



# THE UNISON CALL

A Newsletter of the North American  
Crane Working Group

*Spring/Summer 2005,  
Vol. 16 No. 1*

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## President's Report

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Greetings during an exciting time for cranes. On a positive note, the Whooping Crane Eastern Partnership is poised to release as many as 25 more Whooping Cranes into the wild this winter, both through the traditional ultralight-led reintroduction method and a direct autumn release of up to 4 Whooping Cranes into the already existing migrating Whooping Cranes from earlier ultralight-led reintroductions.

The Proceedings from the Ninth North American Crane Workshop, held in Sacramento, are about to be published. Authors should be receiving page proofs in the next two weeks. If authors are prompt about returning page proofs, we should have the Proceedings at the printer two weeks after the proofs are back. The printer has promised the Proceedings in a couple of weeks after receiving it, so possibly by November???. One free copy goes to each author and conference registrant. Additional copies will be available for purchase, but the details have not been ironed out at this time. We thank our editor, Felipe Chavez-Ramirez, for the tremendous job he has done in organizing and editing this volume.

Our next meeting, the Tenth North American Crane Workshop, is scheduled from February 7-10, 2006 in Zacatecas City, Zacatecas, Mexico. This city was founded in 1546 and has many historic buildings dating from the 16<sup>th</sup> to 18<sup>th</sup> centuries. We will kick off with a welcoming evening social on the 7<sup>th</sup>. There will be technical sessions, with over 40 papers, on Wednesday the 8<sup>th</sup> and Friday the 10<sup>th</sup>. Thursday, the 9<sup>th</sup>, will be set aside for an all day field trip to local natural sites in the surrounding area, which includes some of the most southern wintering areas on the continent for sandhill cranes. There will be our traditional closing banquet on the evening of the 10<sup>th</sup>. For those of you interested in this area of Mexico, we have the possibility of a one or two day additional field trip following the meeting.

On a more somber note, we have had word from our colleagues in the path of Hurricane Katrina. Through both USFWS and Scott Hereford, we have learned that the Mississippi Sandhill Crane National Wildlife Refuge sustained some wind and rain damage, but the main buildings are intact. Personnel are concentrating on helping authorities with the massive destruction in the

area, and have not assessed the status of the cranes in the wild. On a more personal note, Scott Hereford, our immediate past president of this organization, and his family evacuated to Atlanta to friends in advance of the storm. However, Scott says that a wall of water up to attic level rolled through their neighborhood, and they expect their house to be a total loss.

Word from Megan Lauber with the Audubon Survival Center is that they also evacuated personnel in advance of the storm. On August 31 they were able to get a few people flown by helicopter into the Center. They found one 5 year-old Whooping Crane (Rhett) and a 21 year-old Mississippi Sandhill Crane (Valentine) dead and one other Mississippi Sandhill Crane missing. All other cranes and other animals at the Center appear to have survived without problems. However, food, water and the safety of personnel are becoming issues which may force the Center to consider evacuating their animals to other locations in the near future. Currently hay is being ferried in by helicopter, two bales a trip. There is no fresh running water, and animals are drinking from water on the ground (in this area uncontaminated rain water because they are out of the city). We will try to post more information on our web site ([www.nacwg.org](http://www.nacwg.org)) as we receive it. Needless to say, our thoughts and prayers are with Scott and Megan and all the folks along the Gulf Coast.

*Glenn H. Olsen, President NACWG, USGS Patuxent Wildlife Research Center*

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## **Regional Reports**

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### **Whooping Crane Breeding Grounds in Wood Buffalo National Park**

Whooping Crane breeding pair surveys were carried out by the Canadian Wildlife Service (Brian Johns and Melanie Failler) between May 14 and 23. A total of 58 nests were discovered, along with an additional 12 pairs that nested in 2004 that are not nesting this year. A total of 72 territorial pairs were observed this year. Several subadult or non-territorial cranes were also observed scattered throughout the breeding area.

The 2004 year was one of drought conditions throughout the crane nesting area. Last year the breeding grounds received only 69% of normal precipitation resulting in many forest fires. Up until the beginning of June of this year the area received about 84% of normal precipitation. In spite of the lack of precipitation, the habitat conditions were only slightly below average at nesting time.

Between June 11 and 17, 2005 the Canadian Wildlife Service (Brian Johns) with the assistance of the United States Fish and Wildlife Service (Tom Stehn and Jim Bredy) conducted hatching success surveys. Forty-eight nests hatched and a total of 62 young Whooping Cranes were observed. Fourteen of the pairs each had two young (twins). Aerial photography was completed by the USFWS (Jim Bredy and Chris Lohrengel) for new nesting areas that had been discovered earlier by B. Johns.

The lack of rain in May (less than half of normal) resulted in deteriorating habitat conditions. Water levels, in particular in the Sass River nesting area were low with many ponds being dry. The dry conditions resulted in the forest fire hazard rating being extreme. Lightning storms passed through the area on June 7 and 12 resulting in fires

near the town of Fort Smith and in the Whooping Crane nesting area. Fire crews from Alberta, Northwest Territories and Wood Buffalo National Park were all battling fires. The fire of biggest concern was burning within 7 km of Fort Smith. Another fire was within 400 metres of a family of cranes but was not threatening the birds. A third fire was threatening to shut down traffic on the only road access to Fort Smith. Water bombers and ground crews were fighting this fire for two days before heavy rains came on June 16. This rain was the equivalent of the normal for the entire month.

The rain was a welcome relief for the fire crews and for the dry marshes; however rain at hatching time leads to higher mortality of the young cranes. Pairs with two young will often lose at least one of their young under such conditions. On June 17 after the rain had subsided we checked seven of the “twin” pairs. Only one family group still had both their young, five others had each lost one young and one pair lost both their young. On June 19 temperatures cooled and heavy rain and some snow fell overnight. The cool temperature combined with the heavy rain further reduced chick survival.

From August 17-19 the CWS (Brian and Melanie) conducted fledging success surveys and discovered 31 young in 29 family units. Habitat conditions had improved in most areas due to heavy rains during the month of July and in early August which ended the fire season earlier than normal. The Klewi nesting area was the only region that remained dry. As a consequence chick production was very poor in that area. In addition to the surveys we also recorded unison calls and checked water gauges during the week.

*Brian Johns, Canadian Wildlife Service*

## **Mississippi Sandhill Crane National Wildlife Refuge**

The Comprehensive Conservation Planning process, mandated for every national wildlife refuge as part of 1997 National Wildlife Refuge Improvement Act, is underway on the Mississippi Sandhill Crane NWR. The refuge Biological Review report was completed in June. The Visitor Services Review is also complete.

In the 25th year of the restocking program with the 2004-2005 releases, 25 captive-reared cranes were transferred to the refuge for acclimation and release. In October-November, 22 captive-reared juveniles in three cohorts from ACRES were transferred, banded, radio-tagged, acclimated, and released: Firetower (8 birds) cohort, Fontainebleau (7), and Duck Pond (7). After a multiple mortality incident (the first ever post-release) at Duck Pond, the lone survivor #457 was captured December 11, rebanded and placed in the Fontainebleau Pen for a second acclimation period. In December, two parent-reared juveniles were brought from White Oak Conservation Center, banded, banded, radio-tagged and placed in Fontainebleau Pen with 457, and debanded in January 2005.

The January 2005 population was 140 cranes, including the recent “releasees.” Although fewer resources were available for monitoring, 29 nests were identified from 23 pairs. For the first time since 1990, a pair laid two renests. Funds were available for full-time

predator control from

USDA APHIS Wildlife Services. In late May, 12 chicks may have been alive, the highest number recorded. Helicopter surveys in late summer should determine survival. By late June, there were still at least two active nests.

There have been several pertinent refuge personnel changes recently. David Zabriskie started work in May as a PFT wildlife biologist to fill the vacancy left by Tracy Grazia last September. The third full-time position on the biology staff was abolished after Jereme Phillips left in 2003. Amy Croft has been doing a great job as a temporary Biotech but funds will run out in September. Assistant Refuge Manager Tom Thornhill retired in April; that position will not be filled anytime soon. The refuge manager position also remains vacant. Project Leader Alan Schriver will transfer out to a refuge in Tennessee in early August. That position will be filled.

*Scott G. Hereford, U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, Mississippi Sandhill Crane National Wildlife Refuge*

## **Eastern Migratory Whooping Crane Reintroduction**

*Winter 2004/05.*--Locations of the HY2001-03 cohorts during winter 2004/05 included 20 birds in Florida, 4 in Tennessee, 7 in South Carolina, and 3 in North Carolina. The latter 10 birds were all from the HY2003 cohort. The birds wintering in North Carolina, outside the range of both other project Whooping Cranes and the wild sandhill population, had summered in Lower Michigan during 2004.

Fall migration 2004 and subsequent wintering were markedly different than the previous fall migration:

- (1) Beginning of fall migration was protracted with more birds leaving later, the last on 11 December.
- (2) Although actual flight days were similar, time to complete migration was generally much longer with typically weeks spent at extended stopover sites.
- (3) The migration was much more dispersed and biased eastward, especially for yearlings on their first unassisted fall migration.
- (4) Winter homing to the Central Gulf Coast and inland areas of west-central Florida was reduced. Most yearlings did not demonstrate fidelity to their juvenile winter location.

The HY2004 cohort consisted of 14 released birds (11 males and 3 females); 13 juveniles, led by Operation Migration ultralight aircraft, arrived at the winter release pen on Chassahowitzka NWR on 12 December. Because the fall migration of older birds was late and these latter birds had not yet passed through the saltmarsh to winter inland, the juveniles were held in a topnetted enclosure constructed outside a corner of the main pen. They were allowed out of the enclosure only when costumed caretakers were present or when no older cranes were present (some exceptions for the resident wintering pair). This practice was continued until 2 March, after which no older cranes other than the resident pair were at the pensite and the juveniles were always allowed to roam freely.

Because of flight feather development problems, one juvenile male (no. 18-04) did not complete training necessary to follow ultralight aircraft on migration. In late October he was released on Necedah NWR to migrate with older cranes. He followed 3 different whooping cranes during the migration. He also spent some time alone and followed Sandhill Cranes along the route. He migrated successfully to Florida, where he wintered with an older Whooping Crane in Pasco County. No. 18-04 became the first reintroduced Whooping Crane in the eastern migratory flock to complete his first migration by following older cranes rather than ultralight aircraft. He migrated alone during spring migration and successfully returned to Central Wisconsin.

*Summer 2005.*--With some exceptions (see below), released Whooping Cranes generally migrated within the corridor between Wisconsin and Florida and summered in or near the core reintroduction area in Central Wisconsin. As in previous years, almost all birds returned to Necedah NWR or adjacent areas at the completion of spring migration. The spring wandering period, most pronounced in yearlings, then began. Subsequent summer distribution reflected the strong homing and natal site fidelity by males, while females tended to disperse unless they were associated with males. Spring wandering in 2005 was similar to that in 2004, which was much less than in 2003. This occurred because there were few yearling females in the population, and most older females were associated with males.

The main exception to the homing pattern described above occurred in 2004 when 8 yearlings migrated too far eastward and were blocked from returning to Necedah NWR by Lake Michigan during spring. A group of 3 eventually circumnavigated the lake and returned to the Necedah area in July. The remaining group of 5 summered in Lower Michigan. After migrating through southwestern Ontario and returning to Lower Michigan in spring 2005, 2 of the 3 surviving birds of this latter group were retrieved on 30 June 2005 and returned to join the flock on Necedah NWR. The remaining bird was reported in Vermont during June and New York in August. As of 13 August 2005, there are 42 individuals in the eastern migratory population. Except for the Vermont female, all birds are in Wisconsin: 35 in the core reintroduction area in Central Wisconsin and 6 at 4 sites in southeastern Wisconsin. Within the core area, 30 individuals are on Necedah NWR.

*Survival.*--Of 53 juvenile Whooping Cranes so far released in this reintroduction, there have been 11 mortalities. These resulted from predation (7), powerline strike (1), capture myopathy (1, euthanized), and 2 mortalities remain under investigation and details cannot be released. Mortalities due to predation resulted from bobcats in southeastern U.S. (5), an undetermined predator in Wisconsin (1), and predation in Wisconsin of a bird that was roosting on land because of a broken leg. A protective protocol has been effective in reducing potential bobcat predation at the winter release site on Chassahowitzka NWR.

*Breeding.*--As indicated by copulation and/or nest-building, 7 breeding pairs (6 on Necedah NWR and 1 on adjacent Meadow Valley SWA) were apparent during spring 2005. At least 5 of these pairs built nests, and 2 pairs each laid 1 egg. Neither egg was adequately attended by the young, inexperienced pairs, and both eggs were shortly lost.

Several other potential pairs are also evident, and prospects are good for increased reproductive activity in 2006.

*HY2005 Cohort.*--As of 13 August, 21 chicks are being reared for ultralight-led migration this fall. These birds were hatched at Patuxent and then transferred to Necedah NWR. An additional 4 chicks are being reared for direct autumn release (DAR). They were hatched at ICF and are currently being reared on Necedah NWR.

*Richard P. Urbanek, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, and Lara E. A. Fondow, International Crane Foundation, on behalf of Whooping Crane Eastern Partnership*

## **The Florida Non-Migratory Flock of Whooping Cranes**

In 2002 the first wild “recruitment” took place in this flock when a chick was raised up to independence by soft-released parents. The worst drought in Florida history (1998-2001) was thought responsible for delaying the first recruitment into the population. In 2003, two more chicks were recruited into the population. In 2004, a single chick was recruited. In 2005, eight pairs had 11 nests but only one chick was hatched and it died at 6 days of age. For several breeding seasons now, we have seen many nests but few eggs hatched. Examination of eggs collected from these nests revealed that the bad eggs were either infertile or that the embryo died at an early stage of development. Wetland water levels have been “normal” since the end of the drought and Florida Sandhill Cranes have been reproducing at high levels since then. So the Florida environment (water level at least) is not likely a problem. Our efforts in the near future will be concentrated on trying to figure out what is going on with the poor hatching rate.

At present we routinely monitor 53 birds (14 pairs). Five sub-adults dispersed from Florida in May and were seen 480 km north at the Ace Basin National Wildlife Refuge in coastal South Carolina. They were only seen there once, and since then we have not been able to track them down. Birds from this flock have dispersed out-of-state before, mainly during the great drought when all Florida marshes dried up.

At the latest Recovery Team Meeting (February 2005) we reported that not only did there appear to be problems with recruitment, but also survival of older age-classes of adults. Hence, we recommended to the Team that for the up-coming winter 2005-2006 “release” season, no Whooping Cranes be released into the non-migratory flock until there was improvement in reproduction (in the “wild”) and/or survival.

*Marty Folk and Steve Nesbitt, Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission*

## **The Michigan 2004 Eastern Greater Sandhill Crane Survey**

Since 1979, the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service has conducted a coordinated fall survey of Greater Sandhill Cranes in the eastern United States. Counts were scheduled during the last week in October or first week in November to ensure that cranes were concentrated and easily counted, but early enough to avoid excessive turnover at the Jasper-Pulaski

Fish and Game Area in northern Indiana, the largest staging area for the population. Wildlife personnel and volunteers from Great Lakes states to Florida have made this the best estimate of size and trends of the eastern population.

November 1, 2004, more than 30 volunteers counted 11,250 Sandhill Cranes and one Whooping Crane at 37 locations in Michigan (see table). Baker Sanctuary, Calhoun County, tallied the highest number 3,609 followed by 2,570 at the Haehnle Sanctuary in Jackson County. These two Michigan Audubon Society sanctuaries accounted for 55% of all the cranes counted in Michigan. The Whooping Crane seen in Barry County was originally reintroduced in Wisconsin.

The 2004 Michigan count was the highest since the survey began in 1979. Totals steadily increased from only 757 in 1979 to 6,807 in 1998 and then leveled off until 2001 when 8,060 were tallied. Counts then climbed to 9,956 in 2003. During the same period, counts of the entire eastern population increased from 14,385 sandhills in 1979 to 37,827 in 1998 (Len Schumann, pers. comm.). Since then the counts have declined. In 2004, 28,947 cranes were tallied in the eastern population's range (Sean Kelly, pers. comm.).

Several factors interacted to affect survey results. Much of the increase was due to expansion of the population. Once an uncommon species, sandhills have made a remarkable recovery in Michigan and other Great Lakes states. As the population increased, it appears that cranes selected additional staging areas that were not consistently counted. As a result, much of the fluctuation in numbers was due to incomplete surveys. Previously, counts in Michigan were conducted only at traditional staging sites, mostly at Baker and Haehnle Sanctuaries. The number of areas surveyed was expanded from 14 in 2003 to 37 last year with the inclusion of many new, previously unreported staging sites. If only areas surveyed in 2003 were counted the total would have been 7,850 cranes in 2004 instead of 11,250, leaving little doubt that better coverage is needed. Weather also affects the count. When the temperatures are mild cranes remain dispersed over a larger area and migrate later, but an early freeze up and deep snow will concentrate the birds making them easier to count. Conversely, it is harder to count when inclement weather affects visibility.

The Eastern Greater Sandhill Crane Survey is another opportunity for citizen science, much like the Christmas Bird Count, Winter Bird Feeder Survey, etc. In an effort to improve the accuracy of the survey, additional volunteers are needed this year. People can help in two ways. One, they can report locations where cranes have been seen in previous years during the last week in October or the first week in November. Volunteers can then follow up on these reports of new staging areas. Secondly, additional counters are needed at many of the staging areas. The best method is to count cranes leaving night roosts early in the morning or when they return in late afternoon. Sometimes it is not possible to locate night roosts, so cranes are counted when dispersed during the day in fields. Persons interested in cooperating in the 2005 Michigan survey can contact me for more information or Sean Kelly for other staging areas used by the eastern population of sandhills.

For more information: Ron Hoffman, 517-769-6891, [hoffmanrj@dmci.net](mailto:hoffmanrj@dmci.net)

Sean Kelly, US F&WS, 612-713-5470, [sean\\_kelly@fws.gov](mailto:sean_kelly@fws.gov)

Eastern Greater Sandhill Crane Survey Results For Michigan.

Area & Number of Sites 2003, 2004	11/3/03	11/1/04
<b>Allegan 0, 2</b>		386
<b>Barry County 0, 8</b>		1,743
<b>Calhoun County 0, 1</b>		244
Convis Twp. Baker Sanctuary 1, 1	5,328	3,609
<b>Cass County 0, 1</b>		465
<b>Clinton County 0, 1</b>		6
<b>Hillsdale County 1, 2</b>	207	414
<b>Jackson County 8, 8</b>	1,020	703
Leoni Twp. Haehnle Sanctuary 1, 1	2,975	2,570
<b>Kalamazoo County 0, 4</b>		471
<b>Livingston County 2, 4</b>	290	578
<b>St. Joseph County 0, 2</b>		50
<b>Washtenaw County 2,2</b>	136	11
<b>Michigan total</b>	9,956	11,250
<b>Great Lakes population total</b>	29,300	28,947

*Ron Hoffman, Jackson, Michigan*

## West Coast Crane Counts

This year, the West Coast Crane Working Group (WCCWG) has focused its attention on the Conboy Lake National Wildlife Refuge in the Glenwood Valley at the base of Mt. Adams, Washington. The refuge was established in 1964 to preserve the remaining wildlife habitat in the lake bed and surrounding area for waterfowl nesting and Sandhill Cranes. The refuge is located in the only nesting area in the state for Greater Sandhill Cranes and contains one of the state's four populations of Oregon spotted frogs.

The 18 nesting pairs in Klickitat and Yakima counties are the only breeding Sandhill Cranes in the state of Washington. Sandhill Cranes are listed as endangered in Washington and there is a need to increase the crane population to achieve de-listing.

The Sandhill Crane has been listed as an endangered species by the state of Washington since 1981. Sandhill Cranes are represented in Washington by about 18 pairs that breed in Klickitat and Yakima Counties, about 23,000 sandhills that stop in eastern Washington during migration, and 3,000-4,000 sandhills that stop on lower Columbia River bottomlands. Up to 1,000 sandhills have wintered on lower Columbia bottomlands in recent years, but most of the cranes seen in Washington winter in California.

The historical distribution of breeding cranes in Washington was poorly documented, but the few historical accounts mention breeding in south-central, northeastern and

southeastern regions, and the southern Puget Sound Basin. Crane numbers had been severely reduced due to widespread habitat destruction concurrent with human settlement, and perhaps more importantly, unregulated hunting which continued until passage of the federal Migratory Bird Treaty Act in 1916.

The species was extirpated as a breeder from the state after 1941 when the last nest was documented at Signal Peak, Yakima County, in south-central Washington. Some 31 years later, they were again found summering in the Glenwood Valley on Conboy Lake National Wildlife Refuge, Klickitat County in 1972, but it was not until 1979 that nesting was confirmed.

A total of 18 territorial pairs was documented in 2003: 15 at Conboy Lake National Wildlife Refuge; and one each on Yakama Indian Nation lands, Yakima County; Panakanic Valley, Klickitat County; and on Washington Department of Natural Resource (WDNR) lands along Deer Creek, Yakima County. The total summer population in Washington in 2003 was 49 birds. Five nests produced chicks to fledging age in 2003.

Few studies are currently being conducted on Sandhill Cranes in the Pacific Flyway. Joseph D. Engler, Biologist of the USFWS, Ridgefield NWR Complex, has undertaken a study of the nesting Sandhill Cranes in Washington State. In 2002, the WCCWG cooperated with the Washington State Department of Fish and Wildlife in the joint funding and preparation of a recovery plan. The WCCWG is now working to implement the recommendations of that plan.

Conboy Lake NWR, with the highest concentration of breeding Sandhill Cranes, is endangered. There is a possibility the entire refuge will be mothballed to save money. It would simply be locked up and no activity would take place, public or private.

The WCCWG has arranged for speakers to address students last May at the Glenwood School and has funded a July 2005 aerial crane count by Joe Engler. The group is currently working with the local communities to form a "friends" group and is circulating a grant proposal to potential donors.

Visit our website at <http://www.wccwg.nacwg.org/>

*Thomas J. Hoffmann, Chair, West Coast Crane Working Group*

## **Patuxent Wildlife Research Center Propagation Program**

Patuxent Wildlife Research Center had busy breeding and chick rearing seasons this year. A total of 23 fertile whooping crane eggs were laid at Patuxent. Additional fertile whooper eggs were brought in from ICF (9), Audubon Species Survival Center (2), and the Calgary Zoo (1) to be hatched and reared at Patuxent for the WCEP ultralight migration project. The birds received extensive training at Patuxent and were shipped to Necedah NWR, Wisconsin at about 40-50 days of age. Twenty-one chicks in total were

sent to Necedah. In addition, one chick was held back for health reasons and four chicks of high genetic value were kept to become future breeders. Patuxent sent three fertile whooper eggs to ICF to be used in the WCEP Direct Autumn Release project and two to the San Antonio Zoo to be raised as captive breeders.

One whooping crane female who laid eggs for the first time this year (Studbook #1366) has had an eventful past. She originally came to Patuxent as an egg collected from Wood Buffalo National Park in 1995. She was hatched and reared at Patuxent, then sent to Florida to join the non-migratory release flock in February 1996. A few weeks after release, the bird was unable to fly and was taken to Gainesville for rehabilitation. After it was determined she could not be released, she was sent to the White Oak Conservation Center in Yulee, Florida. She lived there for a few years, then was returned to Patuxent in early 2000 to be paired with a male determined to be her ideal genetic match. Unfortunately her ideal genetic match was not an ideal behavioral match. She did not produce with her first mate and so was paired with a different male in late 2004. Whooper #1366 and her new mate produced eggs and raised a sandhill chick in their first season together. It seems she is finally *home*.

*Jane Nicolich Chandler, USGS Patuxent Wildlife Research Center*

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## Conservation Issues

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### **The Allocation of Whooping Crane Chicks (or Why My Hair is Turning Gray)**

Every year, decisions have to be made about the Whooping Crane chicks that the captive breeding centers work so hard to raise. Each chick needs a home. Here is how it is done.

The Recovery Team in 1998 prioritized the use for chicks coming from captivity. These uses are, in order from highest to lowest priority:

1. Maintenance of captive flocks;
2. Florida releases;
3. Wisconsin releases;
4. Off-corridor experiments considered essential to Florida, Wisconsin, or propagation;
5. Education;
6. Other approved populations;
- and 7. Other experiments.

Each captive Whooping Crane has a mean kinship value calculated for it annually to estimate how unique it is genetically in the captive flock. Certain pairs have few siblings and thus there is a great need to keep their offspring in captivity to become future breeders. These chicks we call “genetic holdbacks.” In many cases, artificial insemination from specific males is done to maximize the genetic value of holdbacks. Approximately six genetically valuable chicks are held back annually to replace birds that have died and slowly increase the size of the captive flock to 153 birds, the number calculated to be able to retain 90% of the flock genetics for 100 years.

Other pairs have produced lots of offspring so are already over-represented in the captive flocks. So their offspring are designated for reintroduced populations. With the Recovery Team in an assessment phase for the Florida nonmigratory population, holding off in 2005 from putting any additional birds in Florida, the chicks with less valuable genetics were designated this year for the Wisconsin reintroduction. The earliest eggs went to the ultralight project, whereas some of the eggs hatched later were designated for the Direct Autumn Release (DAR) program (juvenile birds released in the fall into flocks of wild Whooping Cranes in Wisconsin). With all the initial ultralight conditioning done at Patuxent Wildlife Research Center, this meant some of the early eggs from other breeding centers, including Calgary Zoo, San Antonio Zoo, Audubon Species Survival Center, and the International Crane Foundation, were shipped to Patuxent. Some of the later eggs at Patuxent were shipped to the San Antonio Zoo to become captive breeders, and other eggs went to the International Crane Foundation and added to the DAR program. Some of the chicks designated for reintroductions developed health problems and had to be held back in captivity. These birds, because they have less valuable genetics, may be used at the captive centers as imprinting models, or may be sent to zoos strictly for display (and not for breeding) purposes.

Captive flock managers hold weekly conference calls during the spring to make decisions about the number and location for genetic holdbacks, and about shipping eggs between facilities. Throw in variables such as egg hatching dates, reintroduction project desires of having ultralight chicks all as close in age as possible, the sex of the new hatchling making a difference on whether the bird becomes a genetic holdback, considerations of sex ratios and genetic diversity within each reintroduced population, space and staffing limitations at each facility, and the biggest variable of predicting what a given female will produce in subsequent clutches, and, believe me, chick allocation gets a little complicated.

In 2005, the captive centers ended up producing approximately 21 chicks for the ultralight program, five for the Direct Autumn Release, about eight genetic holdbacks, and several birds held back with health problems. I didn't quite tell the truth about this all being a little complicated. It's VERY complicated. Only because the flock managers and staff really know their birds and can look into their crystal balls and make accurate forecasts about how many total chicks a female will produce in a year, does this whole system of chick allocation work.

*Tom Stehn, U.S. Whooping Crane Coordinator, USFWS*

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## **News and Announcements**

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### **THE TENTH NORTH AMERICAN CRANE WORKSHOP**

**Location: Zacatecas City, Zacatecas, Mexico**

**Date: February 7-10, 2006**

The tentative schedule for the Tenth North American Crane Workshop is as follows:

- Ice-breaker, Tuesday, 7 February
- Paper sessions, Wednesday, 8 February and Friday, 10 February
- Callejoneada (local street event with brass band and mescal) on Wednesday evening
- All day field trip Thursday, 9 February
- Whooping Crane Recovery Team meeting, 6-7 February

The paper sessions promise to be exceptional and will reflect the international flavor of this meeting. It is too close to the submission deadline at the time of this writing to say exactly how many papers will be presented, but the program is currently well filled with exciting titles. There will also be a poster session with opportunities to meet with authors over snacks. The following is just a sampling of paper topics.

The Cuban Sandhill Crane as an umbrella species

Surveillance for West Nile Virus at the International Crane Foundation 2000-2005

Crop depredations by cranes in Siberia

Capture success of Whooping Cranes in Florida using the clap trap method

Responses of nesting Sandhill Cranes to research activities

Hunting success for mid-continent Sandhill Cranes in the Central Flyway

Assessment of Whooping Crane habitat needs at White Lake, Louisiana

Common Crane management in Germany

Whooping Crane collisions with power lines

The Whooping Crane in Mexico

Infectious bursal disease virus in cranes

Eastern Equine Encephalitis mortality in the Whooping Crane

Status of the Whooping Crane in Florida

Sandhills and beavers

Fat storage by Sandhill Cranes

### **News of Members**

*Gay Gomez*, Associate Professor of Geography at McNeese State University, Lake Charles, Louisiana, was appointed by Governor Kathleen Blanco to serve on the White Lake Property Advisory Board. The board is a 13-member state commission charged with advising the Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries on wetland

management and land use issues and on developing an environmental education program for the White Lake Wetland Conservation Area. This is the extensive freshwater wetland property north of White Lake, where the Louisiana non-migratory population of Whooping Cranes existed until 1950 and where some migratory whoopers once wintered.

**Editor's Note:** *The Unison Call* is a forum to share updates and opinions. Articles are not peer reviewed. Reviews and opinions included in any section of the newsletter are those of the author and do not necessarily represent the views of the NACWG.

*The Unison Call* is published twice yearly, winter/spring and summer/fall. Membership is based on a calendar year. Contributions, suggestions, opinions, drawings, cartoons, and photographs are welcome. Items can be sent to:

David and Cathy Ellis, Editors  
HC 1 Box 4420  
Oracle, AZ 85623

E-mail: [dcellis@theriver.com](mailto:dcellis@theriver.com)

Deadlines are normally June 10 and December 10. Please send information as a Microsoft Word attachment (e-mail) whenever possible.

**Crane Trivia: How many crane species are there worldwide? (Do your calculations and send your answers to the editors. We plan to publish some in the next *Unision Call*.)**

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

Membership is based on a calendar year. A membership directory is periodically mailed to members. Provide the contact information below **that you want printed** in the directory.

\_\_\_\_\_ Active \$10      \_\_\_\_\_ Sustaining \$30      \_\_\_\_\_ Contributing \$50      \_\_\_\_\_ Other \$

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

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