



May 2011 Volume 50, No. 1

**In This Issue**

	<b>Page</b>
News Highlight	1
WCCA Trustees Approve \$286,750 for Habitat Purchases	2
Two Women's Donations Preserve Wintering Habitat	2
Whooper Numbers	5
Whooping Crane Nesting Survey Locates a Record 75 Nests	6
Whooping Crane Telemetry Project Update	6
Whooping Crane Chicks Hatch at Necedah National Wildlife	8
Nesting Research Conducted on Florida Cranes	10
Whooping Cranes Return to White Lake	14
WCCA's Web Site Upgraded and Expanded	17
Minutes of the Latest WCCA Meeting	17
Honor Roll of Donors	19

\*\*\*\*\* News Highlight \*\*\*\*\*

**WCCA COMMITS FUNDS FOR LAND CONSERVATION!**



The WCCA, along with partners, will preserve wintering habitats threatened by development in Texas, including this property near Holiday Beach, Texas. See inside for article. \*\*\*\*Photo by Marshall Lightman\*\*\*\*

## WCCA TRUSTEES APPROVE \$286,750 FOR HABITAT PURCHASES

Trustees of Whooping Crane Conservation Association recently approved expenditure of \$286,750 to acquire three tracts of private land currently used by whooping cranes. These sites are located within the lands designated as Critical Habitat wintering area for whooping cranes along the Texas Coast. Critical habitat contains those habitat qualities essential to conservation and recovery of the species. The Trustees believe it is important for the Association to do everything possible to protect these sites from residential and commercial development and to preserve them for continued use by the cranes. A majority of the funds committed for these acquisitions came from bequests to WCCA from two women. Lurae A Brinkerhoff provided \$281,515 in 1998 and Elizabeth F. Overton gave \$36,260 in 1999 (see accompanying article). The Association is deeply grateful for the donation by these women that will do so much to preserve habitat for the cranes. The purchase of these sites, scheduled for this summer, will support goals of the Canada/U.S. International Recovery Team.

The Association is partnering with The Coastal Bend Bays and Estuaries Program, and The Nature Conservancy, to purchase fee title on two tracts totaling 168 acres of freshwater and estuarine marshes, tidal mudflats, and saline uplands on Copano Bay (Fig. 1). The total cost is estimated to be \$348,800 with 25 percent (\$86,750) being WCCA's share. The southern unit is part of a territory that a pair and their chicks have used for several years. The northern unit is used by subadults and unpaired adult whooping cranes. We anticipate that the properties will eventually be transferred into the public trust, and possibly become part of Aransas National Wildlife Refuge. Other protected lands in the vicinity are Goose Island State Park, the Lamar and Tatton Units of Aransas National Wildlife Refuge, and the Mission-Aransas National Estuarine Research Reserve.

The Association is also partnering with The Nature Conservancy to acquire a conservation easement on 108.8 acres of private land bordering San Antonio Bay. The easement will restrict any action that would be detrimental to the conservation purpose for whooping cranes and their habitat. This area is used as wintering habitat by two dozen whooping cranes often referred to as the Welder Flats population. The easement would prohibit further development or construction on this tract which borders resort properties known as Falcon Point Ranch (Fig. 2). The property is a prime piece of the Ranch, suitable for development, which borders salt marsh used by whooping cranes. Other protected crane habitats in the vicinity are Welder Flats Wildlife Management Area, Welder Flats Coastal Preserve, Guadalupe River Wildlife Management Area, and Aransas National Wildlife Area. The Whooping Crane Conservation Association's \$200,000 contribution for the easement will be combined with other public and private funding to fulfill the total real estate, contractual and land acquisition cost of \$1,050,187. \*\*\*\*James Lewis, WCCA Treasurer\*\*\*\*

## TWO WOMEN'S DONATIONS PRESERVE WINTERING HABITAT

Thanks to the love of two women for the beautiful whooping cranes, and their desire to see these birds survive as a species, our Whooping Crane Conservation Association is able to preserve critical wintering habitat on the Texas Coast. Both women named our Association in their wills. We wish to honor their memory and contributions.

LURAE AHRENDES BRINKERHOFF, of Green River, Wyoming, died April 20, 1996. Born in Los Angeles, (continued on page 4)

*Grus Americana* is a biannual newsletter for members of the Whooping Crane Conservation Association, a nonprofit tax exempt organization dedicated to the conservation of whooping cranes.

**Editor:** Marty Folk

**Address:** Whooping Crane Conservation Association, 1475 Regal Ct, Kissimmee, FL 34744.

**Telephone:** 407-348-3009

**Email:** marty.folk@myfwc.com

**Web Site:** <http://whoopingcrane.com/>

**President:** Lorne Scott

**Secretary:** Jeannette Parker

**Treasurer:** James Lewis

**Board of Trustees:** George Gee, Brian Johns, Steve Nesbitt, Lorne Scott, Walter Sturgeon

**Trustee emeritus:** Dayton Hyde

## Holiday Beach Proposed Conservation Lands



**Figure 1. Whooping crane habitat proposed for conservation by the WCCA and partners. Courtesy of The Nature Conservancy.**

California, March, 1940, she earned a degree in music education and continued her training in music, teaching, wildlife, photography, and calligraphy until her death. She believed that one's education should never end. Lurae taught instrumental music in public schools for 24 years and upon her retirement she continued to teach classes on Wyoming Wildlife and served as a conservation volunteer. From 1986 to 1994 she served as a volunteer at Gray's Lake National Wildlife Refuge in Idaho, assisting with administrative details, greeting visitors, and doing field studies. She loved to watch sandhill cranes and cross-fostered whooping cranes, keeping records on their behavior and movements in southeastern Idaho. She assisted in banding sandhill cranes and trumpeter swans and retrieved and cared for sick or injured birds. In 1990, the Whooping Crane Conservation Association awarded Lurae a Certificate of Appreciation in recognition of her conservation efforts. In 1996, the U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service recognized her substantial contribution towards recovery of the whooping crane. During her lifetime she received other awards for music, leadership, and photography. The Gray's Lake Marsh Overlook, on the refuge, is dedicated in her memory. In her will she bequeathed \$281,515 to the Association and these funds provided a major portion of the monies now committed to acquire wintering habitat for whooping cranes.

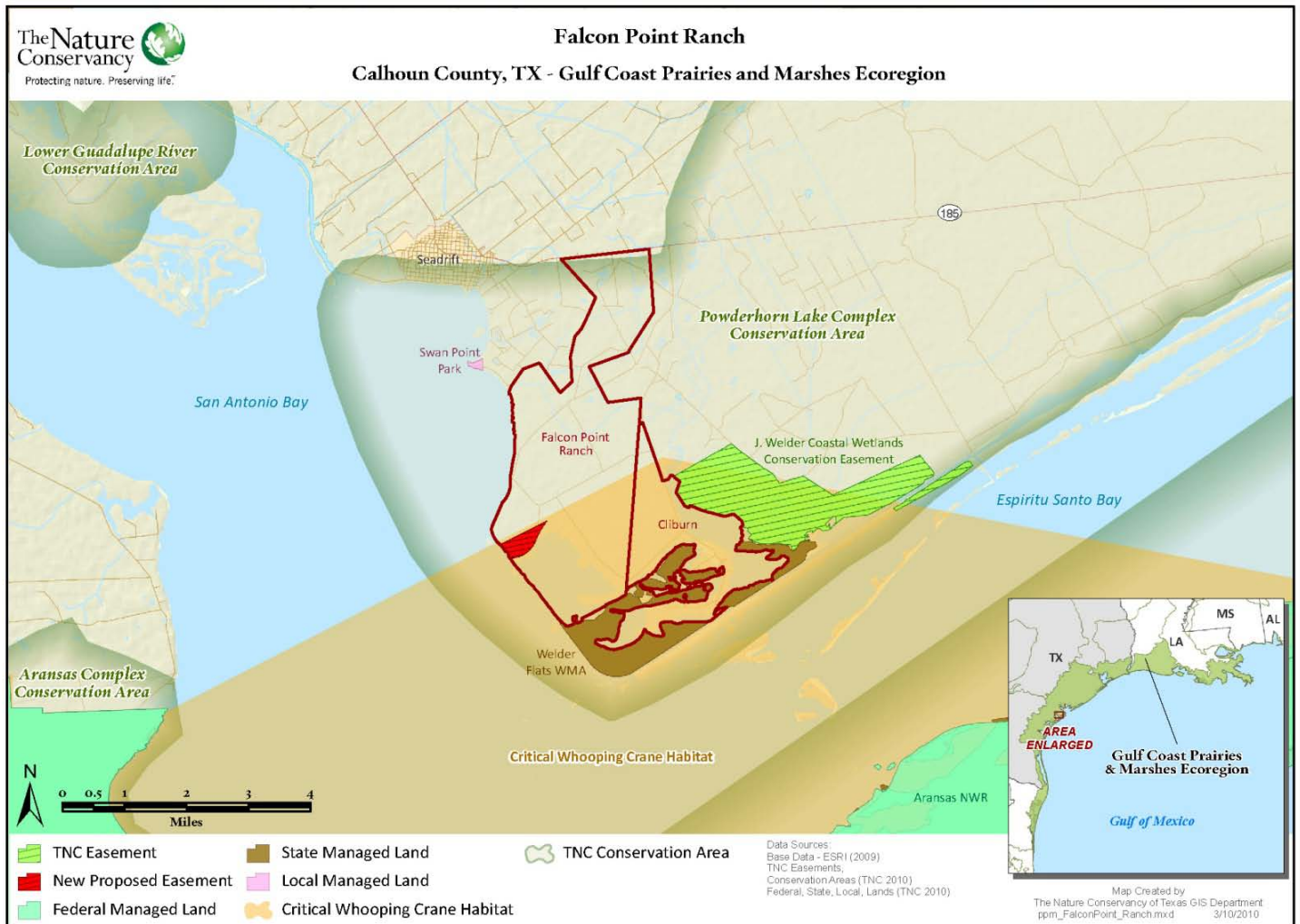


Figure 2. Proposed easement by WCCA and partners. Figure courtesy of The Nature Conservancy.

ELIZABETH F. "BETTY" OVERTON, of Pueblo, Colorado, died August 27, 1998. Born August 24, 1915, in Attleboro, Massachusetts, she and her husband Robert B. Overton made generous contributions to the Whooping Crane Conservation Association throughout their lifetime. Robert, a newspaper columnist and conservationist, preceded her in death in 1994. Betty worked as a Girl Scout Professional in Allentown, Pennsylvania, and Michigan City, Indiana, before joining the Red Cross to work in military hospitals in Hawaii with wounded servicemen during World War II. After the war she became head of the Girl Scouts in Pueblo, Colorado and first Director of Camp Lazy Acres. After marriage she became a fifth grade teacher at Central Grade School in Pueblo. In 1996, Betty received the Whooping Crane Conservation Association's Certificate of Appreciation for her untiring efforts as Chair of the Information and Education Committee. Other recognitions of her abilities include the Arkansas Valley Audubon Society Environmental Education Award, runner-up in the Colorado conservation NACO-Allis Chalmer contest, and a Certificate of Merit from the Silver Star Lodge for service to community youth. In her will she donated \$36,260 for continued support of conservation efforts for recovery of whooping cranes. Her donation, and that of Ms. Brinkerhoff, made it possible for the Association to protect Texas crane habitats and set them aside as sanctuaries for whooping cranes.

The Whooping Crane Conservation Association welcomes any similar donations or bequests designated for conservation of whooping cranes. \*\*\*\*James Lewis, WCCA Treasurer\*\*\*\*

## Whooper Numbers May 5, 2011

### Wild Populations

	Adult	Young	Total	Adult Pairs
Aransas/Wood Buffalo	235	44	279 <sup>A</sup>	78
Florida non-migratory	20	0	20	8
Louisiana non-migratory	0	10 <sup>B</sup>	10	0
Wisconsin/Florida migratory	88	17 <sup>C</sup>	105	17
<b>Subtotal in the Wild</b>	<b>343</b>	<b>71</b>	<b>414</b>	<b>103</b>

A The Aransas-Wood Buffalo population is currently estimated at 279. In 2010, a record 74 pairs nested and fledged 49 chicks, 45 of which arrived safely at Aransas.

B Ten chicks were transported to White Lake, Louisiana in mid-February, 2011.

C Two chicks hatched from wild nests in Wisconsin in 2010 are currently surviving. The other chicks shown are captive juveniles introduced into the wild.

### Captive Populations

	Adult	Young <sup>A</sup>	Total	Breeding Pairs
Patuxent WRC, Maryland	68	5	73	15
International Crane Foundation, WI	34	1	35	11
Devonian Wildl. Cons. Cent./Calgary	18	1	19	6
Species Survival Center, Louisiana	10	0	10	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 Wildl State Park	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
<b>Subtotal in Captivity</b>	<b>150</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>157</b>	<b>34</b>

A Chicks raised in 2010 for the eastern migratory population and Louisiana flocks are listed as wild birds. Chicks hatched so far in 2011 are not listed.

**TOTALS (Wild + Captive)    414 + 157 = 571**

## Whooping Crane Nesting Survey Locates a Record 75 Nests

Mark Bidwell, Whooping Crane Coordinator for the Canadian Wildlife Service reports that he and Kathy St. Laurent (CWS-Ontario) completed this year's survey of nesting whooping cranes in and around Wood Buffalo National Park (WBNP) in late May. Mark advised that, "We conducted the survey in close cooperation with Parks Canada (PCA) and were accompanied on one day by John McKinnon (PCA) who will also assist during the August survey. All in all, we flew 17.7 hours in a Bell 206 helicopter and 7.1 hours in a Cessna 210 fixed wing. In addition to surveying the usual nesting territories, we did some reconnaissance work in areas identified as potential habitat but that hadn't been searched recently."

Mark continued, "We're pleased to report that we detected a record 75 nests, including a few in areas apparently being colonized by new nesting pairs. We made a number of changes, on scientific and safety grounds, to the way the survey is conducted so were happy to have good results despite the changes. We'll revisit the nesting territories in August to assess productivity. We will also take colleagues from USGS, USFWS and ICF to mark an additional 10 to 12 birds as part of the ongoing telemetry study that aims to better understand the ecology of, and threats faced by, the Aransas-Wood Buffalo population."

Tom Stehn, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service added that, "The record of 75 nests found on the May surveys, surpasses by one the 74 nests found last year. Habitat conditions looked good, so hopes are high to have a good production season and an increase for the flock in 2011. With luck, a record 300 whooping cranes could make it to Aransas this fall!"

### Whooping Crane Telemetry Project Update

As the previous newsletter detailed, in August 2010 researchers captured nine whooping crane chicks at Wood Buffalo National Park. This ongoing project intends to answer questions regarding whooping crane migratory ecology and behavior during migration using GPS. The project uses solar Argos Global Positioning System (GPS) Platform Transmitter Terminals (PTTs) attached to tarsal bands. Birds are also marked with color leg bands similar to those used from 1977-1988. At least eight of the chicks thus banded fledged, and successfully migrated to Aransas NWR. After spending the winter months in Texas, the family groups began heading north in late March, with most of them having reached WBNP by the first week of May.



**Figure 3. Whooping crane family with banded individual. Photo by Cathie Foster.**

Researchers also conducted capture efforts at Aransas NWR this past January. Crane Capture Guru David Brandt (Northern Prairie Wildlife Research Center) was ably assisted by Felipe Chavez-Ramirez (Gulf Coast Bird Observatory), Barry Hartup (International Crane Foundation), Edgar Lopez-Saut (CIBNOR La Paz), Claudia Doria-Treviño (UNANL) and Walter Wehtje (The Crane Trust). Using corn, fishing line and a fishing pole, we were able to capture an adult female whooping crane at the ANWR's Lamar Unit on 8 January 2011. Given that this bird's territory included Lamar's 8<sup>th</sup> Street, it quickly became the most viewed and photographed banded Whooping Crane in south Texas (Fig. 3). Adding the chicks banded at Wood Buffalo NP and the two birds banded in December 2009 at Aransas, we are now following 11 members of the Aransas Wood Buffalo Population of whooping cranes.



**Figure 4. Spring migration routes taken by whooping cranes with gps transmitters. Figure courtesy The Crane Trust, Inc.**

Under ideal conditions, the PTTs provide four GPS locations per day. These data are stored by the device and every 56 hours uploaded via satellite to Argos. From here, we download the data and analyze it using ArcGIS. This allows us to follow their migration in near real-time. With each PTT expected to provide data for at least three years, we are looking to learn much about the lives of these birds. The preliminary analysis has provided a wealth of detail and greatly increased our understanding of their migratory habits.

One of the most gratifying findings was that all of the juveniles survived their first migration experience. Except for one PTT that only functioned intermittently, we were able to follow each bird's movements from Wood Buffalo down to Aransas (Fig. 4). While the time spent in migration by the families varied from 14 to 48 days, the number of days during which they actually covered more than 30 km (18 mi) in flight ranged from 9 to 12. The balance of their time was spent at staging grounds in Saskatchewan, North Dakota and South Dakota. The maximum distance covered by one family in a day was 965 km (600 mi) at the end of which they spent the night in a recently harvested corn field; they must have been tired (cranes normally spend the night roosting in shallow water). The sub-adult that was banded in 2009 traveled with Sandhill Cranes throughout much of the fall. Once he reached Aransas he quickly moved to the salt marshes and associated with other whoopers for the whole winter.

The first banded family group departed Aransas on 21 March and the last left on 6 April. As of this writing most of the birds have arrived at Wood Buffalo NP and the adult female banded this past January is moving very little, suggesting she may already be incubating. Equally interesting has been the behavior of the yearling birds. One of them flew up to Wood Buffalo, but then flew back south and has now been in central Saskatchewan for the past week, where it appears that two other yearlings have also ended up. It looks as if every season will continue to bring new insights and surprises.\*\*\*\*Walter Wehtje, The Crane Trust, Inc.\*\*\*\*

**Today's Trivia Question: Whooping cranes are North America's tallest birds. But are they the heaviest? See Page 19 for the answer.**

## **Updates from Reintroductions**

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE May 12, 2011

Contact(s): Doug Staller, Necedah NWR, 608-565-4400, Joan Garland, WCEP, 608-381-1262

### **Wild Whooping Crane Chicks Hatch at Necedah National Wildlife Refuge in Central Wisconsin**

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's Necedah National Wildlife Refuge (NWR) and the Whooping Crane Eastern Partnership (WCEP) are celebrating another success in efforts to reintroduce a wild migratory whooping crane population in eastern North America.

Three whooping crane chicks hatched this week at Necedah NWR in central Wisconsin. The first chick to hatch this season was the offspring of wild whooping crane W1-06. W1-06 was hatched and raised in 2006 on Necedah NWR and is the first wild offspring from the eastern whooping crane reintroduction project started more than a decade ago.

The additional two chicks are the offspring of other well-established whooping crane pairs. Sadly, refuge biologists have been unable to locate the first chick in recent monitoring efforts. The chick may have been predated.

"Although we are disappointed by the potential loss of the first chick, we are encouraged by this first successful nesting and hatching of a wild-born chick, from a wild-born parent," said Necedah National Wildlife Refuge Manager Doug Staller. "Refuge staff is committed to working toward the ultimate goal of a self-sustaining

eastern flock of migratory whooping cranes and actively monitors additional nests of whooping crane pairs on the Refuge.”

There are approximately 105 whooping cranes in the eastern migratory population including at least 20 nesting pairs, also a record number for this reintroduced population. In addition to the three chicks hatched in the wild this week at Necedah NWR, three chicks have fledged in the wild during the course of the reintroduction project, which began in 2001.

“The Whooping Crane Eastern Partnership’s focus over the next five years is successful reproduction in the wild flock, and the recently hatched chicks, in addition to the three previously fledged wild-hatched chicks are a very promising start to achieving this goal,” said Joel Trick, acting project leader for the Service’s Green Bay Ecological Services Field Office and WCEP representative. “We continue to work to identify the factors that may contribute to nest failure, and are working to address those challenges through active nest management and captive-reared releases.”

This year marks an important transition for whooping crane recovery efforts at Necedah NWR. The effort has shifted from the population depending upon introduction of captive-reared birds to the population being supported through wild whooping cranes producing eggs, hatching chicks and fledging young. Since whooping cranes have been absent from the upper Midwest for over 120 years, WCEP plans to continue studying factors that improve reproductive success as well as how reintroduced whooping cranes use the habitats they encounter following release. These data will refine the understanding of what determines overall success for whooping crane reintroduction in the upper Midwest.

For additional information about the Necedah National Wildlife Refuge, visit <http://fws.gov/midwest/necedah> and to learn the latest about whooping crane activity at Necedah NWR visit <https://www.facebook.com/pages/Necedah-National-Wildlife-Refuge/136199513105930>.

For additional information about the efforts of the Whooping Crane Eastern Partnership, visit [www.bringbackthecranes.org](http://www.bringbackthecranes.org) or visit <http://www.facebook.com/pages/bringbackthecranesorg/>.

Whooping Crane Eastern Partnership founding members are the International Crane Foundation, Operation Migration, Inc., Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, the U.S. Geological Survey's Patuxent Wildlife Research Center and National Wildlife Health Center, the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation, the Natural Resources Foundation of Wisconsin, and the International Whooping Crane Recovery Team.

Many other flyway states, provinces, private individuals and conservation groups have joined forces with and support WCEP by donating resources, funding and personnel. More than 60percent of the project’s budget comes from private sources in the form of grants, public donations and corporate sponsors.



The mission of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is working with others to conserve, protect and enhance fish, wildlife, plants and their habitats for the continuing benefit of the American people. We are both a leader and trusted partner in fish and wildlife conservation, known for our scientific excellence, stewardship of lands and natural resources, dedicated professionals and commitment to public service. For more information on our work and the people who make it happen, visit <http://www.fws.gov>.



## Nesting Research Conducted on Florida Cranes

We continue to study the whooping cranes of the Florida resident flock. The flock contains 20 birds, 16 of which are paired. This spring we employed camera “traps” near nests of whooping and sandhill cranes in order to learn more about nesting issues. Camera traps, or trail-cameras as they are sometimes called, are cameras triggered by heat differential and motion. At night they use infrared “flash” to illuminate the photos. Wildlife

cannot see the flash so it does not affect their behavior.

Most of our data so far are from sandhill crane nests and all results are preliminary. However, we are seeing some interesting results from the camera traps at nests. The cameras were useful for documenting 1) many occasions of visitors (representing disturbances or potential disturbances) to nests, 2) whether a nest was successful or not, 3) water levels at nests, and 4) behaviors of the birds at their nests. The following examples are presented in that order.



**Figure 5.** Image from camera trap showing a bobcat that had flushed the sandhill crane off its nest. See next image.

Camera traps successfully documented many disturbances or potential disturbances at nests. For one nest, the last image of the attending crane was when it flushed from the nest in the dark; and then a bobcat (*Lynx rufus*) walked by the nest (Fig. 5). While the nest was unattended, raccoons (*Procyon lotor*) came and scavenged the nest (Fig. 6). Raccoons were common near nests; at one nest they triggered the camera daily. Coyotes (*Canis latrans*) and an alligator (*Alligator mississippiensis*) also were photographed.



**Figure 6.** After a bobcat flushed the sandhill crane off its nest (previous photo), the nest was scavenged by raccoons.

Sandhill cranes defended their nests from curious livestock, even when it meant dealing with an animal that weighed 200 times more than the crane (Fig. 7).

Camera traps also successfully documented whether nests hatched. Camera placement in relation to the nests provided clear views of chicks when they hatched (Fig 8). Also significant at this nest was the fact they were also incubating a data-logging egg that we had placed in their nest. The data recorded will provide a “known successful” recipe for incubation temperature.



Figure 7. A sandhill crane defends its nest against an Angus bull.



Figure 8. Successful hatch of a chick documented by camera trap.

Camera traps also documented water levels. This is important because too much water can flood nests and too little water will cause abandonment. One nest was unique in that the nest was constructed of mud and sticks on a natural rise in an otherwise open-water pond. Extremes in water level can be seen at this nest in Fig. 9.



**Figure 9.** Images showing extremes in water levels at a sandhill crane nest. The pair abandoned the nest the day the right-hand picture was captured, apparently in response to drying of the marsh.

Camera traps captured important bird behaviors. Last year we discovered from data-logging eggs that whooping cranes were sometimes leaving their nests unattended at night. This quarter we deployed the first-ever successful camera trap at a whooping crane nest (Fig 10).



**Figure 10.** Photo taken by camera trap of a whooping crane on its nest. The camera was triggered by coots (*Fulica americana*).

Important was the documentation of the pair exchanging incubation duties in the dark (Fig. 11).



Figure 11. Pair of whooping cranes exchanging incubation duties in the dark.

Of the trailcam photos from sandhill nests we reviewed thus far there have been no obvious nest exchanges at night. This could be a fundamental behavioral difference between the 2 species that previously has been undescribed (but we'll need data from more whooping crane nests before we can say that). Or, it could be a behavioral artifact of captive rearing for the whooping cranes. Whatever the reason, it would seem to add vulnerability to the eggs and potentially attract attention to the nests of whooping cranes.

We ended the 2011 nesting season with data from 22 sandhill crane nests and 7 whooping crane nests. The results are still preliminary, but it is evident that these new techniques for studying nest success are providing exciting and valuable information about crane reproduction. We plan to continue the study next year to get more data, especially from whooping crane nests. This work was funded in part by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. *\*\*\*Marty Folk, Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission\*\*\**

## Whooping Cranes Return to White Lake

There are many success stories on species recovery associated with the Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries (LDWF) and in February 2011 LDWF added one more. The department's Coastal and Nongame Resources Division (CNR) moved forward with a whooping crane re-population project that will be as challenging as any previous effort.

“LDWF biologists have a proven track record for bringing back species from threatened or endangered status to robust population levels readily noticeable around the state,” said LDWF Secretary Robert Barham. “From the alligator and the brown pelican, to the bald eagle and the white-tailed deer, our citizens can see the results of years of tedious field work. The expertise and dedication that LDWF biologists bring to a long-term restoration plan is truly impressive.” For Louisianans, the sight of a whooping crane in the wild has been only a distant memory. The last record of the species in Louisiana dates back to 1950, when the last surviving whooping crane was removed from Vermilion Parish property that is now part of LDWF's White Lake Wetlands Conservation Area (WLWCA).

The whooping crane is the most endangered crane species. Fifteen species of cranes occur throughout the world; only two of the 15 species, sandhill cranes (*Grus canadensis*) and whooping cranes (*Grus americana*) occur in North America. Today, sandhill cranes are prevalent, but whooping cranes are in great peril, having suffered severe population declines during the late 1800s and most of the 1900s. Due to these declines, whooping cranes were placed on the federal endangered species status list on March 11, 1967. The population slowly increased over the last 30 years with approximately 565 individual whoopers in North America as of Jan. 31, 2011.

Historically, both resident and migratory populations of whooping cranes were present in Louisiana through the early 1940s. The massive birds, with males growing to 5 feet tall at maturity, inhabited the marshes and ridges of the state's southwest Chenier Coastal Plain, as well as the uplands of prairie terrace habitat to the north. According to Dr. Gay Gomez, professor of geography at McNeese State University and Louisiana whooping crane historian, “Records from the 1890s indicated ‘large numbers’ of both whooping cranes and sandhill cranes on wet prairies year round.”

The Louisiana whoopers are not the only cranes in the wild. A 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. Like those in an eastern migratory population, the Aransas group remains vulnerable to extinction from continued loss of habitat and catastrophes, either natural or man-made. Multiple efforts are underway to reduce these risks and bring this magnificent bird further along its path to recovery. This includes increasing populations in the wild, ongoing efforts to establish a migratory population in the eastern United States and establishing a resident (non-migratory) population in Louisiana. The White Lake marshes and vast surrounding coastal marshes of southwest Louisiana was a positive factor in the decision making process that led to the experimental population approval.

The Louisiana crane population did not withstand the pressure of human encroachment, conversion of nesting habitat to agricultural acreage, hunting, and specimen collection, which also occurred across North America. Dr. Gomez's research indicates “In May of 1939, biologist John Lynch reported 13 whooping cranes north of White Lake and that in August 1940, flood waters associated with a hurricane scattered the resident White Lake population of cranes and only six of the 13 cranes returned. By 1947, only one crane remained at White lake and in March of 1950, the last crane in Louisiana was captured and relocated to Aransas National Wildlife Refuge, Texas.”

Whooping cranes currently exist in three wild populations and within captive breeding populations. Captive breeding facilities are responsible for providing eggs that will eventually be released back into the wild. The 10 juvenile cranes relocated to White Lake on February 16 were raised at the Patuxent Wildlife Research Center in Laurel, Md. The eggs were hatched in May and June 2010 by birds in four locations including the Calgary Zoo in Alberta, Canada, Necedah National Wildlife Refuge in Necedah, WI, Audubon Species Survival Center in New Orleans and Patuxent facility. The young cranes were then flown to Jennings, La. and transported to the White Lake property.



**Figure 12. Costumed caretakers process a bird at the release pen in Louisiana. Photo by Brac Salyers, LDWF.**

The process preceding the cranes arrival, which involved project approval by the US Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS), public meetings and a public comment period, spanned more than two years. “Without our cooperative partners, which includes USFWS, U.S. Geological Survey (USGS) and International Crane Foundation (ICF), this project would not have come to fruition,” said LDWF-CNR Division Administrator Robert Love. “We will continue to work closely with this group for years to come.”

Upon their arrival in February, the birds were placed in a small, netted acclimation pen within a larger 1.5-acre pen located at WLWCA. The birds remained in the netted acclimation pen for approximately one month to allow proper transition to their new locale and to allow researchers and biologists the opportunity to ensure all birds were healthy and well acclimated to their surroundings. The birds adjusted quickly and within 24 hours of their arrival, one individual was observed catching and eating a wild crawfish. In addition to wild caught food, the birds have been receiving supplemental pelletized food referred to as crane chow. While contained within the acclimation pen, each bird was fitted with unique leg band colors, a USFWS I.D. band and satellite transmitter. The bands and transmitters will allow biologists and researchers the opportunity to study and follow each bird through its lifespan.

The White Lake cranes were released from the netted acclimation pen on March 14. Biologists conduct daily monitoring activities and continued supplemental feeding activities. The birds can roam free within the larger pen and actively fly in and out of the pen at their own discretion, roosting at night as they continue to acclimate to the marshes. “Providing access to food sources in the pen early on was designed to attract the group back to the safety of the predator-proof enclosure at night,” said Tom Hess, LDWF-CNR biologist

program manager. “Our concerns early on were for the birds to develop predator avoidance skills in a marsh environment also inhabited by alligators, bobcats and coyotes.”

The goal of the state’s reintroduction project is to establish a self-sustaining whooping crane population on and around White Lake, which contains over 70,000 acres of freshwater marsh. A self-sustaining population is defined as a flock of 130 individuals with 30 nesting pairs, surviving for a 10-year period without any additional restocking. Whooping cranes do not generally nest until 3-5 years of age, so the nesting success of the Louisiana group may take several years to be determined. The long-term goal of this reintroduction is to move whooping cranes from an endangered species status to threatened status. Future plans for the project include re-introductions of additional juvenile cohorts once or twice a year for the next two years. At that point, the project will be evaluated to determine the number of birds for released in future years.

The newly established whooping crane population at White Lake is designated as a nonessential experimental population (NEP) under the provisions contained within section 10(j) of the Endangered Species Act. The population is considered experimental because it is being reintroduced into suitable habitat that is outside of the whooping crane’s current range, but within its historic range. It is designated nonessential because the likelihood of survival of the whooping crane as a species would not be reduced if this entire population were not successful and lost. The NEP status will protect this whooping crane population as appropriate to conserve the population, while still allowing the presence of the cranes to be compatible with routine human activities in the reintroduction area. Examples of such activities include recreational hunting and trapping, agricultural practices (plowing, planting, application of pesticides, etc.), construction or water management.

Although designated as NEP, the Louisiana whooping cranes are still protected under law. Because of the experimental non-essential designation in this rule, if the shooting of a whooping crane is determined to be accidental and occurred incidentally to an otherwise lawful activity that was being carried out in full compliance with all applicable laws and regulations, no prosecution under the Endangered Species Act would occur. In the case of an intentional shooting, however, the full force and protection of the Endangered Species Act could apply. Additionally, the birds are protected under applicable state laws for non-game species and the federal Migratory Bird Treaty Act, which protects all birds that migrate such as herons, egrets and songbirds.

“We want anyone in the marsh near White Lake to enjoy the moment should they encounter one or more of the experimental birds in the wild during this re-population effort,” said Love. “As long as the cranes are observed at a distance, they should adapt to occasional human encounters.”

Project funding for Louisiana’s whooping crane project is derived from LDWF species restoration dedicated funds, federal grants and private/corporate donations. LDWF’s budget for the initial year of the project is \$400,000. The project costs escalate in year two and beyond as the project expands. LDWF estimates it will be necessary to raise three to four million private dollars to help fund a portion of this 15-year project.

Private and corporate donations supporting the whooping crane project can be made to the Louisiana Wildlife and Fisheries Foundation. Gifts should be designated as “support of the Whooping Crane Project.” For information on the foundation and to obtain a donation form go to <http://www.wlf.louisiana.gov/lwff>. For more information on the historic re-introduction of



whooping cranes to Louisiana, visit <http://www.wlf.louisiana.gov/wildlife/whooping-cranes>.\*\*\*\*Carrie Salyers, Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries\*\*\*\*

**Acclimation pen. Photo by Michael Seymour, LDWF.**

## WCCA's Web Site Upgraded and Expanded

Have you checked out the Whooping Crane Conservation Association's (WCCA) upgraded and expanded website? If not, you are missing out on lots of new and some interesting old information about whooping cranes. Go to <http://whoopingcrane.com> on your computer and see for yourself. For the very latest updates delivered to your computer and mobile phone you can also follow the WCCA on Twitter - <http://twitter.com/#!/WhooperTweets>. We believe you will be pleased.

With these improvements you can check out the latest whooping crane news, learn about WCCA's history, become a member, pay your dues online, observe whooper videos and photographs, learn about the whooper flock status and migration routes and review the archive of newsletters. Then if you want to learn the basics about whoopers you can click on "Whooping Cranes 101". After learning more about whooping cranes, you may see one in the field and can report your observation by clicking on "Report a Sighting".

Then, if you want to assist the endangered whooping cranes more than by paying your membership dues, click on "How Can I Help?" and then get involved. We provide you an easy procedure to let you donate to WCCA. Another way you can help WCCA is by clicking on our "Online Store" and purchasing books and other items from Amazon.com via our web page. WCCA receives a small percentage of all sales purchased through our web page to help pay for web page operations. And for your kids or school, we provide a "Coloring Book" that lets you print out pages to color and learn about whooping cranes while doing so. Finally, we provide links to related organizations that provide more information on whooping cranes.

How did we get all this accomplished? The short answer is lots of hard work. During the last year we were very fortunate to recruit a new volunteer to perform all the technical needs to operate our web page. He is Ian Walters. Ian is British, but he moved across the pond and now resides with his wife and son in Daphne, Alabama. Ian and his wife Wendy own and manage "Business Cornerstone Services" which provides a variety of services to assist businesses and organizations ([www.businesscornerstoneservices.com](http://www.businesscornerstoneservices.com)). The Walters live a few blocks down the road from the Editor of the web page, Chester McConnell. Chester explained, "I have been extremely fortunate to have volunteers like Ian to work with me on our web page. I know nothing about the technical aspects of web page operation and would be unable to function without their expert services." Ian replaced Melissa Staff of Summertown, Tennessee who served WCCA for several years and did a commendable job.

Like all other WCCA staff members, Ian volunteered his services during the past year with no monetary compensation. WCCA's Board did agree to pay for the many hours of special technical work for the web page upgrading. However, Ian will continue to volunteer his routine services along with Chester. WCCA's web page is visited by numerous people who have no other contact with us. Some may join WCCA but hopefully all become more knowledgeable about our endangered whooping cranes. Our web page is our window to the world and helps inform thousands of people about whooping cranes. *\*\*\*\*Chester McConnell, WCCA Website Coordinator\*\*\*\**

### Minutes of the WCCA Meeting, Midtown Holiday Inn, Grand Island, NE

7pm, 14 March 2011, Lorne Scott, President, presides

The meeting began with a moment of silence in remembrance of the following individuals who have passed since our last meeting: Ruby Apperley, Bob Elgas, Larry Smith, Bill Huey, Jerry Pratt, Chuck Frith, Bill Fuller, Judith Buhrman, May Gee, Ernie Kuyt, Zoe Lynch.

Hand out of agenda. Minutes from last meeting-some were passed around for Trustees. They had already been approved previously.

Jim Lewis provided a treasurer's report. Years ago, Lorraine Brinkerhoff left WCCA a substantial amount that has been kept in investments. The current value of WCCA finances was ~\$359,000 in stocks, bond, t-bills, and cash. Our finances are recovering after the recession. Walt Sturgeon made a motion to accept the treasurer's report; Rod Drewien seconded it; motion carried.

Newsletter editor Marty Folk provided an update on the newsletter. Members were encouraged to send Marty articles of interest. George Archibald asked about the size of our membership; Marty looked up in the mailing lists and found that paper newsletters went out recently to 247 addresses and email versions to 116 for a total of 363.

Tom Stehn described a record turnout at a function in Texas recently where the International Crane Foundation (ICF) Board met with 23 people to discuss threats to whoopers at Aransas. Tom went on to describe current activity at Aransas for the monitoring and management of wintering whooping cranes. The current population of 279 is up from 15 in 1941. A list of 10 threats was presented and discussed.

George Archibald asked if WCCA should write a letter about banning of crab traps in whooper habitat on the winter grounds. Tom said 2/3 of the wintering ground is already closed (refuge land) to crab trapping but more needs to be closed and a letter would be helpful. Tom says another good letter would be for emphasizing the need to expand critical habitat for whooping cranes on the wintering grounds. WCCA should prepare a letter with a coalition of conservation organizations. Lorne called for a motion to proceed with those 2 letters. Jim Lewis made a motion that the WCCA prepare those 2 letters. Rod Drewien seconded the motion; motion carried.

Jim Lewis described how the Trustees had been discussing, for some time, the possibility of the WCCA putting money toward conservation of some habitat on the wintering grounds adjacent to Aransas. Jim contacted Tom Stehn to get his advice; Tom had Jim contact two organizations who were currently involved with habitat preservation (Coastal Bend Bays and Estuaries and The Nature Conservancy). Two properties totaling 168 acres were being considered for purchase via federal grant monies; WCCA could provide \$87,000 in matching dollars to assist with the purchase; we would be providing 25% of what was needed for the purchase. The area, known as the Newcomb Bend Marsh, without protection, would eventually be surrounded by homes. George Archibald endorsed the purchase and suggests perhaps we could encourage members to contribute to a "land fund" for future use (put article in newsletter describing) and have people leave money in their wills for the purpose. Tom Stehn heartily endorsed the purchase and added that the land, after purchase, would likely be added on to the refuge for their management. Rod Drewien made a point that it is a good time to buy land. George Archibald made a motion that we assist with purchase of the land and spend about \$87,000. Jim Lewis seconded it; motion carried. President Lorne suggests we consider a press release for this.

The Recovery Team met yesterday. Mark Bidwell is the new Canadian Coordinator. Mark talked about the satellite telemetry project, looking at habitat use and movements especially during migration. Twelve birds have been radioed so far (9 pre-fledged young and 3 older). Mark also discussed the oil sand area and the need to see where whoopers use habitats around that area because there are proposals to expand the area that is mined for oil sands.

Billy Brooks reported on the Louisiana reintroduction. Just today they opened the gate on the soft-release pen to free 10 birds held there. Since 15 February the birds have been there after transport from Patuxent. Tom Stehn described the 10j rule and the value in keeping landowners in support of the project.

Walt Sturgeon provided an update on the Whooping Crane Eastern Partnership's (WCEP) efforts to reintroduce migratory whoopers to the eastern US. Five birds have been shot. Walt made a motion that WCCA put up \$1000 in reward money for information leading to arrests for the killings. Brian Johns seconded it; motion carried. Abandonment of nests, especially early season nests, has been a major problem for this flock. Black

flies may be responsible for driving the birds off their nests. Three chicks have fledged in the wild. Walt described the search for areas in Wisconsin without black flies to consider for future releases and the ongoing research on black flies.

Billy Brooks reports that for the WCEP shootings the rewards now stand at \$20,000-\$22,000. A pledge system was used to accumulate the rewards. Billy asked if WCCA could accept checks from donors and write the final check to the informant. He also asked if the WCCA might hold an account that would be ready, and serve as a standing reward that might help deter future shootings of any whoopers in any of the flocks. Jim said an individual trust account should be ok to set up for that purpose. Jim suggests \$10,000 would be sufficient for future rewards. Walt Sturgeon made a motion to create a trust fund for money devoted to rewards for malicious killing of whooping cranes (in any of the flocks). George Archibald seconded it; motion carried.

Trustee election for WCCA; Steve Nesbitt's position after this year plus one other position will be vacant; this could be announced in newsletter this spring with ballots. Rod Drewien agree to run for Trustee. Trustees will appoint Trustees emeritus.

Mark Bidwell and Brian Johns (later maybe George Archibald if ICF is considered) will get with Elsie Kuyt about archiving Ernie Kuyt's notebooks, files, photographic slides, etc from his many years of work with whoopers in Canada.

Dr. Elizabeth Smith has been hired by ICF to work in Texas to work on key issues like water inflow and mangrove encroachment. She will be based at the Corpus Christy USFWS office. She also does educational programs.

Rod Drewien described how the largest freshwater marsh in Mexico, which used to be a major wintering area for whoopers and sandhills, is now gone due to diversion of water for agriculture.

Brian Johns made a motion to adjourn the meeting. The meeting was adjourned at 9:06pm.

Respectfully submitted by Marty Folk, WCCA Newsletter Editor.

---

### **Honor Roll of Donors**

Thanks to the following individuals who contributed extra money over and above their annual dues; all contributions will be used toward conservation of the whooping crane:

Weldon E. Vickrey  
 Scott R. Derrickson  
 Mary Peace Douglas  
 Leonara M. Breault  
 Fred Conrad

Phyllis D. Else  
 Evalinda Warlack  
 Charles Bressman  
 Antonietta Talevi

### **New! WCCA Membership Dues Can be Paid On-line**

You now can sign up for membership, renew your membership, or make a donation on-line to the WCCA. Go to this link <http://whoopingcrane.com/membership/> and do your part today!

**Answer to Today's Trivia Question from page 8: Whooping cranes weigh 14-16 pounds and are NOT the heaviest birds in North America. Several birds that can weigh as much include turkeys and white pelicans. But the real heavy-weights are trumpeter swans and California condors, weighing in at 23 pounds!**

Members—please send your correct address if the one shown below is wrong. Send to the return address below.

---

**Whooping Crane Conservation Association**  
1475 Regal Ct.  
Kissimmee, FL 34744

Nonprofit Org.  
U.S. Postage  
**PAID**  
Leesburg, FL  
Permit No. 1040

**Return Service Requested**



Whooping crane eats a Louisiana crawfish. See inside for article. \*\*\*\**Photo by Sara Zimorski, Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries* \*\*\*\*