

THE UNISON CALL

- Newsletter of the North American Crane Working Group -

Spring/Summer 2010

Vol. 21 No. 1

President's Message

It may be challenging to think about next spring while dealing with the summer heat, but it's time to start planning now for March and the next North American Crane Workshop. We will be at the heart of the continent and the heart of the flyway for the Midcontinent Population of Sandhill Cranes at the Platte River in Grand Island, Nebraska. The timing of the workshop should be near the peak of spring migration of Sandhills, so participants will have great opportunities to see this incredible sight. Felipe Chavez-Ramirez serves on the boards of both the NACWG and the Waterbird Society and is our able logistics planner for the meeting. David Aborn, University of Tennessee-Chattanooga, is our Program Chair. For the first time, we will be holding a joint meeting with the Waterbird Society. This joint meeting should provide for new synergies on issues of common interest, such as wetland conservation, water conflicts, and changing climate. It will also provide an excellent opportunity for networking with other avian biologists and some cross-fostering of knowledge and ideas. For more details, check out the first formal announcement in this newsletter; the call for papers will be coming later this fall.

The active research and conservation efforts for cranes are demonstrated by the range of news in this newsletter. Many challenges continue to face the whoopers in Aransas, but early reports from the breeding grounds have been

good. The Whooping Crane Eastern Partnership continues its program to reintroduce Whooping Cranes in the eastern United States. The first tracking of Whooping Cranes in over 25 years is underway, with birds marked at Aransas last winter and more to be tagged at Wood Buffalo as this newsletter goes to press. Sandhill Cranes in the eastern flyway are also sporting satellite transmitters in new studies to document their wintering, staging, and breeding locations (see article on page 5). Internationally, crane biologists, hydrologists, and other specialists gathered at an international crane workshop in eastern Russia earlier this summer to discuss cranes, water, climate change, and interactions with agriculture (see article on pages 3-4). With the leadership of Jim Harris, that meeting also has revitalized the Crane Specialist Group, which is part of the IUCN's Species Survival Commission. These are just a few of the diverse activities related to cranes in North America. The dedication and passion of all involved in the conservation of cranes and their ecosystems is inspiring, and a critical part of success of these efforts.

Spread the word.... If you know of others involved with crane conservation who may not be members, please share a copy of this newsletter with them, or direct them to our web site (www.nacwg.org).

Jane Austin, President

TWELFTH NORTH AMERICAN CRANE WORKSHOP

will be held in Grand Island Nebraska, March 13 to 16, 2011 and will be jointly held with the Waterbird Society. The workshop is open to all those interested in crane research and conservation. Workshop details and registration information coming soon.

Contacts for the meeting are:

Felipe-Chavez-Ramirez, Local Committee Chair (fchavez@whoopingcrane.org) and **David Aborn**, Scientific Program Chair (david-aborn@utc.edu).

all other cranes species around the world. We have an opportunity at the next workshop to put forward resolutions for discussion and the vote of the membership. Do you have an issue that you feel is significant and deserves a resolution be considered by the Working Group? If so, please contact Jane Austin (jaustin@usgs.gov) to discuss it. We would like any resolutions be drafted and shared before the workshop to give members time to consider them. We also need to identify the best means of distribution beyond the crane community, such as key decision-makers.

Jane Austin

Resolutions

Soliciting draft resolutions for the upcoming workshop

Resolutions are a call for action by the organization. Resolutions seek to address problems, situations, or concerns of the organization and which require action for solution. They also serve to raise awareness in and to seek support of a decision-maker, such as a head of a government agency or NGO, or an elected official. While we are a small organization, our members encompass the best expertise on crane ecology, and our collective voice may help generate awareness and support for actions important to crane conservation.

At earlier workshops, the NACWG has developed and published resolutions on a wide range of subjects such as urging satellite-telemetry studies of Whooping Crane migration, re-analysis of egg removal from wild Whooping Crane nests, protection of water inflows at Aransas, and support for legislation related to cranes. Resolutions were published in the Proceedings of the North American Crane Workshop but were not distributed further. Resolutions that are published only in the Proceedings, however, have minimal or no impact because of their limited distribution and the lengthy time between acceptance and publication. To be more effective, resolutions need to be communicated via letter or email to the decision makers involved, or more broadly to the public.

There are many challenges facing Sandhill and Whooping Cranes in North America, and indeed

The North American Crane Working Group Awards Committee is seeking a call for nominations for the L. H. Walkinshaw Award to be presented at the workshop. The purpose of this award is to recognize those individuals whose efforts have advanced our ability to conserve a species, subspecies, or population of cranes in North America. Criteria for consideration for this award are long-term involvement with conservation of cranes through research, management, education, or application of biological principles to the preservation of cranes in North America. Past recipients include: Jacob M. Valentine, Dr. James C. Lewis, Dr. George F. Gee, Stephen Nesbitt and Ernie Kuyt. For more details on the award and recipients, visit the NACWG website (<http://www.nacwg.org/awards.html>). Please submit a 1-2 page nomination highlighting the nominee's contribution to crane conservation by September 15th to tracygrazia@gmail.com.

Tracy Grazia, Secretary

Update: ***Proceedings of the 11th North American Crane Workshop*** (held 23-27 September 2008, Wisconsin Dells, WI). Barry Hartup, Editor of the 11th *Proceedings*, anticipates publication anywhere from early fall 2010 to the next workshop in mid-March 2011. Formatting difficulties at the printing stage have led to delays.

Visit to Russia by U.S. Scientists and the International Crane Workshop

In May and June 2010, we had the privilege of visiting southeastern Russia as part of a scientist exchange between Russia and the North American Crane Working Group. Our travel was funded by a grant from the Trust for Mutual Understanding awarded to the International Crane Foundation. We participated in an International Crane Workshop focused on climate change, agriculture, and cranes. The conference, which was attended by 38 scientists from 13 countries and 5 continents, was held at Muraviovka Park in the Tambovka District, Amur Region, Russia.

The workshop environment itself was inspiring and intriguing. Muraviovka Park is located on the terrace edge of the Amur River floodplain (Google Earth 49° 52' 23.2" N and 127° 42' 10.7" E) and overlooks a wide reach of rich floodplain wetlands. Muraviovka Park (www.muraviovkapark.ru/engIndex.html) was established in 1996 by the International Socio-ecological Union and is the first and only privately owned nature reserve in Russia. The 5,600 hectare reserve is located largely in the floodplain of the Amur River which forms the border with China, supports over 200 species of birds and diverse flora, and has been designated a RAMSAR Wetland of International Importance. Workshop participants usually spent early mornings and evenings birding and botanizing in the wetlands and terrace forests. From the bunkhouse and patio, we frequently saw Hooded and White-naped Cranes, and on our excursions we also saw Red-crowned and Siberian Cranes, as well as the endangered Oriental White Stork. The Reserve has a wonderful educational outreach program; they spoke to a few thousand kids last year alone, including trips to their schools as well as hosting kids for multi-day educational experiences. In addition, they have an organic farm and sawmill operations which they use as a demonstration of sustainable land use for area communities.

The International Crane Conference was an outstanding educational experience. Twenty-eight specialists, representing the various crane working groups around the world and diverse disciplines, gave presentations, discussed strategies, and initiated

work on action plans for crane conservation. We heard about the many challenges facing cranes in their regions, such as the impacts of dams, changing hydrology, changing climate, and fire. Many interesting discussions ensued, and a lot of good suggestions were shared among the participants regarding strategies to deal with conservation issues. Crane–agriculture conflicts are common throughout the world, although the specific crops and prevailing regulations and cultures result in different types of conflicts and solutions. Water, and its increasing scarcity, was also a major discussion point. Many decisions being made now regarding water will have long-term consequences for cranes. Innovative solutions are needed in virtually all regions to ensure the long-term viability of crane populations while also meeting human needs in the face of extreme uncertainty regarding our climatic future. The workshop also led to the renewal of the Crane Specialist Group, led by Jim Harris, and operating under the auspices of IUCN's Species Survival Commission.

After about a week we left Muraviovka Park and took a 36-hour train ride westward to the Chita Region. The train ride itself was quite an experience! We saw some incredible wilderness, many small Russian towns, and got a unique glimpse of Russian culture. In addition, we slept four in our sleeper car and frequently had a total of 6 people in a room not much larger than a walk-in closet. Needless to say, we got to know each other very well! George Archibald, Jim Harris, Eleya Ilyashenko from the International Crane Foundation (and representing the Eurasian Crane Working Group), and Oleg Goroshko from Daursky State Nature Biosphere Reserve in the Chita Region were our travel companions. After arriving in Chita, we drove 5 hours south to the border area of Russia, China, and Mongolia. The Daursky Nature Reserve is part of a tri-country agreement that established nature reserves in Russia, China, and Mongolia. The overall protected area is now 1,725,200 ha across the three countries. In Russia, the Daursky Nature Reserve encompasses 45,790 ha in the core area and 163,530 ha in the buffer area. The reserve

International Crane Workshop in Russia

(continued)

is located in the Daurian steppe ecoregion and supports a lake and a wetland that are each several hundred square kilometers. The grassland bird communities are absolutely amazing. Very little, if any, of the grassland in the reserve has been plowed. Although the region is currently in the drought phase of a very prominent 30 year drought cycle, during wet cycles White-naped, Eurasian, Red-crowned, and Demoiselle Cranes breed here and Siberian and Hooded Cranes use the area as stopover habitat. We observed Hooded and White-naped Cranes in the few remaining wet areas of the large wetland, and several of the more upland Demoiselle Cranes were noted. We remained at Daursky for several days before heading back to Moscow and then home.

This trip was truly an amazing opportunity. We sincerely thank the North American Crane Working Group, the International Crane Foundation, the staff at Muraviovka Park and Daursky Nature Reserve, and our employer, USGS, for making this a possibility, and for the excellent support provided throughout our travels. We were thoroughly impressed with the exceptional professional and interpersonal skills of our hosts. Their dedication to cranes and overall wetland and wildlife conservation is truly inspiring. It was a real privilege to visit their country and it is a favor that we hope we can return to them in the future.

Sammy King* and Jane Austin

*USGS Louisiana Cooperative Fish and Wildlife Research Unit, Baton Rouge, LA

First documented wintering Sandhill Crane (*Grus canadensis*) in Delaware

We documented a Sandhill Crane (*Grus canadensis*) near Townsend, Delaware from mid December 2007 through late February 2008. Sandhill Cranes are considered rare in Delaware. Few sightings have been accepted by the Delaware Bird Records Committee (DBRC) and there are no modern reports of Sandhill Cranes wintering in Delaware. Prior to our observation, the DBRC accepted only one record of a Sandhill Crane in Delaware (DBRC #97/25, Sandhill Crane). We documented the second verified and accepted record (DBRC #08/05, Sandhill Crane) and the first modern record of a Sandhill Crane wintering in the state of Delaware. We also documented attempted kleptoparasitism of a fish by the Sandhill Crane on a Great Blue Heron (*Ardea herodias*). The published report can be found in *Delmarva Ornithologist*, Volume 38, 2009 or a pdf version is available by email from Thomas E. Lewis at thom_lewis@fws.gov.

Thomas E. Lewis* and Albert E. Dager

*U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
11510 American Holly Drive
Laurel, MD 20708

Sandhill Crane photographed near Townsend, DE on 24 February 2008. Photograph by Judy Montgomery.



Satellite Tracking of Eastern Population Sandhill Cranes

The Eastern Population (EP) of Sandhill Cranes (*Grus canadensis tabida*) is rapidly expanding in size and geographic range. To date, the core EP breeding range occurs in Wisconsin, Michigan, and central Ontario. However, the EP range has expanded in all directions as the population has grown. Little is known about the geographic extent of breeding, migratory, and wintering ranges of EP cranes, or migratory chronology, use of staging areas, annual recruitment, and habitat use. In December of 2009, David Fronczak, M.S. candidate from the University of Minnesota, initiated a pilot project and began trapping and affixing solar-powered Global Positioning System (GPS) satellite transmitters on EP cranes to assess seasonal movements. To date, David has rocket-netted and attached transmitters to 7 cranes within the Hiwassee Wildlife Refuge in Tennessee and Goose Ponds Fish and Wildlife Area (FWA) in Indiana. Preliminary movement data show that 5 of the 7 birds migrated to their respective breeding grounds in Wisconsin. One bird is located near Grand Rapids, Michigan and 1 bird is located north of Sault Saint Marie, Ontario. Researchers intend to affix an additional 23 transmitters to EP cranes at Jasper-Pulaski FWA and Hiwassee starting fall 2010.

In a collaborative effort, Everett Hanna, M.Sc. candidate from the University of Western Ontario and Long Point Waterfowl, is conducting a concurrent research project based on the North Shore of Lake Huron, Ontario, a key EP staging and breeding area in Canada. Everett carried out a preliminary field season in 2009 collecting a minimum fall population estimate of 9000 cranes and an estimate of fall recruitment of $13.2 \pm 3.82\%$ (mean \pm SE). During the 2010 field season, Everett is focusing research efforts on Manitoulin Island, Ontario where he is rocket-netting and banding 10 cranes with solar-powered GPS satellite transmitters. Further, Everett is attempting to collect additional data pertaining to population size and recruitment as well as habitat use, including roost sites in the region. Preliminary movement data from the first 4 marked birds reinforce the importance of well-established feeding and roost sites.



To learn more about this collaborative project and follow the movements of marked cranes, please visit our interactive 'Crane Tracker' webpage at <http://www.bsc-eoc.org/research/lpwwrf/index.jsp?lang=EN&targetpg=lpwwrfcranetracker>.

David Fronczak and Everett E. Hanna

David Fronczak
Migratory Bird Management
Bishop Henry Whipple Federal Building
1 Federal Drive Room 501
Fort Snelling, MN 55111-4058
dave_fronczak@fws.gov

Everett E. Hanna
Long Point Waterfowl
University of Western Ontario
115 Front St.
Port Rowan, Ontario N0E 1M0
ehanna23@uwo.ca

Regional Reports

Whooping Crane Numbers in North America, August 24, 2010

| Wild Populations | Adult | Young ^D | Total | Adult Pairs |
|-----------------------------|------------|--------------------|------------------|-------------|
| Aransas/Wood Buffalo | 242 | 21 ^B | 263 ^A | 78 |
| Rocky Mountains | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Florida non-migratory | 24 | 1 | 25 ^C | 9 |
| Wisconsin/Florida migratory | 94 | 2 | 96 | 9 |
| Subtotal in the wild | 360 | 24 | 384 | 96 |

^A The Aransas-Wood Buffalo population (AWBP) is currently estimated at 263 birds. Young shown are from 2009 for AWBP. AWBP chicks hatched in 2010 are not yet included in this table. In 2010, a record 74 pairs nested and fledged 46 chicks.

^B In 2009, 52 chicks hatched in Canada but only 22 fledged. All 22 completed the migration, but one died at Aransas in January, 2010.

^C Florida is currently monitoring 25 birds. Three others are missing but could show up.

^D Two chicks that hatched from wild nests in Wisconsin and one in Florida in 2010 are currently surviving.

| Captive Populations | Adult | Young ^A | Total | Breeding Pairs |
|------------------------------------|------------|--------------------|------------|----------------|
| Patuxent WRC, Maryland | 68 | 0 | 68 | 15 |
| International Crane Foundation, WI | 31 | 0 | 31 | 11 |
| Devonian Wildlife Conservation | 22 | 0 | 22 | 6 |
| Species Survival Center, Louisiana | 11 | 0 | 11 | 1 |
| Calgary Zoo, Alberta | 2 | 0 | 2 | 0 |
| New Orleans Zoo, Louisiana | 2 | 0 | 2 | 0 |
| San Antonio Zoo, Texas | 7 | 0 | 7 | 1 |
| Homosassa Springs Wildlife State | 2 | 0 | 2 | 0 |
| Lowry Park Zoo, Tampa, Florida | 2 | 0 | 2 | 0 |
| Jacksonville Zoo, Florida | 2 | 0 | 2 | 0 |
| Milwaukee County Zoo, Wisconsin | 2 | 0 | 2 | 0 |
| Sylvan Heights Waterfowl Park, NC | 1 | 0 | 1 | 0 |
| Subtotal in captivity | 152 | 0 | 152 | 34 |

^A Chicks hatched in 2010 are not included above since they have not yet fledged.

Total (wild + captive): 384 + 152 = 536 *Compiled by Tom Stehn, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Region 2*

Update on Eastern Migratory Whooping Crane Reintroduction

Winter 2009/10 and Spring 2010 —Winter distribution, including 20 ultralight-led (UL) juveniles at 2 winter release sites, was: Florida (50), Kentucky (10), Tennessee (8-9), Indiana (8), Alabama (8), South Carolina (4), Georgia (3), Mississippi (1), and state undetermined (6-7), plus 6 birds suspected but not confirmed dead. Mortalities of adult-plumaged birds during January-July included 1 juvenile UL male and 1 adult female in Florida (predation), and a 2-year-old female (predation) and adult male (undetermined cause) in Wisconsin.

Reproduction —Nine pairs (8 on Necedah National Wildlife Refuge, 1 in a private cranberry reservoir in Wood County) began incubation in the core reintroduction area, 1-5 April. As in the previous 5 years, all nests initiated at the beginning of the nesting season were unsuccessful, and most pairs deserted their nests in a synchronous pattern. Of later nests (initiated 29 April – 12 May), 1 renest was deserted, but the second renest of that pair, renests of 3 other pairs, and late first nests of 3 additional pairs (the latter containing the first 2 direct autumn-released [DAR] females to reproduce in the population) were all incubated full-term. The 2 infertile eggs of the Wood County pair were replaced with 1 captive-produced egg from Patuxent Wildlife Research Center. Seven chicks hatched from 5 nests. Single eggs in the 2 remaining nests were infertile. As of 20 July, 2 chicks remained—1 on Necedah NWR and 1 in Wood County.

Current Population Size — As of 20 July 2010, the eastern migratory population consisted of an estimated 97 birds (52 males, 43 females, 2 chicks) including 88 in Wisconsin, 1 in Michigan, 1 in Indiana, 2 last recorded in North Dakota, 2 not located since spring migration, and 3 missing since December 2009.

Richard P. Urbanek, Necedah, Wisconsin

Florida Resident Whooping Crane Flock Update

As of 30 June 2010 we monitored 24 Whooping Cranes (*Grus americana*) (10 males, 14 females) including 9 pairs. We monitored 11 pairs (125.8 hours during 100 observation periods) for frequency of copulation from winter (beginning 3 November 2009) until the breeding season in order to examine the relationship between winter rainfall, copulation frequency, and fertility. Lack of copulations during 61 sampling periods (4612 min) in November and December was not supportive of the hypothesis that copulation is the mechanism responsible for the correlation between winter rainfall and fertility. Eight of 11 pairs nested this spring; 3 pairs hatched 4 chicks and 1 chick survived at the end of June. This spring, in addition to collecting data on incubation behavior with video surveillance equipment, we deployed artificial data-logging eggs into nests of 5 Whooping Crane pairs and 1 Florida Sandhill Crane (*Grus canadensis pratensis*) pair in a pilot study of incubation temperature. This is the first time this has been done with any wild crane species that we are aware of. All pairs accepted and incubated the artificial eggs. None of the experimental nests successfully hatched, but the Sandhill Crane nest was incubated to term based on recovery of a fully-developed embryo. We recognized that the trading of an artificial egg for a natural egg within 2-egg clutches resulted in a decreased likelihood of nest success. To avoid this cost in nest success in future studies, we tested whether the temperature in the floor of the nest (not requiring removal of one egg) was representative of that in an artificial egg. It was not. The most important finding from preliminary examination of plots of incubation temperature (within artificial eggs) showed that in 4 Whooping Crane nests there was a single large downward spike in incubation temperature that occurred on one night (different night for each nest). Amount of time off the eggs ranged

from 3 hours, 7 minutes to 15 hours, 18 minutes during which the eggs dropped up to 41 °F (22.8 °C) below mean incubation temperature. Unusually long lapses in incubation likely affect hatchability of eggs. Cameras capable of night-vision should be deployed near nests to determine the cause of these lapses in incubation. Behavioral and temperature data from more Whooping and Sandhill Crane nests will be necessary in order to allow comparisons between successful and unsuccessful nests and comparisons between the species.

Marty Folk, Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission

Mississippi Sandhill Crane Update

There were about 105 endangered Mississippi Sandhill Cranes in the population at the beginning of the year. Fifteen captive-reared juveniles were released in winter 2009/10 to supplement the population. Six from Audubon were released at Ocean Springs and 5 at Gautier. To test the direct-release method, 4 White Oak birds were direct-released at a total of 3 sites. Only one survived, joining the Ocean Springs cohort. Twenty people participated in a crane recovery meeting at the refuge on February 5.

In March and April, it finally dried up enough to conduct prescribed burns on 3215 acres, the first burns since May 2009.

Nineteen pairs produced a total of 28 nests. Eighteen chicks hatched from 12 nests but only 1 chick has fledged yet. A second chick survives. There was the first nest ever in North Fontainebleau. Cranes had active nests in two newly restored Grady Ponds. We tried several variations on a technique to use pens or barriers to protect nests/chicks to increase recruitment. We built eight 1-2 acre plastic barriers and used two of the permanent release pens. We tried 7 chick relocations into pens/barriers but only one was successful and that chick fledged. Most pairs were reluctant to move to join a chick within a barrier but we will try more variations in 2011. Two captive flightless pairs were moved from Audubon to the Ben Williams and Fontainebleau pens to see if they would nest at the refuge or allow chick fostering. One pair was killed by a refuge pair that decided to claim the pen as their territory. The other pair did not nest nor accept 2 chick fostering attempts.

The new Bunkhouse was completed and opened in June and will provide housing for interns, students, researchers, and detailers. Refuge staff assisted greatly with the Gulf Oil Spill, including a total of 20 14-day deployments to date. New Project Leader Maury Bedford will begin work the first week of August.

Scott Hereford, Gautier, MS



News and Announcements

New CEO Strengthens International Crane Foundation's Global Reach

International Crane Foundation's (ICF) Board of Directors recently announced its selection of a new President and CEO, hydrologist and wetland ecologist, Dr. Richard Beilfuss.

Joseph Branch, ICF Board Chair from Milwaukee said, "Rich brings over twenty years' professional experience with cranes, and his major contribution has been to the emerging field of environmental flows. Beilfuss' work blends science and policy, and considerable people skills, to ensure that our water resources—rivers, lakes and wetlands—continue to nurture cranes, other wildlife and humanity."

ICF's global reach recognizes the remarkable charisma of cranes in bringing diverse people and new allies together to solve problems vital for us all. The long-term future of cranes depends in large part on the decisions that people make for water and wetlands as human demand soars and variable climates threaten the security of water supplies. ICF has invested heavily in promoting healthy wildlife and wetlands on farmlands, in Wisconsin as well as far eastern Russia and the valleys of Uganda. Crane projects now alleviate poverty through the sustainable use of water and wetlands in the Mekong Basin of southeast Asia and Drakensberg Mountains of South Africa among other places.

"Cranes will not survive unless we tackle the big issues," explains Rich Beilfuss. "Yet the same measures that safeguard landscapes nurturing cranes are effective at addressing human needs. I learned this first in Vietnam, where we searched for creative solutions to save the vanishing wetlands of the Mekong Delta for threatened Sarus Cranes and the impoverished people there. Later, our work to save vulnerable Wattle Cranes and other wildlife on the enormous floodplains of southern Africa led to a unique partnership with the Zambezi River authorities and dam operators for sustainable water management that will greatly benefit local fishing and farming communities."

Beilfuss recently returned to ICF after serving 4 years as Director of Scientific Services for the Gorongosa Restoration Project in Mozambique, where he lived with his wife Katie and their 2 children. From 1992-2005 he served as ICF's Director of Africa Programs, cultivating and supervising conservation efforts in more than a dozen African nations. Beilfuss also has contributed his expertise to ICF's long-term efforts in Vietnam, China, Nepal, and elsewhere. Beilfuss has a Ph.D. in Land Resources, two Master's degrees (Civil and Environmental Engineering and Water Resources Management), and a Bachelor's degree in International Economics. He is also an Adjunct Professor at the University of Wisconsin–Madison, where he advises graduate students and teaches a course in environmental flows, and was appointed by the Governor of Wisconsin to the Examining Board of Professional Geologists, Hydrologists, and Soil Scientists.

To learn more, visit www.savingcranes.org

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Proposes Reintroduction of Non-migratory Whooping Cranes into Southwest Louisiana

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service announced on 20 August 2010 that it is seeking public comment on a proposed rule to reintroduce the endangered Whooping Crane into habitat in its historic range on the state-owned White Lake Wetland Conservation Area in Vermilion Parish, Louisiana. The Service and the Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries (LDWF) will attempt to establish a non-migratory flock that lives and breeds in the wetlands, marshes and prairies of southwestern Louisiana. If this proposal is approved, the reintroduction effort could begin during early 2011.

“With just under 400 birds in the wild, the vast majority of which winter along the Texas coast, Whooping Cranes are among our nation’s most threatened species. Our proposal to reintroduce a population in Louisiana would not only help protect this iconic species from extinction but would also help us take another big step in our campaign to restore the Gulf Coast’s wildlife, marshes, and coasts to health,” said Ken Salazar, Secretary of the Interior.

The reintroduction is being proposed as part of an ongoing recovery effort for this highly imperiled species, which was on the verge of extinction in the 1940s and even today has only about 395 individuals in the wild; none in Louisiana. The only self-sustaining wild population of whooping cranes migrates between Wood Buffalo National Park in the Northwest Territories of Canada and Aransas National Wildlife Refuge in Texas and, like those in the eastern populations, remains vulnerable to extinction from continued loss of habitat or natural or man-made catastrophes. Multiple efforts are underway to reduce this risk by increasing populations in the wild, including ongoing efforts to establish a migratory population in the eastern United States.

The Service proposes the new, reintroduced, non-migratory population of Whooping Cranes be designated as a non-essential, experimental population (NEP) under the provisions of the Endangered Species Act. This proposed designation and its implementing regulation are developed to be more compatible with routine human activities in the reintroduction area. The designation allows for take of Whooping Cranes when such take is accidental and incidental to an otherwise lawful activity, including agriculture practices, recreation, and hunting. The intentional take (including killing or harm) of any NEP-designated Whooping Crane would still be a violation of federal law punishable under the Endangered Species Act and the Migratory Bird Treaty Act.

There are approximately 1.3 million acres of marsh, open water, and Chenier habitat in southwestern coastal Louisiana. The cranes would be reintroduced to the White Lake area and are not expected to be affected by the Deepwater Horizon oil spill. Whooping Cranes historically occurred in Louisiana in both a resident, non-migratory flock and a migratory flock that wintered in Louisiana. The proposed release area is the location where Whooping Cranes were historically documented raising young in Louisiana.

LDWF Secretary Robert Barham praised this lofty proposal to reintroduce Whooping Cranes back into the wetlands of the Chenier coastal plain. “Crane species around the world depend on coastal wetlands, and the proposed efforts would reunite this indigenous species back into some of the most productive and expansive coastal freshwater wetlands left in America,” he said.

To learn more, visit the southeast regional website at www.fws.gov/southeast

Contacts:

Bill Brooks, Billy_Brooks@fws.gov, 904-731-3136

Elsie Davis, Elsie_Davis@fws.gov, 404-679-7107

Whooping Cranes featured in

NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC

The June 2010 issue of *National Geographic* magazine contains an article on the precarious state of the Wood Buffalo Aransas flock, "Counting cranes: How many wild Whooping Cranes are there? Not enough" by Jennifer S. Holland, with spectacular photographs by Klaus Nigge. Also featured are NACWG members Brian Johns and Tom Stehn.

<http://ngm.nationalgeographic.com/2010/06/whooping-cranes/holland-text>

In Memoriam

Sadly, on 21 May 2010, celebrated Whooping Crane biologist Ernie Kuyt died suddenly at his home in Edmonton, Alberta, from injuries sustained in a fall. He was 81.

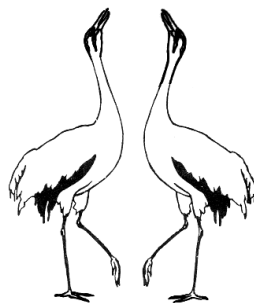
Ernie joined the Canadian Wildlife Service (CWS) in 1960 and began working with Whooping Cranes in 1965. In May 1967, Ernie participated in the first transfer of Whooping Crane eggs from nests in Wood Buffalo National Park to the Patuxent Wildlife Research Center, the genesis of the captive breeding program. Ernie received the Order of Canada in 1993 and the L. H. Walkinshaw

Award in 2008, both in recognition of his many contributions to wildlife conservation and Whooping Crane recovery. In a statement, Dave Duncan, Prairie and Northern Region director for the CWS said:

"Ernie Kuyt was the best kind of biologist: passionate and dedicated to wildlife conservation...the successful conservation of Whooping Cranes in North America is due in large part to Ernie Kuyt."

Ernie is survived by Elsie Kuyt, his wife of 50 years, daughter Pamela Stroh, and son Jonathan.

Sources: *The Edmonton Journal*, 25 May 2010 (obit); T. Vela, *The Edmonton Journal*, 27 May 2010 (www.canada.com)



(New) Editor's Note

It was as a boy growing up in Canada in the 1960s that I first heard about Whooping Cranes and their plight. The specifics of the news reports I don't recall, but the egg lift from Wood Buffalo to Patuxent seems a good bet. With Ernie Kuyt's passing I was reminded of the documentary film *A Great White Bird*, released in 1976 by the National Film Board of Canada in cooperation with the Canadian Wildlife Service and the US Fish and Wildlife Service. The film describes early efforts to save the Whooping Crane from extinction, beginning with Robert Porter Allen and ending with initial attempts to establish a flock at Grays Lake in Idaho. Ernie Kuyt appears in the second half of the film, when the wisdom of removing eggs from nests in Wood Buffalo is discussed and then put into practice. Although it's an imperfect historical account, the rare archival footage is a must-see for crane enthusiasts. The film can be viewed online for free at www.nfb.ca. (And while there, for a humorous look at incorrigible blackflies like those causing problems at Necedah, check out the animated film *Blackfly*.)

My recent interest in cranes was sparked by the extraordinary achievements of Operation Migration and the Whooping Crane Eastern Partnership over the past decade. I attended the 11th NACWG Workshop in Wisconsin Dells in 2008 and was impressed by what I saw: the evident passion and commitment of the membership to crane conservation, the international cooperation, and the refreshing collegiality of the group. I wanted to help out.

Like many of you, I am a biologist. I have undergraduate and graduate degrees from the University of British Columbia, and a Ph.D. from the University of California, Davis. In summer I teach introductory genetics at Stony Brook University on Long Island, NY, where I currently reside. My academic training is in *Drosophila* genetics, but my scientific interests extend well beyond fruit flies. I am captivated by birds, whether viewed through binoculars or microscopically. Long Island still has a wonderfully diverse avifauna (but, alas, no cranes); we've identified more than 50 species of birds in our small, wooded backyard alone.

I wish to thank Cathy and David Ellis for their helpful advice on getting me started as Editor.

Daryl Henderson, Stony Brook, NY

daryl@squirrelscribe.com

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.

Members: Please check the date code on the mailing label. This represents the year through which your membership is current. If you have questions, please contact Glenn Olsen (address below).

_____Active \$10 _____Sustaining \$30 _____Contributing \$50 _____Other \$

Name: _____

Address: _____

City: _____

State/Province: _____ Zip/Postal Code: _____

Email: _____

Telephone: (_____) _____ - _____

Mail completed form and check (US\$ payable to **NACWG**) to:

NACWG, c/o Glenn H. Olsen, 14223 Greenview Drive, Laurel, MD 20708



Return address:

**North American Crane Working Group
c/o Daryl Henderson
3 Elm Lane
Stony Brook, NY 11790**

Board of Directors

President: Jane Austin
Vice-President: Richard Urbanek
Secretary: Tracy Grazia
Treasurer: Glenn H. Olsen
Barry Hartup
Marilyn Spalding
Felipe Chavez-Ramirez

The Unison Call is published semiannually by NACWG

Daryl S. Henderson, *Editor*

Return service requested