in the prosecution.

Edited excerpts from an article by James Bruggers published in the Courier-Journal (Louisville, Kentucky)

www.courier-journal.com

COLD WEATHER LIKELY CAUSE OF DEATH FOR RARE BIRD IN ST. ANTHONY (NEWFOUNDLAND)

St. Anthony, Nfld. (17 December 2016) — People in St. Anthony who've been enjoying a rare bird sighting for the past couple of months were saddened this week to learn that a sandhill crane that's been seen around town has died.

The feathered visitor first showed up in southern Labrador in September, but spent most of its time the past couple of months in and around the town of St. Anthony (on Newfoundland's Northern Peninsula).

"I think any sandhill crane that winds up in Newfoundland for the winter, its days are probably numbered," says bird biologist Darroch Whitaker.

Whitaker said the sandhill crane is the most common crane in the world, but it is an unusual bird to be seen in Newfoundland and Labrador.

The fact that it was still around after the snow started is a sign to him that the bird was either sick or injured.

The sandhill crane managed to survive for several weeks after snow arrived in St. Anthony.

But the rare bird was definitely out of its comfort zone, he said.

"A lot can go wrong on a bird's migration," Whitaker told CBC Radio's *Corner Brook Morning Show*.

It's not uncommon for young birds to go off course, but Whitaker said he could tell from the plumage that this was an adult bird.

"That probably means it was more likely a bird that got caught in a weather system or for some other reason got sent off track during its journey of thousands of kilometres."

Whitaker said once the snow arrived, it would have become extremely difficult for the sandhill crane to make it through the winter.

"Their foraging strategy is a lot like chickens or turkeys. They actually feed on the ground," he said. "They're picking up grain, slugs, worms, anything like that that they can find on the ground."

But Whitaker reminds people that the bird must have been ill or injured to have not continued on its journey.

"I would guess that it was suffering already, and then the weather was sort of the final straw for it. It was unable to survive and perished."

Edited excerpts from an article by Bernice Hillier, CBC News (www.cbc.ca/news).



The sandhill crane had plenty of food before the snow came. It's seen here enjoying a feed of wild berries (photo: Vernon Buckle).

The story is interesting for at least two reasons. First, the bird ended up about as far east as one can go in Canada, and second, the townsfolk seemed helpless to help the bird. — Ed.

Opinion

457 Whooping Crane Eggs Taken from Canada's Nesting Grounds – Enough is Enough!

Chester McConnell, Friends of the Wild Whoopers, Spanish Fort, Alabama

An astonishing **457** whooping crane eggs were removed from nesting grounds in Canada's Wood Buffalo National Park (WBNP) from 1964 to 1998 to be used in several experimental population projects and to establish (or augment) captive breeding programs. The eggs were taken from the only self-sustaining wild population of whooping cranes in the world, which is known as the Aransas-Wood Buffalo population (AWBP). The significance of such management decisions cannot be overemphasized. As of 2016, the AWBP numbers an estimated 329 birds. We can only imagine how much larger the AWBP would be today if the 457 eggs had not been removed. Certainly, not all of the eggs would have produced birds that would have survived and added to the population, but some would have.

Importantly, we need to recall why the eggs were removed. There was concern during the 1940s (and subsequently) that the AWBP could become extinct. Only 18 whooping cranes remained in that population in 1944-45. By 1967 there were just 9 nesting pairs. The U.S. Fish and Service (USFWS) and Canadian Wildlife Service (CWS) decided to make an attempt to help the species.

The two agencies made well-intentioned efforts, based on information at the time, to safeguard the AWBP, by establishing and then increasing the numbers and genetic diversity in the captive flocks used to produce eggs and, starting in 1975, by trying to establish new wild populations in new locations. Some of the repopulation attempts were failures, while others are still ongoing (with outcomes still unknown). Even so, there have been, and continues to be, serious differences of opinions about the various efforts and especially those involving taking whooping crane eggs from nests in WBNP.

The egg removal plan involved taking one egg from nests with two eggs. (*Technical information in this article is summarized from the International Recovery Plan for the whooping crane 2007, Appendix C, Egg Collection, pages C1 through C5*). The decision to collect one of two eggs from wild nests was made in 1965. Research personnel had learned that, although whooping cranes normally lay two eggs, only about 15% of families arriving on the Aransas National Wildlife Refuge (ANWR) wintering area have two chicks. Therefore, about 85% of nests usually contain one egg that is unlikely to result in a fledged chick. However, the second egg plays an unknown role in providing insurance that at least one chick survives. Habitat conditions, including water levels, food availability and predator abundance, affect



Top: Two whooping crane eggs in a nest in Wood Buffalo NP (photo: Libby Gunn). Bottom: Whooping crane adult at its nest site in Wood Buffalo NP (photo: John McKinnon).

survival. In years with suitable habitat conditions, crane pairs may raise two young. For example, during the 1958-59 winter, 8 of the 9 young that arrived at Aransas were from twin pairs. In 1997 and 1998, at least 9% of second-hatched whooping crane young survived to fledging age.

During the 61-year period from 1938 to 1998, there were 34 years in which no egg collection occurred at WBNP (mostly pre-1967). In those 34 years, 16 pairs of 'twin' juveniles arrived at ANWR in the fall. During the 27 years of egg collection at the nesting grounds, no pairs of twin juveniles arrived at ANWR in the fall (Cannon et al., 2001).

Eggs were first taken from 1967 to 1971 and in 1974 to further augment the Patuxent Wildlife Research Center (PWRC) captive population. More eggs were taken from 1975 through 1988 to provide 215 eggs for the Grays Lake cross-fostering experiment. Egg transfers to PWRC were resumed in 1982-1989 and 1991-1996, with 178 eggs being transferred. Fifty-eight eggs were transferred to the International Crane Foundation (ICF) beginning in 1990 and resumed in 1992-1996. Six eggs were shipped to the Calgary Zoo in 1994 and 1998, and a chick was transferred there from WBNP in 1999. Two eggs from an abandoned nest were picked up opportunistically in May 1998 and transferred to Calgary Zoo. Between 1967 and 1998, 244 eggs were taken from WBNP to the captive sites.

The effects of egg collection on the growth rate and overall fitness of the wild AWBP are unknown. There was, and remains, much disagreement among whooping crane professionals. Some contend that egg removals have not adversely affected the productivity of the wild population (e.g. Ellis and Gee, 2001). They point out that between 1967 and 1996, the era of egg pickups, the AWBP increased from 48 to 160, and the number of nesting pairs increased from 5 to 45. After reviewing and critiquing the several research findings, USFWS retired biologist James Lewis, in 2001, recommended that a re-analysis of the existing egg collection data was warranted (Lewis, 2001).

CWS biologist Brian Johns (retired) reviewed the data pair by pair and extracted as much information as possible from original reports and solicited the expertise of Dr. Mark Boyce, University of Alberta, for the analysis (Boyce et al., 2005). However, it's been suggested that the data set used has biases, including: non-random nest selection; lack of a control group; not testing eggs for viability in the early years of collection; limited samples in certain years; and potential inaccuracies in chick surveys. Because of these issues, it is not possible to say what impact egg pickup has had on the size of the AWBP.

The Whooping Crane International Recovery Team (IRT) recognizes that collection of eggs has benefited the whooping crane recovery program by providing stock to establish the captive flocks and providing offspring for release, thus increasing the total number of whooping cranes (cranes artificially reared and released into the wild) and helping to preserve the genetics of the species. The IRT in 2007 believed that data analyses to date did not indicate that egg collection would increase recruitment in the AWBP over the long term, but could increase recruitment in selected years.

In 2016, the IRT initiated a process to update the International Recovery Plan for the Whooping Crane, 2007 (IRP-2007). The goal is to incorporate new information and techniques, with the overall goal of down-listing and eventually fully recovering the species. A whooping crane population viability analysis (PVA) process is being used to produce information to be included in an upcoming version of the IRP. The PVA would include whooping crane egg harvest on WBNP as one of several management scenarios that would be considered. According to Wade Harrell (USFWS) (personal communication), "That does not necessarily mean that we will harvest eggs from nests, only that we are considering it as we model a number of different management scenarios. If the PVA models indicate that it would provide significant benefit to the population, we would consider it further as we look at political, logistical and cost constraints of various management scenarios. So, to be clear, no decisions have been made."

Friends of the Wild Whoopers (FOTWW) is opposed to any additional collection of wild whooping crane eggs from WBNP. Based on several unpublished communications, we believe that poor parenting skills of captive-reared whoop-

ing cranes and/or habitat quality is the reason for the serious problems in the Eastern Migratory Population. According to the genetic master plan, the genetic diversity of the AWBP is well represented in the three captive flocks, hence there would be little to be gained genetically in the captive flocks by removing additional eggs from WBNP at this time. Genetic experts have recommended that, as a minimum before any additional eggs are picked up from the wild, a large-scale genetic study is needed in WBNP, since information on the composition of nesting pairs has been lost with the cessation of color-banding in 1988 (IRP 2007). Frozen semen banks should be maintained to prevent loss of founder lines. A national serum bank should be set up to serve as a repository of genetic material for the species.

FOTWW believes all eggs should remain in the nest on WBNP because there is no convincing need to take more.

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Nebraska Statehood Forever stamp unveiled by the United States Postal Service on March 1, 2017 in Lincoln, Nebraska. The stamp, which features Sandhill Cranes flying to roost sites on the Platte River, celebrates Nebraska's Sesquicentennial. The original photo was taken near Wood River ca 2000 by renowned Nebraska photographer Michael Forsberg.

Thomas J. Hess, Jr. Posthumously Inducted into the LSU Wildlife Hall of Fame



Left to right: Dr. Allen Rutherford, Director LSU School of Renewable Natural Resources; Dr. Carrie Castille, President of the Alumni Association; Charlotte Hess (Tom's widow); Brandon Hess (son); Scott Hess (son); Andrew Hess (grandson); and Taylon Hess (grandson).

Thomas J. Hess, Jr. (M.S. Wildlife '75) was born in Wilmington, Del., where he developed his love and passion for the outdoors. In 1972 he was hired as a biologist assistant at Rockefeller Refuge. After graduate school in 1975, Tom accepted employment with Little Pecan Properties as the general manager and the wildlife land manager. In 1987, Tom was employed by the Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries (LDWF) at Rockefeller State Wildlife Refuge, where he concentrated on waterfowl management. Tom was also an aerial survey biologist – he surveyed waterfowl, alligator nests, bald eagles and brown pelicans. Tom saw the once-threatened bald eagles and brown pelicans removed from the threatened species list during his career. Tom also coordinated the release of brown pelicans in Louisiana after the BP oil spill in 2010. He also was a sponsor of the most recent satellite tracking study of eagles that nest in southern Louisiana. This study revealed that Louisiana eagles migrate to northern Canada. Their location each summer was unknown to science until the results of that study. In 2014, Tom retired as program manager of Rockefeller Wildlife Refuge in Grand Chenier, Louisiana.

One of Tom's most notable accomplishments was the re-introduction of the whooping crane to Louisiana. His experience was a perfect fit for the task of developing and implementing a comprehensive whooping crane repatriation and restoration program.

Tom had to start from scratch and, as a first step, he assembled a team of experts from the LDWF; the US Fish and Wildlife Service; the US Department of Agriculture; Louisiana State University; the Whooping Crane Recovery Team; the International Crane Foundation; and the Audubon Center for Research on Endangered Species.

After leading this team's effort to develop a comprehensive design for the program, Tom and his team set out to identify the local stakeholders and gain their trust and consent. Numerous town meetings and individual visits were made with landowners, agricultural interests, the oil industry, elected officials, and the public, to share project details and gain consensus. Tom educated his staff to ensure that those who made these public contacts informed landowners and business owners of a key detail of the plan to categorize the new whooping crane population as a non-essential experimental population, which reduced federal restrictions associated with endangered species. The product of this effort was the broad-based enthusiastic public support for bringing home this long-lost Louisiana native. Tom next led his team to devise a funding strategy followed by a very successful effort to raise private donations to help pay for the program.

Finally, on February 16, 2011, and again on December 1, groups of whooping cranes arrived at their new home in the same area of White Lake where their long-lost ancestor lived many decades before. In less than two years under Tom's leadership, after a 60-year absence, the call of the "whooper" could be heard in the marshes of southwest Louisiana once again.

In recognition of the hard work and tireless dedication to save a species and return it to its rightful Louisiana home, in 2011, Tom was presented the Conservation Professional of the Year Award by the Louisiana Wildlife Federation.

Additionally, Tom was posthumously presented the Dr. George H Lowery Award in April 2015 by the Louisiana Ornithological Society for his long-term commitment to restoring populations of endangered bird species to Louisiana's avifauna.

You are invited to join the North American Crane Working Group

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