

THE UNISON CALL

- Newsletter of the North American Crane Working Group -

Vol. 30, No. 2

Summer/Fall 2020

President's Report

First off, what a year it has been. I sincerely hope you all are doing okay through everything, and are staying safe and healthy. I know this has been a challenging year for all in a multitude of ways, and I hope North America's cranes have brought you a few moments of peace amidst so much uncertainty and hardship. For many of us, the workshop was the last time we were traveling or in larger groups, and I am grateful we had the opportunity to see each other and experience the Texas High Plains in 2020.

One of the things the North American Crane Working Group has been working on this year has been the Proceedings of the 15th workshop. Thank you to our editors, Jane Austin, Richard Urbanek, and Megan Brown, as well as to everyone who has taken the time to submit a manuscript for publication, or has helped in the review process. The official submission deadline has now passed, but if you have a paper you would like to submit, please reach out to the editors to see if they are still accepting any late submissions. I look forward to reading about all of your hard work and exciting new observations or studies on cranes.

A couple orders of business for the NACWG this year have been renewing our membership in the Ornithological Council, as well as shifting to digital copies of our newsletter. The Ornithological Council (OC) is a consortium of 10 ornithological societies and provides a variety of benefits to members of participating organizations. If the OC can help you with some aspect of your work, please reach out to Jane Austin who is our representative for the OC, or the new executive director Laura Bies (<https://birdnet.org/>). See pages 14 and 15 for more on the OC. We have also voted to no longer distribute paper copies of our newsletter, the Unison Call, and will only be distributing electronic copies. This will save not only resources (trees and money), but also will save time for the editor as well. Thanks to Daryl Henderson for continuing to edit and distribute our newsletter!

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.

Take care everyone, I wish you (and the cranes) all the best in the new year.

Hillary Thompson, International Crane Foundation, Baraboo, Wisconsin

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Announcements

As noted by Hillary Thompson in her President's Report, *The Unison Call* is going all-digital. This issue (Vol. 30, No. 2) is the last one for which a printed version will be made and distributed. The vast majority of members now receive the electronic version only, so it is an appropriate time to go entirely paperless. — Ed.

Colorado Crane Conservation Coalition

The Colorado Crane Conservation Coalition, Inc. (CCCC) is looking forward to celebrating their 10th year in 2021. Included in their plans is a new Sandhill Crane Nest Cam project that will hopefully launch in spring, 2021. CCCC has received two grants from the Yampa Valley Community Foundation to help pay for this project. The plan is to set up a camera at a known Sandhill Crane nest in the Yampa Valley and live stream the action at the nest. Anyone with access to the internet will be able to watch the cranes changing places with their mate, rotating eggs, and hopefully, hatching out their chicks. In addition, CCCC staff will record, edit and post video clips of nest activity highlights. This nest cam project will include an interactive format through the CCCC website and Facebook page so that the public can ask questions and receive information about what they are seeing at the nest.

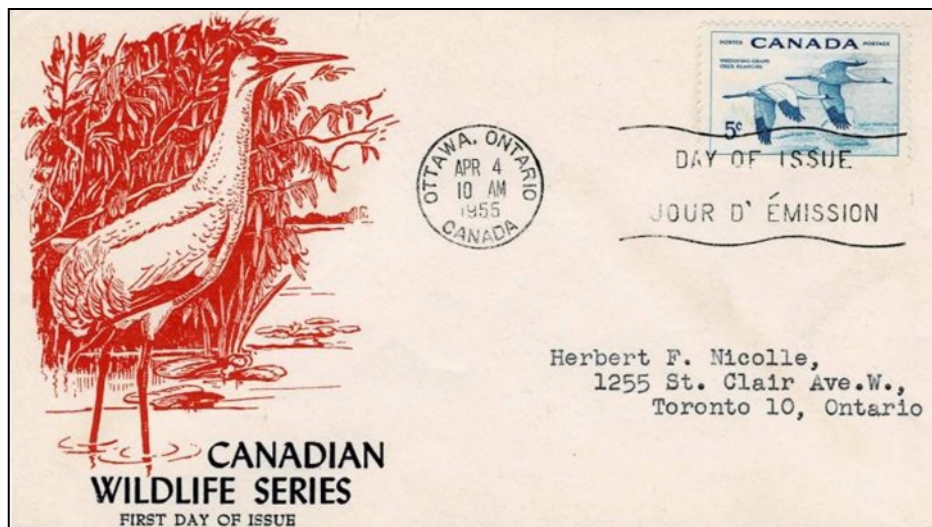
In honor of their 10th year (and thanks to a generous donor), CCCC is expanding their Crane-inspired Creative Arts Scholarship Contest. CCCC is inviting all high school seniors in Routt and Moffat counties to submit an original piece of writing, visual art, or performing art inspired by the Rocky Mountain Population of Greater Sandhill Cranes. The 2021 contest offers THREE categories of art:

- ✦ Category 1: Written Arts. A nonfictional essay or fictional story of 750-1500 words or a group of three poems.
- ✦ Category 2: Visual Arts. A painting, sketch, photograph or digital art.
- ✦ Category 3: Performing Arts. A song, dance, musical composition or skit lasting 2- 5 minutes.

The work must be original and accurately reflect the physical characteristics, behavior and habitat of the Rocky Mountain Greater Sandhill Cranes. The First-Place winner in each category will receive a \$2,000 scholarship. The Second-Place winner in each category will receive a \$1,000 scholarship. An Honorable Mention winner from any of the categories will receive a \$1,000 scholarship.

The 10th annual **Yampa Valley Crane Festival** will take place in Steamboat Springs and Hayden, CO September 2-5, 2021. It will once again feature favorite crane, bird and nature activities, plus new events, films and expert speakers. **Dr. Richard Beilfuss**, President and CEO of the International Crane Foundation, will be the 2021 festival keynote speaker. Other featured speakers will include **Steve Burrows**, award-winning Canadian mystery writer, journalist, and past recipient of a "Nature Writer of the Year" award from BBC Wildlife, and **Arvind Panjabi**, avian conservation scientist for Bird Conservancy of the Rockies and coauthor of the recent study published in *Science* magazine on the decline of North American birds. **Paul Tebbel** will lead guided crane viewings and **Ted Floyd**, editor of *Birding* magazine, will lead the guided bird walks and offer a special presentation at The Nature Conservancy's historic Carpenter Ranch. Complete details can be found at the CCCC website: <https://coloradocranes.org>.

The Unison Call is a forum to share updates, news and opinions. It is published twice yearly by the **North American Crane Working Group**, a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization incorporated in Wisconsin. Electronic (PDF) versions 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; send to Daryl Henderson at nysquirrel1@gmail.com



William Rowan and Canada's 5¢ Whooping Crane Stamp: The Proposal and a Saskatchewan Photograph
(*Blue Jay*, Fall 2020, Vol 78.3)

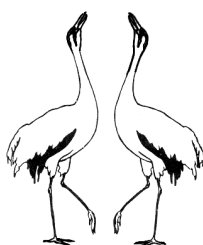
Spencer Sealy, Emeritus Professor in the Department of Biological Sciences at University of Manitoba, has written a fascinating, behind-the-scenes account of Canada's first Whooping Crane stamp, issued in April 1955. Based on archived letters and other documents, Spencer tells the story of ornithologist William Rowan and his dogged efforts in the early 1950s to urge Canada's Post Office to consider a Whooping Crane stamp and help "Protect Whooping Cranes Now Facing Extinction." Rowan — you'll recognize his name in *Grus canadensis rowani* — not only mustered far-flung support for producing a Whooping Crane stamp, but he also designed it, taking inspiration from a much-heralded photograph of three Whooping Cranes in flight near Herbert, Saskatchewan. Just as Whooping Cranes are creatures of both sides of the 49th parallel, so too are Whooping Crane stamps: Spencer has uncovered a connection between Rowan and the Whooping Crane stamp issued by the United States Post Office in 1957, two and half years after Canada's.

In addition to his stamp article, Spencer has authored two short historical notes on Whooping Crane presence in the Battleford region of Saskatchewan:

Revisiting the Historical Nesting Record of the Whooping Crane at Battleford, Saskatchewan
(*Blue Jay*, Winter 2020, Vol 78.4)

Early Photographic Record of the Whooping Crane in the Battleford Area, Saskatchewan
(*Blue Jay*, Spring 2021, Vol 79.1)

All three articles were recently published in *Blue Jay*, the journal of Nature Saskatchewan. If you are interested in any of these articles, please contact Spencer at spencer.sealy@umanitoba.ca and he would be more than pleased to send you a PDF reprint. — Ed.



Cranes in the News

‘Fraser’ Crane released back to the wild after golf-course injury

A sandhill crane that had been nursed back to health after suffering a broken leg was released back to the wild in Pitt Meadows, British Columbia on Saturday [November 21, 2020].

The bird, which has been named ‘Fraser’ by its rescuers, had been struck by an errant golf ball on a Richmond, BC course this summer along the banks of the Fraser River.

He was captured to give him a fighting chance at survival, but his mate, who had also been hit, was not as lucky, and succumbed to her injuries.

Wildlife biologist Myles Lamont said a passionate team of veterinarians spent the last several months donating their time, materials, and expertise to care for the graceful crane.

Dr. Adrian Walton from Dewdney Animal performed the original surgery after capture, Dr. Ken Macquisten aided in post-operative care and subsequent treatment, and Elizabeth Melnick from Elizabeth’s Wildlife Center, has helped with rehab of these golf ball injured birds for the last several years.

“They have likely invested several thousands of dollars’ worth of surgery time and medical support with zero compensation, so they deserve to have some recognition for their community support,” said Lamont.

Fraser was fitted with a GPS transmitter so his movements and recovery can be tracked.

Lamont, who along with BC Nature provided the majority of the funding for the transmitter, said it will help contribute to our limited understanding of this unique sub-population of sandhill cranes.

“With less than approximately 12 breeding pairs left of the South Coastal sandhill cranes in the Fraser Valley, this population is facing severe threats from urban expansion, loss of wetland habitats to agricultural development, and increased threat of golf courses as they continue to be forced onto these sub-optimal habitat types and subject to injury,” Lamont said.

The crane was released in the Pitt Polder Ecological Reserve, one of the last viable habitats for the birds.

“I’m hoping he’s got a couple weeks here of some fairly mild weather, so he can acclimatize and join a small flock that usually hangs out in the Pitt [Polder] this time of year.”

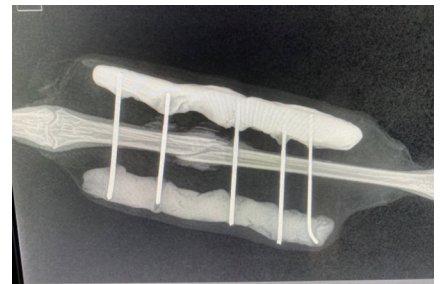
Of note, is the cultural significance of the species to local First Nations people.

“It’s the only First Nations culture that I know of that has such a close tie to cranes,” Lamont said.

“According to Katzie oral history, the sandhill crane was one of the most important animals in their culture and was highly revered, with their name for the crane being *haha’w* which means *superior in everything*.”

“In March, thousands of sandhill cranes would stop over in their traditional territories along the Pitt River and stage prior to moving north, and they termed March the ‘month of the crane’ in their traditional language.”

He estimated there are between 30 to 35 birds in the greater Vancouver area, and would like their status changed from *Non-threatened*, to *Threatened*.



An injured Fraser Crane (top) and his fractured leg post-surgery (bottom).

“[The population] is terribly low, and unfortunately has not received any concern or attention from either provincial or federal governments in the last decade,” Lamont said.

“I’m trying to lobby them to re-look at this species because 30 birds is not very many and their recruitment is terribly abysmal.” He pointed out less than 3 per cent of the birds that hatch actually make it to adulthood.

“It is not high enough to maintain the population, and we’ve lost ten birds in the last five years to golf ball strikes. The whole thing is a recipe for disaster because it can take five years for them to reach maturity,” he said.

“So, the population will not be able to sustain itself with those kinds of fatalities continuing.”



Fraser Crane takes flight after being released.

Article by **Ronan O’Doherty**, *Maple Ridge – Pitt Meadows News*, November 22, 2020 (with minor edits).

<https://www.mapleridgenews.com/news/fraser-crane-released-back-into-the-wild-in-pitt-meadows-after-golf-course-injury/>

Story contributed by **Myles Lamont**, who spoke at the Lubbock workshop about this same precarious crane population in southwest BC. For more information see <https://www.terrafauna.ca/south-coast-sandhill-crane-project>

Man from Rayne (Louisiana) sentenced for whooping crane violations

United States Attorney David C. Joseph announced that Kaenon A. Constantin, 28, was sentenced on July 30, 2020, to five years of probation for killing and transporting a federally protected and endangered whooping crane.

During his period of probation, Constantin must complete 360 hours of community service related to wildlife conservation. As part of the sentence, Constantin’s hunting privileges have been suspended until he completes the community service. United States Magistrate Judge Hanna also ordered Constantin to pay a \$10,000 fine and to pay \$75,000 in civil restitution to the Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries (LDWF).

In November of 2019, Constantin was named in a federal bill of information for violating the Lacey Act in May of 2016. Specifically, on May 20, 2016, Constantin and a juvenile used .22 caliber rifles to shoot at a pair of whooping cranes located in a field within Acadia Parish. One of the cranes fell dead in the field, and Constantin and his accomplice retrieved its carcass. The other crane flew too far north into another field and couldn’t be retrieved, but investigators later recovered its carcass.

Constantin and the juvenile found a transponder on the crane’s leg used by LDWF in tracking the crane. Constantin and the juvenile then cut the transponder off of the crane and transported the crane, knife, severed legs and transponders to a nearby road where they discarded the evidence.

When initially approached by investigators shortly after the crime, Constantin lied about his involvement, causing the investigation to continue for nearly two more years before he finally confessed in April of 2018. LDWF agents cited Constantin on April 2, 2018.

The United States Fish & Wildlife Service and the LDWF conducted the investigation. Assistant U.S. Attorney Danny Siefker prosecuted the case.

LDWF news release (edited) — <https://www.wlf.louisiana.gov/news/man-from-rayne-sentenced-for-whooping-crane-violations>

Regional Reports

Aransas—Wood Buffalo Whooping Crane Population Summary 2016-2020

Breeding season	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
No. of nests detected at WBNP (May)	78	98†	87	97	No count ‡
Additional territorial pairs (non-nesters)	18	?	?	?	
No. of fledged chicks detected (August)	45*	63**	24	37	No count ‡
Average no. of chicks per nest [#]	0.57	0.64	0.28	0.38	
Estimated no. of birds at Aransas NWR in the primary survey area	489 95% CI 428-555	505 95% CI 439-576	504 95% CI 412-660	506 95% CI 343-678	No count ‡
Estimated no. of juveniles at Aransas NWR	50 95% CI 36-61	49 95% CI 42-58	13 95% CI 10-19	39 95% CI 26-52	

†Most nests ever recorded

‡No surveys were conducted in 2020 due to COVID-19

*One family with twins; **four families with twins

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

Wood Buffalo National Park (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); 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.

Update on the Eastern Migratory Population of Whooping Cranes

Nicki Gordon, North America Program Research Assistant, International Crane Foundation

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



Whooping Cranes 79-19, 74-18, and W3-18 at Goose Pond FWA in Greene County, Indiana. Photo credit: Nancy Lightfoot

Current Population Size and Status

As of 1 December 2020, the estimated population size is 80 (39 F, 38 M, 3 U). Seventeen of these individuals are wild-hatched and the rest are captive-reared. Almost all birds have left Wisconsin and are on their way or at their wintering location. To the best of our knowledge, as of 1 December, there are 7 Whooping Cranes that are still in Wisconsin, 18 in Illinois, 35 in Indiana, 6 in Kentucky, 2 in Tennessee, 4 in Alabama, 1 in Florida. The remaining birds' locations have not been confirmed in the last month. Also, migration is still underway, and the locations of birds change daily. During March-Nov 2020, there have been three confirmed mortalities of adults, and five individuals that have been missing for at least a year. They either have not been seen with their mate or on their territory and are assumed to be dead. Also, one female incurred a wing injury during July. She was captured and brought into captivity for medical attention. She will not be able to be released back into the EMP and will now be a part of the captive population.

Nesting Season

This spring we had a total of 18 chicks hatch from 15 of the 24 nests (21 first nests, 3 re-nests). Out of the 18 chicks, 8 hatched at Necedah National Wildlife Refuge (NWR), and excitingly, the first chick hatched and fledged at Horicon NWR. Ten chicks hatched on state or private land. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic and field work constraints, we were unable to carry out forced re-nesting during black fly emergence. Although, we were able to pull the eggs of one nest at Necedah NWR and took them to be raised by a female-female pair at McMillian State Wildlife Area. This pair has exhibited nesting behaviors in the past but did not have fertile eggs. They ended up hatching at least one chick, but it died of unknown causes. Currently, there are 4 wild-hatched chicks that have fledged and are still alive.

W3-20 (F) hatched to parents 11-15 and 42-09 in Adams County in late April and fledged mid-summer. She and her parents left Wisconsin in late October and went to Morgan Co, AL and then decided to come a bit more north to Hopkins Co, KY, where she is currently.

W13-20 (M) hatched to parents 38-17 and 63-15 at Horicon NWR in mid-May and fledged during late summer. He is the first fledged chick at Horicon NWR and this pair's first chick. They left Horicon NWR and are now in Randolph Co, IL for the winter.

W14-20 (M) hatched to parents 12-03 and 12-05 at Necedah NWR in mid-May and fledged during August. He and his parents migrated from Necedah NWR to Knox Co, IN where they are currently.

Regional Reports *continued*

W18-10 (F) hatched to parents 13-02 and 24-08 at Necedah NWR at the beginning of July and fledged in late September. This chick's father is the oldest male in the population and this was the latest hatch date ever documented. This family has migrated from Necedah NWR to Wabash Co, IL.

Two of these parents were captured this year (along with 3 other breeding adults) and were fitted with a new GSM transmitter that helped us track their movements during their migration. These transmitters send us locations of the individuals remotely, giving us valuable information about movements and habitat use of breeding cranes and family groups. This will assist us in upcoming years to find their nests and track chick survival and habitat use.

Summer Distribution

Breeding pairs of Whooping Cranes this year were in Juneau, Adams, Marathon, St. Croix, Green Lake, Marquette, Sauk, and Dodge Counties, WI. Most Whooping Cranes spent the summer in Wisconsin, but 4 cranes were separately located in Michigan, and one 1-year-old female spent most of the summer in Illinois.

Releases of Captive-reared Whooping Cranes

79-19 (F) was a parent-reared juvenile released last fall in Wisconsin and went to Horicon NWR in Dodge Co, WI for the summer. She was seen associating with 16-11 (M), 75-18 (M), and 74-18 (M). She left Wisconsin with 74-18 and they are now in Greene Co, IN at Goose Pond Fish and Wildlife Area, associating with many other Whooping Cranes.

80-19 (F) was a parent-reared juvenile released last fall in Indiana. She came to Juneau Co, Wisconsin for a short time in March and then went down to Grundy and LaSalle Counties, Illinois and stayed there for the summer. She was seen with family group W3-20, 11-15, and 42-09 in Illinois and followed them to Alabama and now is currently in Kentucky with them as well as another breeding pair.

Due to COVID-19 restrictions, we did not release any captive-reared Whooping Cranes this year.

Louisiana Whooping Crane Update

Eva Szyszkoski, Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries

2020 Reproduction — Nesting in Louisiana began early in 2020, with the first nest initiated on 2 February in Jefferson Davis Parish and ended with the conclusion of the last nest on 5 June.

A total of 22 nests by 12 pairs were confirmed in seven parishes (Acadia, Allen, Avoyelles, Calcasieu, Cameron, Jefferson Davis and Vermilion) in central and southwestern Louisiana and one county (Chambers) in southeast Texas. Due to a number of failed remote transmitters and pairs that became "untrackable" along with a moratorium on tracking flights due to the COVID-19 pandemic, nesting in the remote WLWCA hunting marsh was unable to be documented, although we suspect at least two additional pairs likely had at least one attempt each. We also suspect one pair with a documented first nest likely re-nested, based on an observation of the male in flight alone; however, that potential re-nest was unable to be visually confirmed and neither bird had a functional remote transmitter.

A minimum of 31 eggs were produced in 2020, 30 confirmed by visual observation or discovery of eggshells and one not directly observed but presumed due to a mated pair sitting on a nest platform for just over one week. Thirteen eggs were confirmed fertile, of which seven died prior to hatch (1 early dead, 2 mid-dead, 4 late dead) and six successfully hatched in the wild. Nine other intact eggs were collected and determined to be non-viable and the remaining nine eggs were of unknown fertility and viability, with most of these disappearing or breaking at the nest. Six chicks hatched to five pairs in 2020, with one surviving to fledging (confirmed at 84 days old). The other five chicks disappeared between 11-41 days of age. We assume one chick hatched to a pair nesting in Texas for the first time but we were unable to get a visual confirmation. We base our assumption that the chick hatched and then disappeared on our analysis of the transmitter data and behavioral observations from both adults. Furthermore, it's possible that a small number of additional chicks hatched but were never confirmed as the restrictions in place due to the COVID-19 pandemic prevented aerial surveys from being conducted, resulting in some pairs not being monitored due to their locations in remote areas of marsh.

Of the remaining 17 confirmed nests, five were incubated to full term or beyond with no hatch, eight were abandoned prior to full term for unknown reasons, and the remaining three had an unknown outcome (two may have incubated to or past full term). An eggshell membrane was found at one of the nests classified as an unknown outcome, and appeared to possibly have resulted from a hatched egg; however, there was no other evidence of a chick and the length of incubation was not definitively known.

Unusual Nesting Behavior — In 2020 we documented unusual nesting behavior from one experienced pair who hatched chicks the previous two years. Female L5-14 and mate L12-16 initiated their first nest on 2 February (11 days earlier than in 2019) and incubated past full term on eggs that were not viable. After the failure of their first attempt, they initiated four additional nests, all of which contained a single egg that they only minimally incubated or abandoned almost immediately for unknown reasons. Two of these platforms were significantly smaller than a normal-sized nest and the other two were only discovered later, after they deteriorated, so accurate measurements were not obtained. A sixth nest attempt appeared to be normal but was abandoned after a week, possibly due to a severe storm that produced hail and may have caused one of the eggs to break. A seventh attempt was made but again failed after about one week and was never visually confirmed while active. GPS data for the male indicated incubation behavior and a disintegrated platform was found five days after failure, at which time male L12-16 was suspected to be in molt (later confirmed). It is unknown if this may have contributed to the failure of their last attempt.

Experimental Nest Elevation — Since nesting began in 2014, 5% of nests (5/97) have been confirmed to have failed as a result of flooding, with three of those occurring in 2019 as a result of storms that produced heavy rainfall in isolated locations. To find out if management actions could mitigate possible nest failure due to flooding, a pilot experiment was conducted in March 2020 to add vegetative material to nests that were naturally constructed by select crane pairs in order to raise nests higher above the surface of the water.

Although the initial plan was to elevate three nests, the restrictions in place due to the COVID-19 pandemic prevented experimentation on more than one nest. The pair selected for this experiment was chosen based on accessibility (crawfish field) and previous tolerance of a brief disturbance at their nest (deployment of a nest camera in 2019 by two people). In order to minimize overall disturbance at the nest, a data-logging egg and trail camera were deployed at the same time the nest was elevated. Louisiana Whooping Crane nests are, on average, 10.0 centimeters above the surface of the water and we doubled this height by adding hay onto the top of the nest (see Figure). Although the total amount of time from the initial disturbance until biologists were back at their vehicles was only 14 minutes (~6 of those actually in the field at the nest), there were four biologists present to ensure all tasks could be completed while holding back potentially defensive adults. Even though the cranes returned close to the nest several times, the nest appearance was significantly changed, and they seemed wary. The female finally resumed incubation 61 minutes after the initial disturbance, which was double the amount of time it took them to return to their nest in 2019 when only a camera was deployed. Twelve days later, the pair hatched out a chick, but the chick survived for only 11 days before disappearing.



Regional Reports *continued*

From the time the nest was elevated until the time the chick disappeared there were no flooding rain events and camera evidence showed that the height of the nest appeared to be back to the original height five days after the artificial elevation (see Figure). At the time measurements were taken at the nest following its conclusion (9 days after hatch), the nest height above the surface of the water had decreased to 8.0 cm.

Captures — Seven free-flying cranes were captured for banding or transmitter replacement on 19 days of attempts from 29 September – 18 December 2020.

Mortalities — Only one mortality was documented from March – November 2020: one adult male in Louisiana.

Current Population Size — As of 18 December 2020, the Louisiana non-migratory population consisted of a maximum of 75 individuals (39 males, 36 females). Estimated distribution includes: 68 in Louisiana, 4 in Texas, 1 in Arkansas and 2 with no recent reports.

FALL SURVEY OF THE EASTERN POPULATION OF SANDHILL CRANES 2020 FINAL REPORT

Prepared by Rachael Pierce and Dave Fronczak, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

INTRODUCTION

The fall survey of the Eastern Population (hereafter EP) of Greater Sandhill Crane (*Grus canadensis tabida*) staging areas has been conducted throughout the Mississippi and Atlantic Flyways since 1979. The fall survey traditionally occurs during the last week of October under the assumption that the majority of EP Sandhill Cranes that breed in Canada have migrated to staging areas in the United States. The survey is a collaborative effort by state and federal agencies as well as citizen scientists.

We ask volunteers to visit recommended sites or sites in which cranes have been observed in previous years. Observation methods include roadside counts or point estimates (i.e., cranes departing from or arriving to a roost). Observers record date, start and stop times, location information, weather, and the number of cranes observed at each site.

This survey is not a complete census of EP Sandhill Cranes, but instead serves as an index of abundance. Over the past decade, EP Sandhill Cranes have expanded in both size and geographic range. The information collected allows the Service and Flyway Councils to quantify estimates and trends of EP Sandhill Cranes in an attempt to better manage this species.

In 2019, the Service launched the EP Sandhill Crane fall survey data portal (<https://www.fws.gov/epsandhill/>). This online platform was designed to improve survey coordination, enhance communication, reduce the burden of data entry, and provide precise information about where roosting and foraging locations occur each year. This platform provides both volunteers and the Service more refined information about habitat use and selection, as well as population distribution across the Midwest landscape and has significantly reduced the time required to coordinate the survey and analyze the data.

RESULTS OF SURVEY

- In 2020, volunteers in ten states and the Province of Ontario conducted the fall EP Sandhill Crane survey. This year, the Service was pleased to bring Iowa in to the survey.
- The total number of Sandhill Cranes counted across the region for the 2020 survey was 94,879 (**Figure 1**). This was a +6% change from the previous year's count of 89,504. The largest percentage of birds was counted in Wisconsin (52%) followed by Michigan (17%), Minnesota (12%), and Indiana (11%). Despite the Covid pandemic, the effort among states was comparable to previous survey efforts.
- Weather for the first week of the survey (October 26 - 31) was reported as relatively mild, with average high temperatures across the surveyed region at 45 °F (7 °C) and the average low temperatures at 34 °F (1 °C). There was little to no

precipitation and average winds were reported as mild. However, during the following week of the survey (November 1 - 4), the reported average high temperatures increased to 61°F (16 °C) and the average lows were 39 °F (4 °C). Again, there was little precipitation, except for trace amounts reported in portions of Indiana and Ohio, and the average wind speeds were fairly mild throughout the region. This may explain the increase in observations for northern regions.

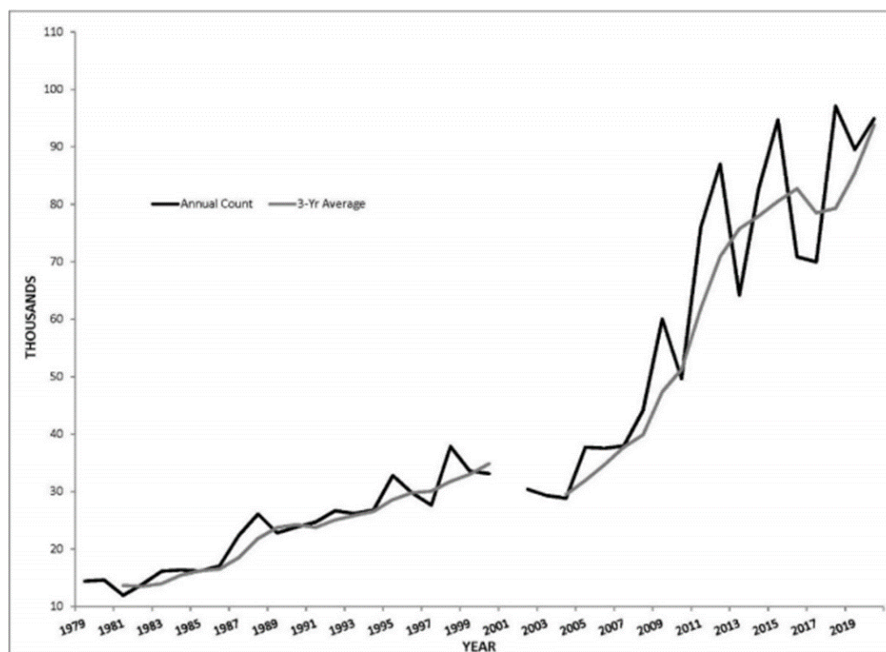


Figure 1. Total number of Eastern Population Sandhill Cranes counted, 1979 – 2020.

Editor’s note: the full report, which includes additional figures and a data-rich table comparing multiple years, can be found at: [U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service - Migratory Bird Program | Conserving America's Birds \(fws.gov\)](https://www.fws.gov/migratorybirds/conserving-america-birds)

Mississippi Sandhill Crane Update

Covid19. Like biologists everywhere, we adapted to the changes in field and office work. Although several surveys and types of habitat work were put on hold, endangered species care and monitoring are considered critical and so we continued with crane and dusky gopher frog monitoring and releases.

Nesting. After the record-smashing 2019, 2020 recruitment dropped back to recent levels. Because of the FWS wide suspension of drone use, we were unable to utilize that tool for nest detection in 2020. A record 41 pairs nested and had a record high 62 nests; there were 21 renests. There were at least two new territories: O20 South and Rock Hill, the latter off the Refuge. There were 4 new nesting pairs: unbanded & 1703, 1409 & 1603, an unbanded pair, and 1301 & 1602. Crane 1509 was a new male with 1113. Five chicks fledged from the Rock Hill pair 1409 & 1603 (twins), 831 & unbanded in the Riley Road area, the unbanded pair nest in the Ocean Springs Pen, and 541 & W41, likely in the Jordan territory.

Hurricane season. During a crazy active season in the Gulf in which we were projected in the “cone” for 3 storms, we lucked out again, unlike our colleagues to the west in Louisiana. The Refuge did experience 60 mph winds with the passage of Hurricane Zeta but we were fortunate again as she was very fast moving. There was damage to two crane pens and 5 observation blinds, 3 of which were beyond repair. No cranes were known to have been lost. The 3 GPS transmitter equipped cranes remained in their usual locations during and after the storm.

Regional Reports *continued*

Release. In the 41st year of population supplementation, we released 12 captive-reared juveniles in two cohorts from netted pens; all were parent-reared. To reduce the chance of free-flying cranes getting entangled in the top nets, we attached FireFly powerline-type markers along the top net guy wire and along the side fencing. These are far superior to the cloth flagging we used previously. We received 6 birds from White Oak Conservation Center on November 4. They were measured, banded, fitted (two) with leg mount Ornitrack GPS transmitters, and placed in the Gautier netted pen for acclimation and now known as #2001-2006. On November 5, we received 6 birds from Audubon Species Survival Center. They were measured, banded, fitted (two) with leg mount Ornitrack GPS transmitters, and placed in the Headquarters netted pen for acclimation and now known as #2007-2012. I chose to not use any VHF transmitters, a first for the program. We conducted a predator response test for each cohort and collected multiple 50-minute time budget sessions. On Nov 23, we released the Gautier cohort. We moved the water troughs and feeder out of the netted pen and into the open part of the pen. We then opened and secured the door for the netted pen. After 3 hours, all 6 walked through the door into the open pen and within minutes took their first flight. On December 1, we released the Headquarters cohort. The pen door there is much narrower so we set up a fabric 'chute' guide, opened the door, and herded them through, after which they promptly flew north over the HQ area into a marsh.

Scott Hereford, Gautier, MS

Lesser Sandhill Cranes, Annual Summary

Homer, Alaska, Summer 2020

By Kachemak Crane Watch

A Project of the Center for Alaskan Coastal Studies

Nina Faust of Kachemak Crane Watch submitted her group's annual summary for 2020. Some highlights are given below; the full document can be found at <http://cranewatch.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/Annual-Sandhill-Crane-Summary-2020c.pdf> — Editor

Like so many cycles of nature, Homer's local Lesser Sandhill Cranes arrived as usual mid-April, with the first reported pair landing on April 9. The first week of May, Kachemak Crane Watch began receiving reports of crane pairs showing up at observers' locations, indicating that the cranes had begun nesting. Most crane pairs were on the nest by May 20.

This summer, Homer had good weather for successful nesting, with few big storms and fairly warm temperatures. By June 2, the first reports of hatched colts were received from local citizen scientists. This year, 42 nests were reported, and 70 colts hatched.

While no deformities were reported this summer, a number of nests were destroyed by predators, or colts perished due to illness, predators, or were hit by a car. One colt body was sent to the state veterinarian for necropsy, but the results were not able to pinpoint the cause of death, although the colt was under weight for its size. Its sibling had also died after exhibiting similar symptoms to the other colt.

One other colt that was sent for necropsy from a different area of town was found to have succumbed to a fungal infection, likely aspergillosis. Its lungs and air sacs were filled with nodular lesions caused by the fungus, a fungal pneumonia.

Bears were reported destroying a nest, and a colt elsewhere was reportedly killed by a bear. One colt was killed by a horned owl, and two others were killed by coyotes. A vehicle most likely killed a colt found in a ditch by a road. Despite these deaths, 45 colts made it to fledging, a 64% success rate, comparable to other years. This year's nesting success rate was 78.6%.



Lesser Sandhill Cranes gathering near Homer, AK prior to their southward migration.

Unfortunately, the female adult of one family was shot by a pellet gun and died. The air-gun pellet (retrieved at necropsy) penetrated the intestine, causing the crane to bleed to death. The second colt of this pair declined in health and disappeared shortly after the mother's death.

Sandhill Crane Count Days took place on August 22, 29, and September 5 this year. This is the fourth year Kachemak Crane Watch has counted cranes at Beluga Slough and area wide before the average departure date in mid-September. This year the numbers diminished each successive Saturday evening, but it appears that the cranes had not left but instead were using alternate roosts. On the 5th, only 66 were counted compared to 99 and 91 counted the previous two Saturdays. Counters watched a large flock of over 30 head off toward another roost rather than land in the Slough. It could be the significant eagle activity in the Slough made them decide to go elsewhere. Nonetheless, watching the cranes fly-in, dance, preen, and forage was still breathtaking in the golden sunlight of evening.

As cranes gathered over the pre-migration staging period after the first week of August until mid-September, Kachemak Crane Watch received constant reports of gathering flocks of varying sizes. September 3, at Inspiration Ridge Preserve's monitoring site, 103 was the biggest flock counted. At another site on the bench below Inspiration Ridge Preserve, 180 cranes were reported on the ground, the largest group in Homer reported all summer. Groups of cranes slipped out of town starting around September 10. Hundreds were reported passing over North Fork Road area heading south, most flocks coming from across Cook Inlet. September 28, there were still 9 known cranes in the area from Anchor Point to the south to the head of Kachemak Bay—three separate families.

Kachemak Crane Watch appreciates its Citizen Scientists who provide detailed information about the cranes nesting nearby and local non-breeding flocks using the area. Learning about breeding success, mortality, and disease opens a window to the health and productivity of our local cranes. All the reports, including reports of the non-breeding flocks, help make that window clearer. Citizen Science, collaborating with groups like Save Our Sandhill Cranes in Sacramento and the International Crane Foundation and providing information to the general public, are all ways to help educate people about cranes in both their summer and winter habitats.

The Ornithological Council: Who we are and how we can help you

by Laura Bies

Formed in 1992, the Ornithological Council is a consortium of 10 scientific societies of ornithologists; these societies span the Western Hemisphere and the research conducted by their members spans the globe. Their cumulative expertise comprises the knowledge that is fundamental and essential to science-based bird conservation and management.

Our member societies are:

- ◆ Association of Field Ornithologists
- ◆ Birds Caribbean
- ◆ CIPAMEX: Sociedad para el Estudio y Conservación de las Aves en México
- ◆ Neotropical Ornithological Society
- ◆ North American Crane Working Group
- ◆ Pacific Seabird Group
- ◆ Raptor Research Foundation
- ◆ Society of Canadian Ornithologists / Société des Ornithologistes du Canada
- ◆ Waterbird Society
- ◆ Wilson Ornithological Society

The OC works to (1) ensure that the best ornithological science is incorporated into legislative, regulatory, and management decisions that affect birds; (2) enhance the ability of ornithologists to pursue professional activities; and (3) promote the influence of ornithology in public affairs.

The OC is governed by a board of directors made up of representatives from each of our member societies. NACWG's representative on the board is Jane Austin. The OC has an executive director, Laura Bies, who lives in DC and carries out the day-to-day activities of the organization. We maintain a website, BIRDNET.ORG, where you can access our publications as well as valuable information about animal welfare and permits.

The OC monitors the legislative, regulatory, and management decisions that affect bird management and conservation, and offers science-based feedback to agencies and regulators, as appropriate. For example, we recently submitted comments to USDA's Animal Plant Health Inspection Service as they begin to develop new regulations to include birds not bred for research within the scope of the Animal Welfare Act. We also work to ensure that the regulations, policies, and practices involving bird banding are effective and efficient and that programs such as the Bird Banding Laboratory have the resources they need.

We offer individual assistance to all members of OC societies, on issues regarding animal welfare (usually involving securing IACUC approval for research) or securing the permits needed for ornithological research. We recently released an updated guide to the import permit process, which offers detailed information and advice on securing the permits needed to import specimens or bird parts into the U.S. *A Guide to the Permits and Procedures for Importing Bird Products into the United States for Scientific Research and Display* is available for download on our website. Also on BIRDNET.ORG is the *Guidelines for the Use of Wild Birds in Research*, a foundational publication, now in its third edition, which provides an in-depth guide to the animal welfare considerations involved when performing research involving wild birds, including ethical considerations and the legal framework that must be followed by researchers. If ornithologists have questions that are not answered by these publications, OC staff is always available to help with individual inquiries by phone or email. Each year we help dozens of ornithologists secure IACUC approval for their research or the permit they need to conduct their research or import specimens.

You can learn more about what actions the OC is taking to support ornithologists by visiting Ornithology Exchange, in the "News from the Ornithological Council" forum. There you'll also find timely articles about policy issues that affect ornithologists.

Please feel free to reach out to OC Executive Director Laura Bies at laurbiesoc@gmail.com if we can be of assistance!

The Ornithological Council is updating the *Guidelines to the Use of Wild Birds in Research*
— and we need your help!

The Ornithological Council is planning a minor revision to the *Guidelines to the Use of Wild Birds in Research*. This foundational publication, now in its third edition, provides an in-depth guide to the animal welfare considerations when performing research involving wild birds, including ethical considerations and the legal framework that must be followed by researchers. Topics include investigator impact generally, collecting and trapping, marking, transport, housing and captive breeding, minor and major manipulative procedures, and euthanasia.

The last edition was published in 2010. The Ornithological Council is interested in compiling updated references from the last 10 years so we can include those in the next update. If you are aware of a methods paper relevant to a topic covered in the *Guidelines*, please submit the citation (and if you have it, a PDF of the paper or a link to it) to Laura Bies (laurabiesoc@gmail.com). Also submit papers that are not methods papers *per se* but assess the impact of the study methods.

We are also looking for volunteers to coordinate the literature reviews for each chapter. If you are interested in volunteering, contact Laura Bies at laurabiesoc@gmail.com.

The chapters in the *Guidelines* are:

Chapter I. Introduction

Chapter 2. Impact of Investigator Presence

Chapter 3. Capture and Marking

Chapter 4. Transport of Wild Birds

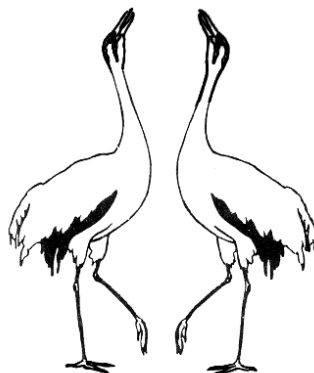
Chapter 5. Captive Management

Chapter 6. Minor Manipulative Procedures

Chapter 7. Major Manipulative Procedures

Chapter 8. Scientific Collecting

The 2010 edition of *Guidelines* is available on our website at BIRDNET.ORG. Thank you in advance for your contributions!



You are invited to join the North American Crane Working Group

Membership is based on a calendar year.

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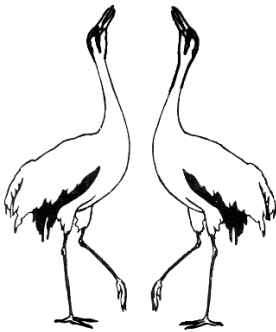
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