

# THE UNISON CALL

- Newsletter of the North American Crane Working Group -

Vol. 30, No. 1

Winter/Spring 2020



A frosty dawn at Muleshoe National Wildlife Refuge , Texas, January 11, 2020 — D. Henderson

## President's Report

**T**hanks to all who attended our 15<sup>th</sup> North American Crane Workshop in Lubbock, Texas during January 2020! A special thank you to our conference planning committee and to our local hosts from Texas Tech University, Dr. Blake Grisham and Kathy Brautigam, for putting on such a wonderful event. During the workshop we heard many great presentations on Sandhill and Whooping Cranes from members all across North America. Three of our board members stepped down from the board, George Archibald, Paige Smith, and Daryl Henderson. We thank them for their service to the group for the past three or more years! We also welcomed three new members to the board, Tom Leiden, and two student members, Antonio Cantu and Jeannie van Vianen. Some of the highlights of this year's workshop include an opening banquet at the National Ranching Heritage Center with presentations on art, play, and creativity and their roles in crane conservation by Gregory Hill and Rose Elizondo, as well as a presentation on Sandhill Cranes in Siberia by George Archibald. We had plenary presentations on the Texas High Plains and symposia on the future of habitat conservation, human dimensions and outreach, and the effects of telemetry and marking cranes. We enjoyed a field trip to Muleshoe National Wildlife Refuge to see Sandhill Cranes on the Texas High Plains. Our silent auction raised over



**Left:** George Archibald was presented with the L.H. Walkinshaw Award by Richard Urbanek (left) and Sammy King (right). (photo: Glenn Olsen). **Right:** Final handoff of the finished Walkinshaw Award to George from Barry Hartup, in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic. The beautiful photograph of the Sandhill Crane and nest is by Ted Thousand. (photo: Barry Hartup)

\$850 for student travel awards, so thanks to everyone who donated or purchased something! At our closing banquet George Archibald, co-founder of the International Crane Foundation, was presented with the L. H. Walkinshaw Crane Conservation Award, in honor of all of the work he has done to protect cranes around the world.

During the workshop, we also held our general membership meeting. We discussed plans to publish the proceedings of the 15<sup>th</sup> workshop, contingent on having enough papers to publish. The deadline to submit manuscripts to the editors is 1 October 2020, with an expected publication date of December 2021. Thanks to editors Drs. Jane Austin, Richard Urbanek, and Megan Brown for leading the efforts in continuing to publish crane research in the proceedings of the North American Crane Workshop. We also discussed potential locations for our next workshop, and made tentative plans for the 16<sup>th</sup> North American Crane Workshop to be held in Baraboo Wisconsin, the home of the International Crane Foundation, during fall of 2023.

After the workshop, the board held a meeting and voted on our new officers. Barry Hartup will continue to serve as Treasurer, and Sammy King will continue as Vice President. We elected two new officers as well. Megan Brown is our new Secretary, and I (Hillary Thompson) am the new President. Richard Urbanek will continue to be our webmaster, and Daryl Henderson has graciously offered to continue as Editor of *The Unison Call*. The Board of Directors will continue to welcome your input on the North American Crane Working Group and how we can best serve our members and work together for crane conservation in North America. Please feel free to reach out if you have any suggestions or feedback. Thanks again to everyone for making our workshop enjoyable and productive!

**Hillary Thompson, International Crane Foundation, Baraboo, Wisconsin**

***hthompson@savingcranes.org***

***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](http://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; send to Daryl Henderson at [nysquirrel1@gmail.com](mailto:nysquirrel1@gmail.com)

### **A proposed merger by George Archibald**

The Whooping Crane Conservation Association (WCCA) founded in 1961 (incorporated in 1966) is dedicated to the conservation of the said species. Through its newsletter *Grus Americana* published twice each year, WCCA kept and continues to keep a membership of about 250 persons current with news about the cranes. WCCA was also instrumental in encouraging the governments of Canada and the USA to embark on a captive propagation program for Whooping Cranes at the Patuxent Wildlife Research Center. More recently, WCCA has provided funds to aid in the purchase for conservation of 720 acres of crane habitat just outside the Aransas National Wildlife Refuge.

The North American Crane Working Group, established in 1988, is a venue for communication among North American crane researchers and conservationists both through a newsletter, *The Unison Call*, published twice each year, and through a crane workshop and resulting published proceedings every 3-4 years.

Because of overlap in news and readers, I wish to propose a discussion about merging the two organizations into the North American Crane Conservation Association (NACCA; or similar name) embracing all goals of the two co-founding organizations: producing a newsletter, *The Unison Call*, twice a year; maintaining a web site with fresh news; and sponsoring a crane workshop and resulting proceedings every third year.

**George Archibald, Co-founder International Crane Foundation**

NACWG is soliciting members' opinions on the feasibility and desirability of a merger of NACWG and WCCA along the lines proposed by George. To date, there have been no formal discussions of such a merger by the NACWG Board, WCCA Trustees, or between representatives of NACWG and WCCA. If you would like to share your opinion on a merger, please contact Hillary Thompson, President, at [hthompson@savingcranes.org](mailto:hthompson@savingcranes.org).



**Whooping Crane habitat in Wood Buffalo National Park. Photo: John McKinnon/Parks Canada**

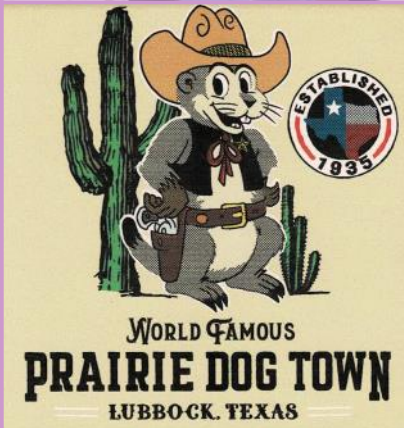
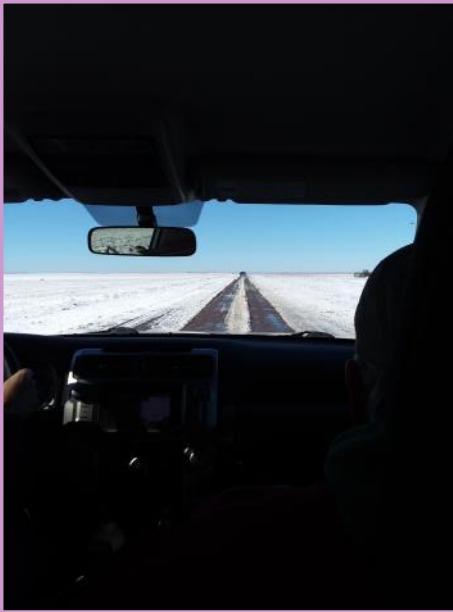


# Postcards from Lubbock, Texas



The photos on this page are courtesy of Glenn Olsen; on page 5, the 3 photos at the top are courtesy of Tim Dellinger, and the rest are by Glenn.







# Whooping Cranes and Sandhill Cranes Breeding in South-central Wisconsin in a Wetland Surrounded by Agriculture

By George Archibald

In the spring of 2019 a lone female Whooping Crane, 24-17, selected as her abode, a privately owned 40-acre wetland near Baraboo, Wisconsin. This crane was parent-reared at the Patuxent Wildlife Research Center in 2017. Some weeks later she was joined by two sibling Whooping Cranes, a male 4-17 and female 6-17 that had been costume-reared first at Patuxent in Maryland and then by Operation Migration at the White River wetland in eastern Wisconsin. All three cranes were released in eastern Wisconsin in 2017.

Upon arrival of the siblings at the wetland near Baraboo in 2019, it was obvious they had paired. They unison called together, danced together, copulated and built a nest, and unsuccessfully tried to chase away 24-17. In the summer, all three molted flight feathers and were therefore incapable of flight for approximately six weeks. They remained together as a group all summer and in late autumn migrated together to a wintering site in Kentucky.

That same wetland supported at least two breeding pairs of Sandhill Cranes in 2019. One pair fledged two colts and the other Sandhill pair one colt.

On March 5, 2020 at noon, two pairs of Sandhills had returned to that wetland and were unison calling at one another from the east and west side of the wetland. Later that afternoon the three, 3-year-old Whooping Cranes arrived and immediately started to chase the Sandhills. The pair of siblings tolerated the female 24-17, but sometimes lunged at her. The three Whooping Cranes were together throughout the day and roosted together at night.



From March 19 through April 4, I observed the two species of cranes at the Baraboo wetland for approximately three hours from dawn and for the same period before sunset. Subsequently I have observed them for shorter periods daily.

The wetland is bordered by a county highway and harvested corn fields on the north and bare-ground winter wheat fields on the northwest. The highway was bordered on both sides by corn fields. Unfortunately, the cranes frequently walked or flew low across the road. Road signs stating "Crane Crossing" alerted traffic from both directions. On the west side of the wetlands a forested wetland separated the winter wheat fields from more corn fields to the south. The south and east sides of the wetlands were edged by low hills completely in corn. A sliver of forest separated the wetland from the north corn field. There were two ponds, one just outside the border of the wetland to the northeast, and a second connected to the wetland by a narrow strip of lowland to the southeast.

The major portion of the wetland was without trees and carpeted with reed canary grass and sedges in the drier portions and cattails over and/or surrounding areas with deeper water. Each of the latter areas had patches of open shallow water. Three ponds formed a triangle from the central area to the north, with the largest wetland above the other two. Three other open water areas lined the southern border of the wetland. The Whooping Cranes claimed as their territory the corn fields and winter wheat fields to the north of the wetland, and the northern portion of the wetland that included the three larger areas of open water — about 70% of the total area of the wetland. A pair of Sandhills established territories on both ponds near the major wetland, and the other two pairs of Sandhills had territories in the southwest of the wetland and along the south-central region.

The sibling pair copulated and nest-built from the start of the observation period. Sometime toward the end of March, I assume the females had a fight and 24-17 won. On April 1, as 24-17 stood on the nest located on the east of the largest patch of open water, I could read her colored leg bands. Both 4-17 and 24-17 vigorously chased both Sandhill Cranes and 6-17 from their territory, however the intensity of aerial chases declined through the incubation period. The pair alternated bouts of incubation throughout the day and eggs were exposed an average of 5 minutes with each next exchange. The Whooping Cranes started incubation April 1, but I do not know when the first egg was laid. A chick hatched May 3. They chased Canada Geese from the nesting pond occasionally, but more regularly just before and then after the chick hatched.

Female 6-17 remains attracted to 4-17 as indicated by dancing, unison calling and standing bent forward with wings stiffly extended as an invitation for mating. Although 4-17 tolerated her more toward the end of the incubation period, he never demonstrated sexual behavior. He unison called at her many times and she joined in the display. His intent was threat. Hers was sexual.

From their arrival in early March until present, 4-17 and 6-17 have continued to forage mainly in the crop fields where they appear to primarily eat earthworms and waste corn. Just before incubation commenced, the calls of several species of frogs announced the availability of amphibians. The Whooping Cranes then spent more time foraging in the wetland but still continued to often feed primarily in the corn fields. Throughout the incubation period, when 4-17 incubated, 24-17 likewise fed in the fields. Two days before the hatch of their chick, 24-17 remained on the nest and did not forage. When the chick was two days, she and the chick went to a nearby muskrat lodge, pulled apart the top and apparently found food.

Although the adult cranes always roosted in the open water near the spot where they eventually nested, they seldom foraged there perhaps reserving food resources for the chick rearing period.

On one occasion, the male Sandhill Crane nesting northwest of the Whooping Cranes started emitting Guard Calls, an indication of danger. Immediately, 4-17 flew from his territory, likely landed near the Sandhill and joined him in Guard Calling. I could only hear but could not see these cranes from my observation point on the hill south of the wetland. A few minutes later a coyote appeared from that general area and ran along the edge of the east corn field. The Sandhills alerted the Whooping Cranes as to the presence of a predator and in this manner might benefit the welfare of the Whooping Cranes.

Observations continue and I will provide the next chapter in the autumn issue of *The Unison Call*. I wish to express my gratitude to landowners, Dan and Kathy Holzman, Harold Mueller and Jon Bump for caring for wildlife and allowing me access to their properties and for Karen Becker, Anne Lacy and Hillary Thompson for their assistance and encouragement.

*P.S. Intriguingly, 24-7 blood-tested as male, although is certainly behaving as a female. — Hillary*

## Whooping Cranes Getting their Day in Court

### Elisabeth Condon, Whooping Crane Outreach Coordinator at the International Crane Foundation

Historically, shootings were a major cause for the decline of the Whooping Crane. Museum collecting, the millinery trade, and other factors drove the market for shootings. Those economic drivers no longer exist, but unfortunately, shootings still occur. Since 1967, when the Whooping Crane was designated as a federally endangered species, there have been 33 confirmed shooting incidents taking 43 individual Whooping Cranes. The majority (73%) of these confirmed shooting incidents have taken place in the reintroduced populations.

There are a few theories for why we might be seeing this, as follows:

- 1) Birds in the reintroduced populations are marked and monitored at a much higher level than the Aransas-Wood Buffalo population, making our ability to detect shooting incidents higher in the reintroduced populations.
- 2) Whooping Cranes in the reintroduced populations are unfamiliar to local people, who likely did not grow up with the presence of Whooping Cranes. There is no sense of local pride in having Whooping Cranes, nor is there awareness about the consequences for shooting a Whooping Crane.
- 3) Whooping Cranes in the reintroduced populations are living in areas that are more highly populated by humans, and are therefore more likely to encounter people.

Regardless of whether these theories hold true, shootings are a preventable source of mortality. Every individual crane that is taken from the population represents a huge loss, since Whooping Cranes are a long-lived species with a low reproductive rate.

The population that has had the largest impact from shootings is the Louisiana non-migratory population; 24% of known mortality in the Louisiana non-migratory population is attributed to shootings, the highest percentage of any of the reintroduced or wild populations. The population has had 10 confirmed shooting incidents taking 14 individual cranes, the highest number of any population. This is particularly alarming since Whooping Cranes have only been present in Louisiana during this study period since 2011. Whooping Cranes stay in Louisiana all year round and have wandered far from their original release area, now being spotted in every parish in the state as well as in east Texas, which might account for some portion of the higher number of shootings. However, experts working on this population agree that the mortality from shootings is unacceptably high and needs to be addressed or this reintroduction will not succeed.

There is a very common misconception that these criminal acts have been conducted by hunters; only 21% of cases have been associated with a hunting season, and in all of the cases that were associated with a hunting season, the perpetrator was found to be in violation of an existing hunting regulation, meaning that he was poaching, even if he had shot a legal game species. None of the cases in Louisiana have been in association with a hunting season.

In half (5/10) of the Whooping Crane shooting incidents in the Louisiana non-migratory population, authorities were able to identify a perpetrator. This is lower than the national average of 60%. Sentencing results for all cases are outlined in the table below (page 9), with Louisiana non-migratory population cases highlighted. One case is still pending prosecution.

The International Crane Foundation has increased our courtroom advocacy efforts for the past few years. This includes encouraging Whooping Crane supporters to attend court hearings, working with community leaders and conservation organizations to write letters to the court, educating members of the court system, and working with the media to raise awareness about the results of these court cases.

The results of our efforts have been mixed. In Texas in 2016, Trey Joseph Fredericks was given a \$25,850 fine, along with five years' probation and 200 hours of community service for the crime of shooting two Whooping Cranes from the Louisiana non-migratory population. In that case we felt that justice had been served. More recently, Gilvin P. Aucoin, Jr. was given two years' probation and 120 hours of community service as punishment for shooting a Whooping Crane in Louisiana. He was not administered any fine.

The judge in that case felt deeply moved by the letters she read from the International Crane Foundation, Audubon Louisiana, Louisiana Ornithological Society, and New Orleans Audubon Society. She read our documentation out loud for the court record, and was specifically moved by the fact that the financial investment in each individual Whooping Crane in Louisiana is \$93,701.67,



a dollar amount that many different organizations, including state and federal governments along with non-profit organizations, contribute to.

Although she was moved by these facts and our deep emotional investment in this species, she felt that Aucoin would not be able to pay a fine due to his financial situation, so she did not administer one. Aucoin was also highly cooperative with the authorities, another factor leading to such a light punishment. The International Crane Foundation feels that taking such a weak stance on this crime sends the wrong message to other potential perpetrators, regardless of Aucoin’s personal circumstances.

While the International Crane Foundation was disappointed by the results of this case, we did make great strides in building a relationship with the US Attorney’s Office in the Western District of Louisiana, an office that is now prosecuting another person for shooting two Whooping Cranes. We have developed a good relationship with the US Attorney’s office for the Western District of Louisiana, and we met in person with their office alongside several conservation organizations to exchange information. Staff from the US Attorney’s office told the group that they needed to learn more about this issue from us, and thanked us for taking the time to educate them about why Whooping Cranes are so valuable to us. It was a valuable meeting, and we have continued to build on that relationship.

We are hoping for better with this next case, and we will be pushing for jail time, along with a high fine. Kaenon Constantin has pled “not guilty” to a violation of the Lacy Act in association with the shooting of two Whooping Cranes in May of 2016. His trial is currently waiting to be rescheduled in the court of Magistrate Judge Patrick J. Hanna. The International Crane Foundation strongly supports the administration of jail time and a high fine for Constantin.

Sentencing from sixteen Whooping Crane shooting cases that resulted in successful prosecutions from 1967-2016 in the wild populations: the Aransas-Wood Buffalo Population (AWBP), the Florida and Louisiana Non-Migratory Populations (FNMP and LNMP), and the Eastern Migratory Population (EMP). The Law column indicates which law was used for prosecution in each case: Migratory Bird Treaty Act (MBTA), Endangered Species Act (ESA), state law, or unknown. Cases involving LNMP birds are highlighted in gray.

Law	State	Date	Hunter related	Fine	Jail time	Probation	Community service	Hunting privileges revoked
ESA	TX	Jan 2016	No	\$25,850	No	5 years	200 hours	5 years
ESA & MBTA	SD	Apr 2012	No	\$85,000	30 days	2 years	Yes, hours unknown	2 years
MBTA	TX	Nov 2003	Yes	\$2,000	6 months	No	None	Indefinitely
MBTA	AL	Jan 2011	No	\$425	No	No	None	No
MBTA	TX	Jan 2012	Yes	Unknown	No	Unknown	Unknown	Unknown
MBTA	IN	Jan 2012	No	\$5,000	No	3 years	120 hours	3 years
MBTA	TX	Jan 2013	Yes	\$5,000	No	1 year	\$10,000 community service payment to Friends of Aransas and Matagorda Island National Wildlife Refuges	No
MBTA	WI	Jul 2013	No	\$2,000	No	Unknown	None	2 years
MBTA	LA	Nov 2014	No	\$500	45 days	No	None	No
MBTA	LA	Jul 2018	No	\$0	No	2 years	120 hours	2 years
State	FL	Nov 2000	No	\$0	75 days	2.5 years	200 hours	Unknown
State	IN	Nov 2009	No	\$1 + \$504.50 in court fees	No	Unknown	None	Unknown
State	LA	Oct 2011	No	\$0	No	None	Unknown number of hours at White Lake Conservation Area	No
Unknown	KS	Nov 2004	Yes	\$3,000	No	2 years	50 hours	2 years
Unknown	TX	Apr 1991	No	\$23,100	No	No	None	No
Unknown	TX	Jan 1989	Yes	\$21,000	No	No	None	No



A group of crane supporters gathered at the Western District Court of Louisiana in Lafayette in September 2019 for the arraignment hearing of Gilvin P. Aucoin, Jr. Representatives from the International Crane Foundation, Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries, National Audubon Society, Audubon Louisiana, Louisiana Ornithological Society, Orleans Audubon Society, Louisiana Wildlife Federation, Baton Rouge Audubon Society, Lafayette Paddle Club, and Louisiana Wildlife Federation have all come to court to show their support for Whooping Cranes.

In November 2019, another shooting incident took place in Jefferson Davis Parish. Authorities have yet to identify a perpetrator in that case. Without deterrence created by stiff penalties, we likely will not see a decrease in the shooting rate in Louisiana. The International Crane Foundation will continue to educate members of the criminal justice system about the financial investment that goes into each individual Whooping Crane, along with the hundreds of hours that we and our conservation partners spend on saving this species from extinction.

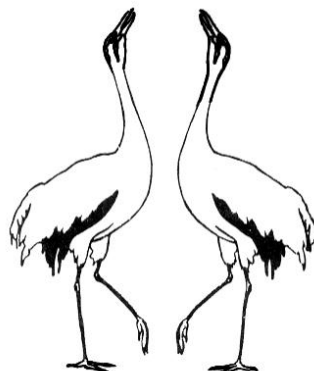
To contribute directly to our outreach and education efforts, along with our courtroom advocacy on behalf of cranes, please go to <https://www.savingcranes.org/whooping-crane-outreach/>.

Two related articles: **“What Kind of Animal Would Shoot a Whooping Crane?”** by Justin Rohrllich at Quartz.

<https://qz.com/1698501/whooping-crane-shooter-facing-federal-charges/>

**“A Whooping Crane’s Killer Got Off Easy, Frustrating Conservationists”** by Natalie Wallington at Audubon.

<https://www.audubon.org/news/a-whooping-crane-killer-got-off-easy-frustrating-conservationists> — Ed.





# Regional Reports

## Aransas—Wood Buffalo Whooping Crane Population Summary 2015-2019

Breeding season	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019
No. of nests detected at WBNP (May)	68	78	98†	87	97
Additional territorial pairs (non-nesters)	20-24	18	?	?	?
No. of fledged chicks detected (August)	23	45*	63**	24	37
Average no. of chicks per nest <sup>#</sup>	0.34	0.57	0.64	0.28	0.38
Estimated no. of birds at Aransas NWR in the primary survey area‡	329 95% CI 293-371 (early winter survey, Cessna)	431 95% CI 371-493 (early winter survey, Kodiak)	—	—	—
	463 95% CI 392-549 (late winter survey, Kodiak)	489 95% CI 428-555 (late winter survey, Kodiak)	505 95% CI 439-576 (late winter survey, Kodiak)	504 95% CI 412-660 (late winter survey, Kodiak)	506 95% CI 343-678 (late winter survey, Kodiak)
Estimated no. of juveniles at Aransas NWR	38 95% CI 33-43	50 95% CI 36-61	49 95% CI 42-58	13 95% CI 10-19	39 95% CI 26-52

†Most nests ever recorded. \*One family with twins; \*\*four families with twins.

<sup>#</sup>20-year average is approx. 0.48 chicks per nest.

‡Aerial surveys conducted later in winter and using a Quest Kodiak aircraft (with improved ground viewing compared to the Cessna) were found to give higher estimates of crane numbers.

Wood Buffalo National Park (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; 2017 nest survey data are from Mike Keizer, Parks Canada; 2017 fledgling data are from CBC News, August 16, 2017 ([www.cbc.ca/news](http://www.cbc.ca/news)); 2018 data are from an article posted by Cabin Radio, Yellowknife, NWT, September 7, 2018 (<https://cabinradio.ca>), citing Rhona Kindopp, Parks Canada; 2019 nest survey and fledgling numbers were reported by Friends of the Wild Whoopers (<https://friendsofthewildwhoopers.org/>), July 12 and August 8, 2019; Aransas NWR winter data are from 'Whooping Crane Updates' at the ANWR website.

## Regional Reports *continued*

### Update on the Eastern Migratory Population of Whooping Cranes

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

#### Current Population Size and Status

As of 1 March 2020, the estimated population size of the Eastern Migratory Population is 85 cranes (41 females, 41 males, and 3 of unknown sex). Fourteen of these birds are wild-hatched and the rest are captive-reared. One of the parent-reared cranes released in spring 2019 died on her migration south due to a powerline collision in Illinois.

#### Fall Releases of Parent-reared Cranes

During October 2019, a parent-reared juvenile raised at the International Crane Foundation, 79-19, was released in Green Lake County, Wisconsin, near a pair of adult Whooping Cranes. Within a couple of days, she was consistently associating with the adult pair, female 67-15 and male 3-17. The trio migrated south together to Wheeler National Wildlife Refuge in Alabama, where they spent the winter together and occasionally associated with other Whooping Cranes as well. During February 2020, the trio along with three other adults left Wheeler and started their migration north.

Another parent-reared juvenile raised at the International Crane Foundation, 80-19, was also released in fall 2019. 80-19 sustained a bill injury in captivity that delayed her release until it was clear her bill was healing normally. By the time she was cleared for release, many cranes had already left Wisconsin, so she was taken to Goose Pond Fish and Wildlife Area in Greene County, Indiana, and released near a sub-adult group of Whooping Cranes. She also began associating with them within a few days of her release, and spent the winter in southwestern Indiana with 5 other Whooping Cranes. As of 1 March 2020, 80-19 and her associates are still in Indiana, but will likely start migrating north very soon!



Parent-reared juvenile 79-19 with her 'adoptive parents' 67-15 and 3-17. Photo: Doug Pellerin

#### 2019 Wild-hatched Cohort

W1-19, the oldest wild-hatched Whooping Crane from the 2019 cohort, left Juneau County, Wisconsin with her parents 12-11 and 5-11 during November 2019. The family group was spotted in Gibson County Indiana during November, but they have not been seen since then. We don't know where this pair typically spends the winter, but we expect them to show up again on the breeding grounds very soon.

W14-19 also left Juneau County, Wisconsin with her parents 12-03 and 12-05 during November 2019. This family group spent the winter in Knox County, Indiana, where they remain as of early March 2020.

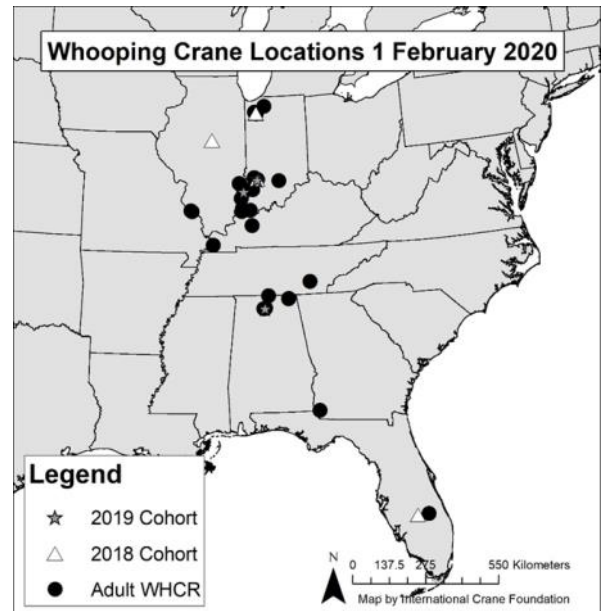
W19-19, the youngest wild-hatched Whooping Crane from the 2019 cohort, also headed south with parents 9-05 and 13-03 during November 2019. This family group wintered near Goose Pond Fish and Wildlife Area in Greene County, Indiana, and often associated with other Whooping Cranes, including parent-reared crane 80-19.



## Winter Distribution 2019-2020

To the best of our knowledge, 27 Whooping Cranes spent the winter in Indiana, 7 in Illinois, 2 in Tennessee, 8 in Kentucky, 20 in Alabama, 2 in Georgia, and 2 in Florida. There was also one Whooping Crane from the Louisiana Non-migratory Population in Morgan County, Alabama this winter. The highest concentrations of cranes this winter were at Wheeler National Wildlife Refuge in Alabama, Goose Pond Fish and Wildlife Area in Indiana, and on private lands in southwestern Indiana and southeastern Illinois.

*A breeding season update from Hillary: as of June 1st, at least 14 chicks have hatched and up to 10 are still alive. — Ed.*



## Louisiana Whooping Crane Update

Eva Szyszkoski, Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries

**2019 cohort** – Eleven captive reared juveniles (8 males, 3 female) were released into the Louisiana population in the winter of 2019/20. They arrived at the White Lake Wetlands Conservation Area, Gueydan, from the Freeport-McMoRan Audubon Species Survival Center in New Orleans on 12 November. They received their permanent bands and transmitters the day of their arrival and were placed in the top-netted portion of the release pen until their release on 26 November.

**Captures** – Five free-flying cranes were captured for banding or transmitter replacement on 11 days of attempts from 17 October 2019 – 3 March 2020.

**Reproduction** – Nesting in Louisiana began early in 2020, with the first nest initiated on 2 February in Jefferson Davis Parish: 11 days earlier than in 2019. This nest did not produce any chicks, with the pair sitting past full term on nonviable eggs. One additional nest was also completed by 9 March, with that pair also sitting past full term. We continue our use of data-logging eggs (*Advanced Telemetry Systems Inc.*) to collect real-time incubation data in wild nests in Louisiana.

**Long distance movement** – Female L4-17 once again spent the summer in Oklahoma and returned to her previous wintering area at the Wheeler National Wildlife Refuge in northern Alabama by 1 or 2 December where thousands of sandhill cranes and numerous Whooping Cranes from the eastern migratory population also were wintering. She left Alabama and returned to northern Louisiana by 6 March.

**Mortalities** – Mortalities from September 2019 through February 2020 included one yearling male, two juvenile females, and one adult female in Louisiana. One mortality (yearling male) was due to gunshot.

**Male L12-16 checks out the camera set up on his and L5-14's nest in Jefferson Davis Parish.**



For the very latest, see Whooping Crane Families 2020: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BqOyaHdTal0>

## Regional Reports *continued*

### Florida Update

We are still holding at 10 Whooping Cranes, we think. Our 2019 chick is now 1 year old. It has remained with its 20-yr-old mom since the dad was killed two months after the chick hatched. No other Whooping Crane males are available in the area, so the mom and chick will likely remain together. We have two pairs remaining in our population and neither have built platforms this spring, but it's a long season in Florida and we remain hopeful. Also, no deaths to report and our oldest crane is now 27!

We're trying to get bands on the 2019 chick and 2016 twins, but it's slow going. We may have luck with one of the twins when we are free to travel again. Our goal is still to translocate some of the wild-hatched cranes to Louisiana.



**The 2019 unbanded chick and its mother.**

**Photo: Tim Delinger**

As for our suburban Sandhill Cranes, we are finding nests in crazy locations. The photo below left (by Miranda Watford, FWC) shows a nest by a fence and utility box, with water on the other side of the fence. The other photo (by Tim Delinger) is of a different Sandhill Crane pair that nested in a retention pond surrounded by a chain-link fence. When I checked on the family, the chicks were on the highway side of the fence and the adults on the nest side. The adults were pacing back-and-forth and wouldn't fly over it, so I pushed the chicks back through a chain link opening to reunite them.



**Tim Dellinger, Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission**



**Lesser Sandhill Cranes**  
**Homer, Alaska, Spring 2020**  
**By Kachemak Crane Watch**

*A Project of the Center for Alaskan Coastal Studies*

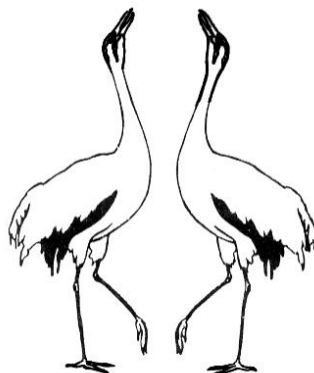
*Nina Faust of Kachemak Crane Watch submitted the photo below and a link to her fascinating video, 'New Paint Job', showing Sandhill Cranes painting themselves with rust-colored mud using twigs or grass as paint brushes at Beluga Slough in Homer, Alaska. We can speculate about the reasons why cranes paint their feathers, but Nina has also thought the behavior may be an example of tool use in cranes. 'Sandhill Crane Fuzzballs' is a more recent video by Nina. — Ed.*



**Plumage painting at Beluga Slough, Homer, AK (Nina Faust)**

New Paint Job <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wK2eqluXPF4&feature=youtu.be>

Sandhill Crane Fuzzballs: First Two Days <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WNZuycnnICY>



***You are invited to join the North American Crane Working Group***

Membership is based on a calendar year.

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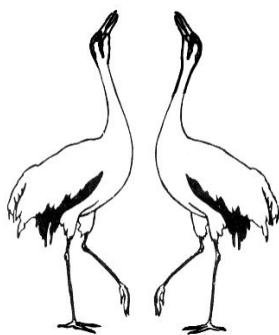
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