

## **Wintering Whooping Crane Update, November 4, 2015**

Wade Harrell, U.S. Whooping Crane Recovery Coordinator

We reported earlier in September that the first whooping crane had arrived here on the Texas coast this fall. This single adult bird was spotted by tour boat guides on 19 September on San Jose Island. Just this past week, we have received several reports of whooping cranes still on the staging grounds in the Saskatchewan prairies of Canada, and a radio marked family group is still in Wood Buffalo National Park. As of today, only 1 of 13 whooping cranes with active radio transmitters has arrived here on the Texas coast. So, whooping cranes are currently spread out across their range, all the way from their northern breeding grounds to their southern wintering grounds. The mild fall in the northern plains states appears to be contributing to a delayed migration, our partners at the Northern Prairie Research Center in North Dakota estimate that migration of cranes and waterfowl is about 2 weeks behind schedule.

We received a report of a single adult whooping crane observed at [Brazoria National Wildlife Refuge](#) up the coast from Aransas, this past week. Brazoria NWR has excellent coastal marsh habitat and has had a few other whooping cranes visit in the past few winters. Refuges on the mid and upper Texas coast provide important habitat for a growing whooping crane population.

There have been a number of whooping cranes reported from traditional stopover sites in the US, such as [Quivira NWR](#) in central Kansas and Salt Plains NWR in northern Oklahoma. For those of you that follow Facebook, both of these Refuges have pages where they report whooping crane sightings.

### Whooping Cranes on the Refuge

On 26 October, our Refuge Law Enforcement Officer reported the first whooping cranes of the season on the Refuge, a pair observed on the Blackjack Unit. Whooping crane tour boats and Refuge staff have reported only a handful of whooping cranes along the marshes of the Blackjack Peninsula, including 9 whooping cranes reported yesterday. I have not received reports of whooping cranes from the observation tower at the Refuge yet, but it shouldn't be long before visitors can expect to be able to view whooping cranes there. I expect that we will have quite a few more arrivals after the next few frontal passages.

### Texas Whooper Watch

Texas Whooper Watch is up and running and has done a great job in getting the word out on whooping crane migration to the public this year. Take some time to check out their website [here](#).

Be sure to report any Texas sightings beyond the known Aransas/Lamar area via email: [whoopingcranes@tpwd.state.tx.us](mailto:whoopingcranes@tpwd.state.tx.us) or phone: (512) 389-TXWW (8999).

### Food & Water Abundance:

While whooping cranes experienced dry conditions on the breeding grounds in Wood Buffalo National Park this past summer, they will be arriving to lush conditions here in Texas. It appears to be a banner fall here on the Texas coast, with seemingly record blue crab numbers and wetlands brimming to the top with fresh water.

### Precipitation/Salinity:

The Refuge received 11.10" of rain from July-October 2015, similar to that same time period last year although over 8" (75%) of the rainfall total occurred in September & October. Nearly all freshwater wetlands on the Refuge are full and native grasses and other vegetation is as dense as we've seen it in years. Salinity levels in San Antonio Bay are currently around 20 ppt. We do expect to see a dip in salinities in the next few days as water from recent flooding in the Guadalupe River watershed reaches the bay.