



U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

Aransas National Wildlife Refuge

Whooping Crane Update –April 12, 2012

Precipitation/Salinity:

As of April 11, the monthly precipitation totals for Aransas National Wildlife Refuge are 1.19 inches. Salinity levels in San Antonio Bay continue to remain under 20 parts per thousand (ppt) and are currently recorded at 16.5 ppt. Increased precipitation and fresh water inflows from Central Texas are helping to improve conditions in the marsh but the refuge is still not to pre-drought conditions.

Food Sources:

The refuge is no longer conducting any prescribed burns due to changing weather conditions. The refuge was able to burn a total of 12,310 acres of habitat, areas targeted because of their value to whooping cranes as a food source.

Reports:

The refuge is still waiting on the final report on the second carcass (recovered January 18) from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's forensics lab in Ashland, OR. Results from the necropsy conducted on the third carcass (recovered February 29, 2012) were inconclusive due to the extensive scavenging.

Surveys:

Because of weather conditions, biologists were only able to conduct one of the three flights scheduled for this survey. On March 31, 2012, biologists flew along the grid -- specific lines set at specific distances within the survey area, including Matagorda Island, San Jose Island, Blackjack Peninsula, Lamar Peninsula, Dewberry Island and Welder Flats. Fewer cranes were observed than the prior surveys, suggesting many of the birds have begun their migration toward the breeding grounds in Canada. Preliminary analyses of the survey data indicate there may be as few as 115 cranes remaining within the surveyed areas.

Data from GPS-marked whooping cranes also indicates many of the birds have begun their migration. Approximately two thirds of the marked birds have left the Texas coast. Departure dates for those cranes in migration range between the 5th of March and 10th of April with an average departure date of 29 March. To date, none of the marked birds have arrived at Wood-Buffalo Nation Park. We continue to download data from the radio-marked birds, as well as receive information from actual sightings.

Helpful Information:

The refuge will issue a final 'State of the Cranes' report summarizing the significant events that occurred during the 2011-12 whooping crane season.

Whooping Crane Draft Revised International Recovery Plan (2006):

<http://www.fws.gov/southwest/refuges/texas/aransas/pdf/WHCR%20RP%20Final%207-21-2006.pdf>

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