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***** News Highlight *****

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Progress made on Telemetry Study



Felipe Chavez-Ramirez (left) and Jessica Rempel (right) process a chick captured on the breeding grounds. See inside for article. ****Photo by Lea Craig-Moore, Canadian Wildlife Service****

2010 WHOOPING CRANE NESTING SEASON SUMMARY WOOD BUFFALO NATIONAL PARK

The 2010 whooping crane nesting season was a great success; water levels in spring and late summer were excellent and chicks benefited from mild summer conditions. A record number of nests were found in May and it was the second highest number of pre-fledged chicks and sets of twins recorded in August. For the first time since 1988, chicks were captured and banded in Wood Buffalo National Park

SPRING HABITAT CONDITIONS

Spring arrived on the breeding grounds a little early this year temperatures were 5 degrees higher than the long-term 60-year average. The Slave River broke up several weeks earlier than normal suggesting the whooping crane breeding grounds thawed and were available for nesting earlier than normal. Despite a greatly reduced snow pack over the winter, water levels on the breeding grounds were excellent in the spring, giving the birds many options for nesting and presumably good food availability.

BREEDING PAIR SURVEYS

Seventeen hours of Whooping Crane breeding pair surveys were carried out by the Canadian Wildlife Service (CWS) between May 16 and May 21. These aerial surveys were conducted in Cessna 185 aircraft, owned by Northwestern Air Lease of Fort Smith and piloted by B. Campbell. Lea Craig-Moore (CWS) directed the surveys and Kathy St. Laurent (CWS) and L. Craig-Moore conducted the observations. During the surveys, 74 whooping crane nests were discovered (see map on next page). This is the highest number of nests on record and likely attributable to a pulse of new birds hatched 3-5 years ago entering the breeding population. An additional 10 territorial pairs were also found in the breeding marshes indicating a healthy breeding population and a significant potential expansion in coming years. Territories north of the park in the Nyarling area that were vacant in 2009, the year after a 21% reduction in population due to winter mortality, were once again occupied with breeding or territorial pairs. A new breeding pair was found outside of the park on Salt River First Nation's (SRFN) land in the sedge meadows east of Lobstick marsh. This is the third nest on SFRN land. A total of 6 nests were therefore found outside the park boundaries. Due to reductions in the regional Whooping Crane budget, we were not able to determine clutch size. There were no June chick surveys flown to inventory hatched young this year.

CAPTURE AND BANDING OF PRE-FLEDGED CHICKS

New this year was a cooperative project spearheaded by the Crane Trust out of Wood River, Nebraska capturing and marking pre-fledged chicks in Wood Buffalo National Park. The project work is intended to answer questions regarding whooping crane migratory ecology and behaviour during migration using GPS. It is specifically intended to answer questions regarding; a) stopover areas, habitat use patterns, and factors influencing habitat use at different spatial and temporal scales, b) how the current migratory route compares to previous route models and to determine environmental and anthropogenic factors that may influence migratory behavior, and c) to identify causes, locations, and conditions of actual or potential mortality. The project uses solar Argos Global Positioning System (GPS) Platform Transmitter Terminals (PTTs) attached to tarsal bands. Birds are also marked with colour leg bands similar to those used from 1977-1988. The goal is to band 30 chicks on the breeding grounds and 30 adults in Texas on the wintering grounds over the next three years.

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/>

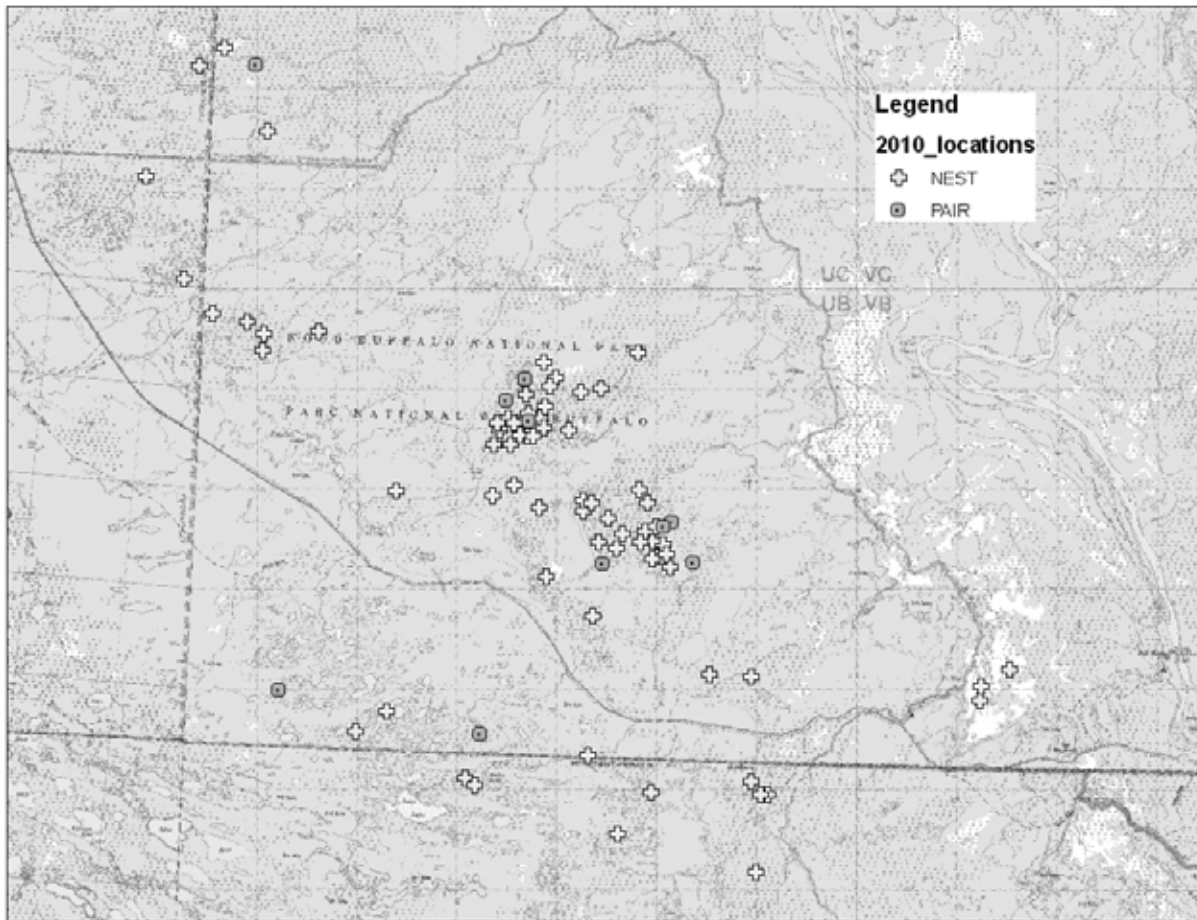
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Whooping Crane nest and non-breeding pair locations in and around Wood Buffalo National Park in 2010.

On August 2nd, L. Craig-Moore and Felipe Chavez-Ramirez flew for 5.4 hours in the C-185 to locate family groups suitable for capture. It was decided that families with twins were not eligible for capture because it would be too great a disturbance to the family group splitting up both young and parents. Nineteen attempts were needed to capture nine chicks on August 2nd and 3rd. The ground capture crew consisted of Felipe Chavez-Ramirez and Jessica Rempel from the Crane Trust, Barry Hartup (DVM) from the International Crane Foundation and Rhona Kindopp from Parks Canada, with L. Craig-Moore from CWS guiding the activities from the helicopter. Kim Hornsby from Thebacha Helicopters was our pilot. A total of 10.5 hours were spent in the helicopter.

Once families were located, the helicopter circled and found a suitable landing spot where the ground crew was dropped off (typically 200-300 meters from the family group). The helicopter then hovered and positioned so that the family was between the ground crew and it, giving the ground crew an aerial target to walk towards in the dense, high vegetation. Radio contact between the helicopter and ground crew allowed for better coordination and took advantage of the aerial view of the chick's movements and location. Families did not appear stressed from the presence of the helicopter and walked slowly away from it. Once the ground crew was visible to the adults they typically flew away. Chicks appeared to have one of two responses to the ground disturbance; they made their way into cover or they fled and were impossible to round up and capture. It became obvious how the chick was going to respond within the first few moments of the adults flying away and leaving the chick. Because a long pursuit time was undesirable (<12 minutes), and we wanted the least amount of disturbance to the chicks and adults, it was decided that the stop watch started from the moment the ground crew was dropped off; however, it was later felt that true disturbance to the birds did not start for at least another 30-60 seconds. The average capture time was 5:04 minutes; the average handling time was 13:37.



A released chick calmly walking away from the capture sight. All chicks behaved similarly when released.

Blood, feather and cloacal swab samples were taken from all chicks but no feces were collected as the birds did not defecate. It was felt that all chicks were in optimal condition based on the veterinarian's health inspection. Chicks were estimated to be 1-2 weeks from flying based on primary feather growth. The only measurements taken were weight and tarsus length to reduce handling time. The average weight of the 9 chicks was 4800 g and the PTT and colour leg bands averaged 2.075 % of the chicks' body weight, well within the limits outlined by the bird banding lab.

FLEDGING SUCCESS SURVEYS

Whooping Crane fledging success surveys were carried out by the Canadian Wildlife Service from August 9 to August 11, 2008. All surveys were directed by L. Craig-Moore and conducted in Northwestern Air Lease's Cessna 185 piloted by J. Goulter. Observations were conducted by K. St. Laurent and L. Craig-Moore. A total of 46 young were discovered in 36 family groups (i.e. 5 sets of twins). This is the second highest chick production and the second highest number of August twins on record. *****Lea Craig-Moore, Canadian Wildlife Service*****

Today's Trivia Question: The unison call is a vocalization made by members of crane pairs. How do you think this call might be useful to biologists? See Page 19 for the answer.

THE ARANSAS PROJECT PASSES CRITICAL STAGE IN ENDANGERED SPECIES ACT LITIGATION TO PROTECT WHOOPING CRANE

News release from July 28, 2010

(Corpus Christi, TX)—Today, in the federal Endangered Species Act (ESA) litigation brought by The Aransas Project (TAP) against officials of the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality (TCEQ), United States District Judge Janis Jack ruled from the bench to deny all motions to dismiss the litigation.

Proceeding issue-by-issue, Judge Jack entertained arguments from all parties before ruling from the bench to deny each of the motions brought by the defendants and interveners urging the court to dismiss the case or abstain from hearing it. The ruling clears the path for the litigation to proceed on the fate of the whooping crane, an internationally-recognized endangered species.

TAP legal counsel Jim Blackburn explains, “TAP’s litigation overcame a major hurdle in surviving motions brought by TCEQ and various interveners.” This significant development in the case followed an approximately 90-minute hearing before the United States District Court for the Southern District of Texas, Corpus Christi Division. Over the course of the hearing, the Office of the Attorney General, flanked by lawyers for interveners Guadalupe-Blanco River Authority (GBRA) and the Texas Chemical Council (TCC), advanced various arguments seeking to secure the dismissal of TAP’s case as well as urging the court to abstain from hearing the case on grounds that it would interfere with the state’s regulation of its water resources.

Following the hearing, TAP legal counsel Jim Blackburn commented, “We are pleased that the Court agreed that our case should move forward. In a case with international implications, this is a significant step in TAP’s efforts to protect this magnificent endangered species.” Blackburn continued, “We are now looking forward to commencing discovery, and digging deeply into the scientific merits which will be central to this case.” The case is currently set for trial on March 2, 2011.

Background

In March 2010, TAP filed a federal lawsuit against several officials of TCEQ in their official capacities for illegal harm and harassment of Whooping Cranes at and adjacent to Aransas National Wildlife Refuge in violation of the Endangered Species Act. TAP seeks a process to ensure that the Crane’s habitat and food sources in the bays and estuaries are protected during times of low flows.

The Aransas-Wood Buffalo flock of Whooping Cranes that winters on the Texas coast is the only natural wild flock remaining in the world. The flock has increased from 16 birds in the early 1940s to a high of 270 in the spring of 2008. The 2008-2009 year was the worst in recent history for the Whooping Crane, with a death toll of 23 birds, or 8.5% of the flock, occurring in Texas during their winter at Aransas. The lack of freshwater inflows to the bays from the Guadalupe and San Antonio Rivers, especially during times of low flows, resulted in very high salinity levels and depleted food and water sources for the Cranes.

About The Aransas Project

The Aransas Project is a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization focused on water management of the Guadalupe River Basin and bays that represents all interests throughout the basin—all the way to the bay. TAP is an alliance of municipalities, businesses, organizations, and citizens working to ensure freshwater flows to the bays and estuaries that protect the winter habitat of the endangered whooping crane. TAP’s focus has brought together a diverse range of groups, unifying an unlikely mix of both conservative and liberal support around this critical issue. Members include Aransas County, Aransas County Navigation District, Town of Fulton, City of Rockport, International Crane Foundation, the Coastal Bend Guides Association and more. *****MEDIA CONTACT: Heather Beckel, 512.474.7777, ext. 42; heather@hellomilkshake.com*****

Updates from Reintroductions

WILD WHOOPING CRANE CHICKS FLEDGE IN WISCONSIN

News Release from September 1, 2010

The Whooping Crane Eastern Partnership (WCEP) is celebrating another success in its efforts to reintroduce a wild migratory whooping crane population in eastern North America. Two wild-hatched whooping crane chicks have recently fledged, or become capable of flight. This is only the second time in over a century that naturally produced whooping cranes have fledged in the wild in the Midwest. The chicks, #W1-10 and #W3-10 (W = wild hatched) were both observed flying with their parents this weekend. Number W1-10 is located on the [Necedah National Wildlife Refuge](#) (NWR) in central Wisconsin, and #W3-10 is on private property in Wood County, Wisconsin.

Seven chicks initially hatched this year in the wild, the largest number to hatch in WCEP project history. Wild-hatched chicks face a precarious existence in the first weeks of their lives, and natural loss of chicks due to predation is common. The survival rate for WCEP with these two chicks is within the range of survival rates for wild sandhill crane chicks in south-central Wisconsin currently being studied by the [International Crane Foundation](#).

The two wild whooping crane chicks are the result of renesting. Earlier this spring, nine breeding pairs of whooping cranes built nests and laid eggs, but all nine pairs abandoned those first nests. The nest abandonments earlier this spring are similar to what has been observed in previous years. WCEP is investigating the cause of the abandonments through analysis of data collected throughout the nesting period on crane behavior and black fly abundance and distribution.

In addition to the two wild chicks, 13 whooping crane chicks are being conditioned to follow ultralight aircraft by a field team from [Operation Migration](#) and the [Patuxent Wildlife Research Center](#). This fall, Operation Migration will guide the young cranes on their first southward migration from Necedah NWR to Florida, the cranes' winter home.

An additional 11 chicks will be migrating south as part of WCEP's [Direct Autumn Release](#) (DAR) project. Biologists from the International Crane Foundation and the [U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service](#) are currently rearing the whooping crane chicks at Necedah NWR. The chicks will be released this fall in the company of older cranes from whom the young birds learn the migration route. This is the sixth year WCEP has used this DAR method.

In the spring and fall, project staff from the International Crane Foundation and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service track and monitor the released cranes in an effort to learn as much as possible about their unassisted journeys and the habitat choices they make both along the way and on their summering and wintering grounds. Most of the whooping cranes released in previous years spend the summer in central Wisconsin, where they use areas on or near Necedah NWR, as well as other public and private lands.

Whooping cranes that take part in the ultralight and Direct Autumn Release reintroductions are hatched at the U.S. Geological Survey's Patuxent Wildlife Research Center in Laurel, Md., and at the International Crane Foundation in Baraboo, Wis. Chicks are raised under a strict isolation protocol and to ensure the birds remain wild, handlers adhere to a no-talking rule and wear costumes designed to mask the human form.

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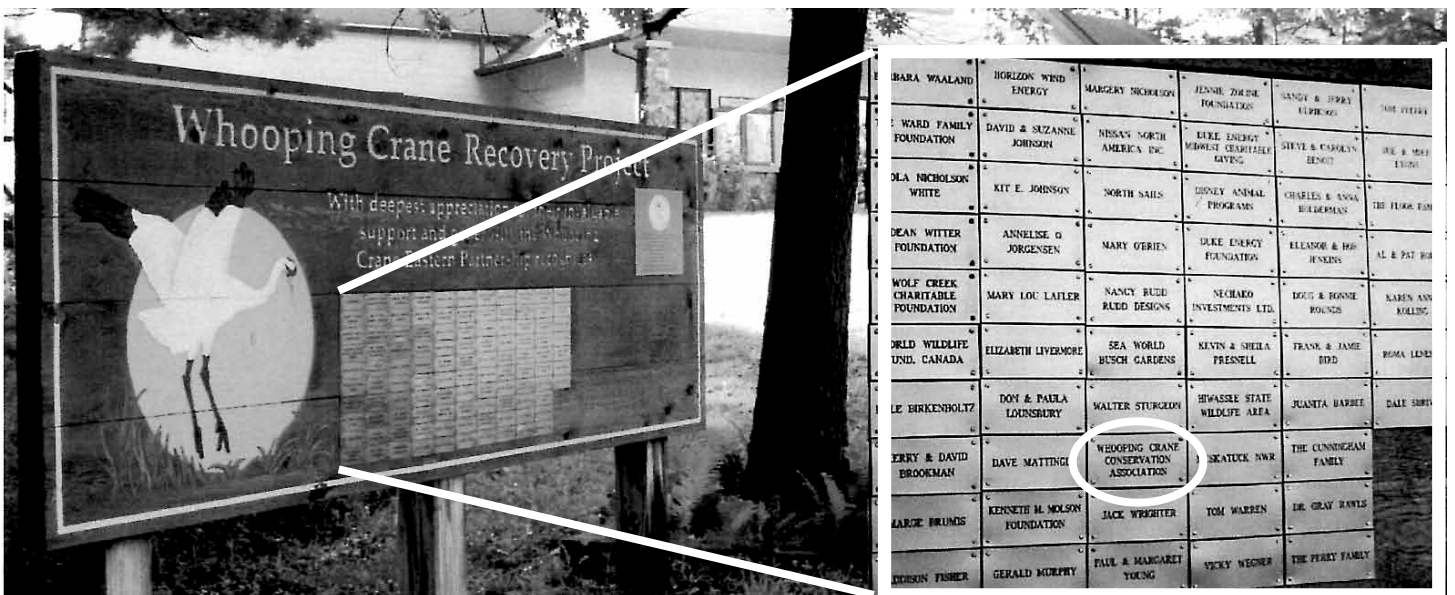
Whooping cranes were on the verge of extinction in the 1940s. Today, there are only about 550 birds in existence, approximately 400 of them in the wild. Aside from the 96 WCEP birds, the only other migrating population of whooping cranes nests at Wood Buffalo National Park in northern Alberta, Canada and winters at Aransas NWR on the Texas Gulf Coast. A non-migrating flock of approximately 30 birds lives year-round in the central Florida Kissimmee region.

Whooping cranes, named for their loud and penetrating unison calls, live and breed in wetland areas, where they feed on crabs, clams, frogs and aquatic plants. They are distinctive animals, standing five feet tall, with white bodies, black wing tips and red crowns on their heads.

WCEP asks anyone who encounters a whooping crane in the wild to please give them the respect and distance they need. Do not approach birds on foot within 200 yards; remain in your vehicle; do not approach in a vehicle within 100 yards. Also, please remain concealed and do not speak loudly enough that the birds can hear you. Finally, do not trespass on private property in an attempt to view or photograph whooping cranes.

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 60 percent of the project's budget comes from private sources in the form of grants, public donations and corporate sponsors. To report whooping crane sightings, visit the WCEP whooping crane observation webpage at: <http://www.fws.gov/midwest/whoopingcrane/sightings/sightingform.cfm>. ***News Release Contact: Joan Garland, 608-381-1262****



The Whooping Crane Eastern Partnership recognized the support of our organization by installing a metal tag on a recognition board that is displayed at the Necedah National Wildlife Refuge in Wisconsin.

FLORIDA RESIDENT FLOCK

Eight of 11 pairs in this population nested this spring; 3 pairs hatched 4 chicks and 1 chick fledged (first achieved flight) on 6 July at 78 days of age but in October went missing and is presumed dead. We continue to study this population, with a focus on breeding issues. 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 pair in a pilot study of incubation temperature. 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 degrees F below mean incubation temperature. Unusually long lapses in incubation likely affect hatchability of eggs. Next spring we plan to continue these studies and will deploy cameras capable of night-vision near nests to determine the cause of these lapses in incubation. Behavioral and incubation temperature data from whooping and sandhill crane nests will allow us to make comparisons between successful and unsuccessful nests and comparisons between the species. Currently the non-migratory Florida flock consists of 21 birds (9 males, 12 females) including 8 pairs. For more information on the Florida non-migratory whooping crane flock, visit: <http://research.myfwc.com/> and click on "Whooping Crane"****Marty Folk, Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission****

U.S. FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE PROPOSES REINTRODUCTION OF NON-MIGRATORY WHOOPING CRANES INTO SOUTHWEST LOUISIANA

News release from August 19, 2010

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service announced today in the *Federal Register* 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 (WLWCA) 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 (550 worldwide); 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.

Today’s *Federal Register* announcement includes the proposed rule. The Service has drafted an environmental assessment (EA), which evaluates several alternatives for establishing a new nonmigratory population of whooping cranes. The Service is seeking comments on both documents, and also specifically the following: (1) the geographic boundary for the NEP; and, (2) effects of the reintroduction on other native species and the ecosystem.

Editor’s note on shaded information: the comment period is currently closed.

To allow adequate time to conduct this review, the Service requests that information be received on or before October 18, 2010. You may submit written information on the proposed rule by one of the following methods:

- Federal eRulemaking Portal: <http://www.regulations.gov>. Follow the instructions for submitting comments.
- U.S. mail or hand-delivery: Public Comments Processing, Attn: FWS-R4-ES-2010-0057; Division of Policy and Directives Management; U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service; 4401 N. Fairfax Drive, Suite 222; Arlington, VA 22203.
- E-mails or faxes will not be accepted. All comments will be posted on <http://www.regulations.gov>. This generally means that any personal information provided will be posted.

You may submit comments on the draft environmental assessment (EA) by one of the following methods:

- E-mail to: LouisianaCranesEA@fws.gov.
- U.S. mail or hand-delivery: Lafayette Field Office, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, 646 Cajundome Boulevard, Suite 400, Lafayette, LA 70506.

The Service and the LDWF will hold public hearing at the following locations: Gueydan, Louisiana, on September 15, 2010, at the Gueydan Civic Center, 901 Wilkinson St., Gueydan, LA 70542; and in Baton Rouge, Louisiana, on September 16, 2010, at the Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries, 2000 Quail Drive Baton Rouge, LA 70808. Each public hearing will last from 7:00-9:00p.m. Before each hearing, an open house will be held to provide an additional opportunity for the public to gain information and ask questions about the proposed rule. All comments we receive at a public hearing, both verbal and written, will be considered in making a final decision.

Visit the southeast regional website to learn more at <http://www.fws.gov/southeast>. 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 www.fws.gov.****Media Contacts: Bill Brooks, Billy_Brooks@fws.gov, 904-731-3136. Elsie Davis, Elsie_Davis@fws.gov, 404-679-7107****

Did the Deepwater Horizon oil spill impact the decision to consider releases of whooping cranes in Louisiana? Here is an excerpt from a “Questions and Answers” article on the website of the USFWS. For the complete list of questions and answers, visit this website:

<http://www.fws.gov/northflorida/WhoopingCrane/Whooping%20Crane%20Proposed%20Rule%20FAQs%20Final%208-19-10.pdf>.

Q: Are these wetlands susceptible to the Deepwater Horizon oil spill that is impacting southeastern Louisiana coastal areas?

A: The Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries (LDWF) recently completed a risk assessment associated with this reintroduction and does not anticipate spill impacts from the Deepwater Horizon/MC252OS Spill Area into the whooping crane restoration site at WLWCA or into the surrounding habitats in southwestern Louisiana. The WLWCA is located over 200 miles from the Deepwater Horizon oil spill release site and 17 miles north of the Gulf of Mexico shoreline. Additionally, there are multiple physical barriers to stop crude oil from entering WLWCA such as the Gulf of Mexico Beach Rim, Levees, Water Control Structures, Locks, and Spill Control Equipment.

Feature Article: The Important Role of Volunteers in the Conservation of Whooping Cranes

One of my many roles with the reintroduction of whooping cranes into eastern North America has been to ask for volunteer help in constructing and maintaining the winter release pens here in Florida for the migratory flock that is being reintroduced by the Whooping Crane Eastern Partnership (WCEP). Actually, back in the fall of 2001, I asked the staff at Chassahowitzka National Wildlife Refuge (NWR) if I could volunteer to help when they constructed the first winter release pen. Lucky for me they gladly accepted my offer. On December 4, 2001 Operation Migration led the original seven whooping cranes to the Chassahowitzka winter acclimation-release pen to complete the historic first migration. The cranes remained there for the winter, as have an additional 9 release cohorts (close to 100 whooping cranes). The young of the year cranes generally stay until late March when they initiate spring migration and return to their natal summering-breeding area of Necedah NWR, Wisconsin.

With the size of the release cohorts increasing from 7 to between 12 and 20 whooping cranes annually, and with older whooping cranes returning to their natal wintering area at Chassahowitzka each year, it was decided to enlarge the winter release-acclimation pen. We enclosed an additional 2.5 acres of salt marsh and enclosed the entire shallow water tidal pond and provided a large predator-safe area for the wintering cranes. In the photograph on the facing page, you can see the original fence line that bisects the upper end of the tidal pond which formed the original 1.5-acre pen and with the additional fence added to encompass the entire tidal pond; the pen now includes 4 acres of salt marsh and a shallow tidal pond. An oyster bar was also constructed to improve roosting habitat during high tides. Now obviously, this was quite an effort and the Refuge staff enlisted help from their “friends group,” the Friends of Chassahowitzka. This awesome volunteer organization has not only helped to organize and host the annual whooping crane arrival events at Dunnellon and Crystal River, but they have spent many work-hours assisting refuge staff with the construction, repair and annual maintenance of the Chassahowitzka NWR winter release pen. I of course have asked several other folks to assist with repairs and maintenance and that is how the Jacksonville Zoo became involved. They annually send several of their keepers to assist with construction and repairs. This allows the keepers, who are normally ambassadors to conservation through the public display, outreach and education of endangered and rare species from around the world, to contribute to whooping crane conservation. During the past ten years of maintaining

and improving this site for whooping cranes, the most remarkable effort was in the fall of October 2004 you may recall that this was the year that four hurricanes made landfall in Florida and the pen site took quite a beating. Surprisingly, the infrastructure of the pen held up fairly well. The repairs were rather simple as the pen withstood the hurricane force winds and tidal surges. Repairs mainly consisted of resetting and tightening up the fence by replacing the cable ties and restringing the electric fences around the pen. It is pretty impressive to think that close to 100 whooping cranes have spent their first winter at the Chassahowitzka NWR winter release-acclimation pen.



Photo by Chassahowitzka NWR

In 2005, WCEP added a second winter pen site at the Halpata Tasthanaki Preserve, a 36,000 acre parcel along the Withlacoochee River near Dunnellon, FL. The Southwest Florida Water Management District (“District”) is actively restoring the property which includes scrub habitat utilized by the Florida scrub jay, indigo snakes and gopher tortoises. There are also many shallow wetlands and wet prairie used by Florida sandhill cranes and large cypress strands that are used by wood storks, egrets, herons and other wetland dependent species. This site is only 25 miles from the Chassahowitzka pen site and is used a migration stop and a site where the new release class has on one occasion been held at for close to 30 days. Halpata is also adjacent to the Dunnellon Airport where the annual arrival event is now held. Preparation of the Halpata site and pen was truly a volunteer effort. The District land managers focused a portion of their restoration funds and staff time to roller chop, mow, burn and close the area to public entry to ensure a safe and secure location to temporarily hold the cranes during their final leg of the fall migration. The Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission donated all the pen materials they used to release the Florida non-migratory whooping cranes into the

Kissimmee Prairie area. They also helped to lead the pen construction at Halpata. In the picture below, Steve Baynes and Marty Folk can be seen pounding fence posts into the ground. Volunteers from the Jacksonville Zoo, Disney's Animal Kingdom, Chassahowitzka NWR, Friends of Chassahowitzka, and several dedicated individuals were able to construct the pen and prepare it for the arrival of fifth class of whooping cranes in less than two weeks time. What I remember about this effort was how wet Florida was that year and we were constructing the fence in waist deep water. This three-acre pen has proven to be a useful tool for the WCEP management "tool box."



Photo on left by Scott Tidmus, Disney's Animal Kingdom. Photo on right by Marty Folk, Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission



Photo of St. Mark's pen by Joe Duff, Operation Migration

In 2008, WCEP made the decision to split future release cohorts into two groups. One group would winter at the already established site at Chassahowitzka NWR and the other group would winter at St. Marks NWR. The decision to split the cohort was made to prevent the possible loss of an entire cohort due to a catastrophic event. I had already asked James Burnette and Terry Peacock if they were willing to host a whooping crane winter release site without any dedicated funds to build the necessary infrastructure. Lucky for us, they said yes. With this decision came the amazing effort by the St Marks NWR and its volunteers from the St. Marks Refuge Association and the St. Marks Photography Club. The goal was obviously to construct the third Florida winter release-acclimation pen within the marsh at the headwaters of Mensler Creek in the Wakulla Unit of the St. Marks NWR (see photo on lower facing page).

Refuge Manager Terry Peacock obtained the environmental permit from the Florida Department of Protection to construct the pen and oyster bar in one of the tidal ponds and to close access to the tidal creeks that lead to the pen site (no easy feat). Once the permit was obtained, a group of volunteers, including the Wakulla High School NJROTC, filled over 1,000 50-lb sandbags (see photo below). The sandbags were hand-placed in the tidal pond and created the base of the oyster bar. Melissa Charbeneau of the Florida Department of Environmental Protection's Big Bend Aquatic Preserve donated 20 yards of oyster shell that were used to cover the sandbags and create the oyster reef for the whooping cranes to roost upon. The Refuge staff and volunteers spent approximately two weeks constructing the three-acre pen, oyster reef, feeding and watering stations and an observation blind.



Photo by Terry Peacock, US Fish and Wildlife Service

WCEP is made up of several dedicated organizations and staff from each of these groups has made significant contributions in the design, construction, modifications, and maintenance of these sites. In particular, the winter monitoring staffs from the International Crane Foundation, Operation Migration and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service have spent countless hours at these sites ensuring that the whooping cranes are as safe as possible and given the opportunity to become wild whooping cranes.

It is amazing to me what people will do if you just ask. I personally want to thank each and every one of you who has had a hand in building and maintaining the Chassahowitzka, Halpata and St. Marks winter release-acclimation pens. Without your help the Eastern Migratory Population of whooping cranes would not be as successful as we have seen them in their winter habitats. ****Billy Brooks, USFWS, Jacksonville, FL****

In Memoriam

Bob Elgas

Bob Elgas once said, when a friend asked him about why he liked birds so much, “that instead of a silver spoon he was born with a feather in his mouth.” Bob was a rancher and cowboy early on, a naturalist forever, an avid aviculturist, an accomplished goose biologist, an arctic explorer, a noted public speaker, a skilled politician, and a world renowned artist. I guess this qualifies him as a renaissance man. Visiting Bob’s and his wife Elizabeth’s home in Big Timber, Montana was like visiting a zoo, a natural history museum, and an art gallery all in one. Bob & Elizabeth traveled all over North America and many places in Europe visiting bird collections, refuges, and attending bird conferences. He was a charter member and past President of the International Wild Waterfowl Association and was there with Jerry Pratt, Jack Kiracofe, Jean Delacour and many others when IWWA had the Whooper Committee meeting to discuss what could be done to help the plight of that magnificent endangered bird. That committee led to the establishment of the Whooping Crane Conservation Association. During the period when Rod Drewien was doing the cross fostering project at Grey’s Lake at least one of those birds, during their juvenile wandering period, visited Bob’s ranch in Big Timber.

As a cowboy and rancher, Bob started out married life in Montana’s high country where he acquired his first geese. After a few years they moved to a smaller holding outside Big Timber where he put together a fabulous collection of northern geese including most of North America’s and a fair number of Eurasian species. He also kept cranes, swans, and macaws. They lived on the outskirts of town but well within walking distance for most of the children who came almost daily to walk down his long gravel driveway to see the birds and the Mouflan sheep that had free run of the area. Bob thought “the kids” were the most enjoyable part of aviculture and he always made time for them. He once told me that to tell a child about a bird exposed that child to nature, culture, geography, biology, and a number of other subjects and was a learning experience that would be long remembered. Bob was also a mentor to many of us older kids and introduced us to good avicultural practices and led us or schooled us on collecting trips in his area for cranes and trumpeter swans and on many trips to the arctic regions of Alaska and Canada.

As an artist, Bob painted mostly in oils. His subjects were primarily birds but he did several very good mammals as well. His paintings hang in galleries and collections throughout the United States and in private homes in America, Europe and Asia. He was once a top ten finalist in the annual National Waterfowl Stamp contest with a painting of Spectacled Eiders. He preferred painting scenes capturing the habitat a particular bird lived in and told me that after his onetime only entry in the stamp contest and his initial success he spent way too much time doing a painting that he really didn’t like. I think he called it “commercial art or consumer art”. What many people never realized was that Bob was color blind and he depended on Elizabeth’s critical eye to get his colors right. Several years ago WCCA benefitted from his artistic talents when he donated a large number of prints of a pair of whooping cranes with a chick to use as a fund raiser.

Bob and Elizabeth made many collecting trips together in the early days, but Bob was forced to go alone when the flock at home grew too large for both of them to be away. The early expeditions were to the Yukon-Kuskokwim Delta, Old Crow Flats and Southampton Island. The trips involved a number of other WCCA members and many others who were eager to learn about collecting techniques developed on earlier trips. Many North American species of waterfowl and cranes were established in captivity for the first time as a result of their efforts.

Bob passed away at 90 years of age in Grant’s Pass, Oregon on July 16, 2010. He was buried beside Elizabeth at Mountain View Cemetery in Big Timber. They were married for 54 years before she died Nov. 2, 1993. Survivors include a granddaughter, Susan Espindola of Hemet, CA****Walt Sturgeon, WCCA Trustee****

Chuck Frith

Charles Robert Frith, 77, of Grand Island died Monday, Aug. 9, 2010, at Bryan LGH East in Lincoln. Chuck was born June 30, 1933, in Rogers, Ark., the son the Joseph Lewis and LaVawn S. (Stephenson) Frith. He received his education in Tulsa, Okla., graduating from high school with the class of 1952. He received his Bachelor's degree in Wildlife Management from the University of Montana. In 1954, he entered the United States Air Force and served until February of 1958. He served in Guam and New Mexico. After his discharge, he furthered his education receiving his Masters degree in Secondary Education & Science from Kearney State Teachers College.

He was united in marriage to Bessie E. Baker on Nov. 28, 1964, in Grand Island. The couple made their home in Grand Island, where he was employed as a fish and wildlife biologist for the U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service from October 1963 until April of 1972 in Grand Island, working on water development projects in Nebraska, Kansas, Missouri, Colorado and Iowa. May 1972 until April 1974, he was a Supervisor of the Environmental Section for the Bureau of Reclamation Frying Pan/Arkansas River project stationed in Pueblo, Colo. From May 1974 until February of 1976, he was Chief Environmental Coordinator for the Corps of Engineers, Omaha District, Omaha.

In February of 1976 until December of 1977, he returned to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service in Grand Island to work on Platte River issues. Starting in December of 1978, he was attached to the Fish and Wildlife Northern Prairie Wildlife Research Center, Jamestown, N.D. While attached to Northern Prairie he worked on the Platte River Ecology Study. After the Ecology Study was completed he was appointed Field Supervisor, Ecological Services of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service for the states of Nebraska and Kansas until his retirement in March of 1985. Beginning in September of 1985, he worked for the National Audubon Society on Platte River issues until February 1987.

He was a member of the First Christian Church. His hobbies included, his guns, hunting and fishing. Survivors include his wife, Bessie E. Frith of Grand Island; cousins, Gaylene Wilson, Cheryl Smith and LizAnne Simons, all of Springfield, Mo., Carolyn Smith of Wichita, Kan., and Clealus Atencio of Denver. His parents preceded him in death. *****Published in The Grand Island Independent on 8/11/2010*****

Bill Huey



William S. Huey, age 85, died peacefully at his Tesuque home Wednesday morning August, 25th. Bill was born in Wichita Falls, Texas, on March 25, 1925, to mother Homer Ella Morrow Huey and his father William Huey. After graduation from Arlington Heights High School in Ft. Worth, Bill enlisted in the military and reported to Aviation Cadet School in Dallas, Texas in March 1943. In April 1945 he boarded the Queen Elizabeth I to England where he fought in WW II as a turret gunner in the [U.S. Air Force](#).

When the war was over he earned a Bachelor of Science in Agriculture at New Mexico A&M (now NMSU). Bill met and married his wife Mary Blue of Rochester, NY, who was also attending A&M as a student in Engineering. After being engaged for only a few hours (and, no, that is not a typo), they were married. [They celebrated their 62nd wedding anniversary on January 5, 2009; Mary died two months later on March 6, 2009.]

After graduating from A&M, Bill and Mary moved to Reserve, New Mexico. It is here that Bill started a career as a game warden with the New Mexico Department of Game and Fish. His love and dedication to wildlife management would lead to a long and distinguished career. He would serve as chief of public affairs, assistant director and director before he was appointed cabinet Secretary of Natural Resources. Friends remember Bill

most for his big presence with a kind and accepting heart, an infectious sense of humor, and that one of a kind dog whistle that resonated in the hills of Tesuque for over 57 years.

His hobbies and interests were varied and carried out with first class intensity: a gift and love for gardening, especially his prized iris garden; raising pea fowl, chickens, Koi, racing pigeons and at one point two pair each: Sand Hill and African Cranes.

Among colleagues, he is revered as a visionary, the godfather of wildlife management in New Mexico. He was recognized as a conservation hero by the Nature Conservancy and was honored throughout his career and even after he retired with many accolades for his service and advice on preservation and wildlife management. Bill was the recipient of the Winchester Award for his outstanding conservation efforts and interests in national and international conservation matters. He was also recognized by the International Wildlife Foundation and the International Association of Fish & Wildlife Agencies. The National Wildlife Federation honored him with a special conservation award and he was instrumental in helping the Federal Government acquire the Valles Caldera (formerly known as the Baca Ranch) in northern New Mexico. *****Excerpts from the Sante Fe New Mexican*****

The world lost a great conservationist and friend to the whooping crane when Bill Huey passed away. Bill was there at the beginning of the WCCA and served in many capacities including Trustee, President several times and as a Trustee Emeritus. He received the WCCA Honor Award in 1977 and the Jerome J. Pratt Whooping Crane Conservation Award in 2000.

Bill Huey and his friend Ervin Boeker pioneered crane studies in North America. Their work led to the development of techniques that were later used by scientists involved in the whooping crane recovery program. This work included a system of marking birds for identification, population dynamics, and the method for collecting and transporting crane eggs from wild nests. Huey's success in rearing sandhill cranes in captivity was legendary.

Bill served as a member of the U.S Whooping Crane Recovery Team representing WCCA. Lynn Greenwalt former Director of USFWS said, "Bill Huey is the consummate "bio-politician" understanding the relationship of politics to the accomplishment of biological conservation." Bill had the honor of representing the US as a delegate to the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES). He remained a strong advocate for habitat protection in retirement, leading the fight for the establishment of state and federal wildlife areas in New Mexico and elsewhere.

The Whooping Crane and his many likeminded human friends will miss Bill Huey and all that he did for wildlife in North America. *****Walt Sturgeon, WCCA Trustee*****



Ernie Kuyt

Ernie Kuyt, retired biologist with the Canadian Wildlife Service, passed away unexpectedly on May 21, 2010. Ernie had a varied career in wildlife which included over 25 years of research on whooping cranes on their breeding grounds. Ernie was born in the Netherlands and was an avid naturalist right from young. I recall him mentioning an incident while climbing up to a Great Blue Heron nest when he was a teen. Ernie emigrated, with his family, to Canada at the end of World War II. Here Ernie worked his way through school and graduated from the University of British Columbia in 1957 and began working on caribou with the Saskatchewan Department of Natural Resources. He moved to the

Canadian Wildlife Service in 1960 and began research into predator-prey relationships between wolves and barren-ground caribou. He obtained his MA on wolf ecology from the University of Saskatchewan in 1970. From 1965 until 1990 Ernie was the lead biologist with the Canadian Wildlife Service's whooping crane recovery project and was involved in developing a strategy of inter-nest exchange of eggs to enhance productivity of the cranes, he also led the colour banding of juvenile whooping cranes and followed radio marked cranes on their 4000 km long migration between breeding grounds and wintering grounds. Whooping crane eggs collected in Wood Buffalo National Park by Ernie were used to establish the captive flocks at the Patuxent Wildlife Research Center and the International Crane Foundation. Many of the eggs he collected were also sent to Gray's Lake, Idaho in an attempt to establish a population in the western United States. Ernie was an avid bander and had banded almost 11,000 birds of over 120 species, including 132 whooping cranes. Ernie not only worked with wildlife he also rigorously reported on his findings. He was a prolific writer, and published almost 90 papers, over 30 of these were on the whooping crane. He coauthored another dozen papers and has authored or coauthored over 50 internal reports for the CWS. Ernie had been recognized previously for his research on whooping cranes including being the recipient of the Whooping Crane Conservation Association's Honor Award and the Jerome Pratt Whooping Crane Award. In addition the Order of Canada was presented to him on April 21, 1993 for his dedication to preserving the beauty and diversity of Canada's natural environment. More recently in 2008, Ernie was awarded the L. H. Walkinshaw Crane Conservation Award. Up until his passing he continued his involvement in natural history and avidly followed the progress of whooping crane recovery. Ernie leaves behind his wife Elsie, daughter Pamela (Mike) Stroh, and son Jonathan. *****Brian Johns, retired Canadian Whooping Crane Coordinator*****

Zoe Lynch



Zoe Sagrera Lynch, 92, died peacefully while being a passenger in the car with her daughter Mary. According to her daughter Nora, Zoe woke up Thursday morning not feeling too well and told her daughters that she was going to die. They brushed it off but Mary still took her to the doctor to check her out. Her doctor did not find anything wrong with her. She hugged and kissed her doctor good bye and walked out. Moments later down the road, she closed her eyes and never woke up. This was a fitting way for Zoe to pass. Her life was filled with accomplishments. Zoe was a member of the St. Genevieve Catholic Church Community, a member of the Catholic Daughters for over 50 years, a member of the Women's Club of Lafayette, Lafayette Garden Club, the Louisiana Society for Horticulture Research, and

numerous organizations. She was a conservationist and was a supporter of the rehabilitation of wildlife, protecting Louisiana's Coastline as well as the re-establishment of the Whooping Cranes in Louisiana. She was a strong advocate for the Whooping Crane. When Jerry Pratt told her that WCCA needed a new Secretary-Treasurer to replace him, she volunteered her daughter Mary. That was Zoe's way of doing things that she wanted to see done. Her involvement covered many decades of work by her late husband, John J. Lynch. The first whooper chick hatched in captivity by a foster parent (a Japanese Silkie hen) was named "Zoe" after her. Zoe continued to raise the waterfowl that John had started and offered information and support to anyone who needed help in raising birds. She even gave tours to school students teaching them about bird identification, wildlife and the habitat needed to support them. She owned and managed Orchid Gardens which was a retail plant nursery containing orchids, bromeliads, rare ferns and unusual tropicals. She was one of the first to promote conservation and propagation of Louisiana native wildflowers. She was a resource on information to the public about orchid growing, wildflowers, rare plants, hummingbird flowers, and other enjoyable things that made life special for so many.

Her final accomplishment was the completion of her memories of Cheniere au Tigre, a 350 page hardcover book that is filled with photos and stories of Cheniere au Tigre. It took her 20 years to accumulate the hundreds of photos and write the stories. The book went on sale in August and sold out in three weeks. She was waiting

for the next shipment to autograph. “She was able to see her book be a success,” said her daughter Nora. “She did not expect it to be so successful”. So many people have wanted to talk to her about Cheniere au Tigre. She was born and raised on Cheniere au Tigre and still visited the island. “This book was written because I wanted to leave something behind,” said the late Zoe before she passed away. “Cheniere au Tigre is a special place for me. I wanted others to see what I already know.”

Zoe was aware of the strong possibility that the Whooping Cranes would come back to White Lake or somewhere along the Louisiana Marshes. She had planned to attend the two hearings with her daughter Mary and son in law, Art. Mary had told her that things were looking pretty good, but we could not get too excited just yet. Mary says that Zoe was there in spirit with her and Art. I know that Mom and Dad will both be there should they release the young cranes in the Louisiana marshes. Mom was very supportive of the WCCA and their mission. Contributions to WCCA in her memory are appreciated. If anyone wants to learn more about Zoe feel free to contact her daughter Mary at whooperchics@yahoo.com or call 337-288-4594 (cell). *****Mary Courville, WCCA Life Member*****

WCCA to meet with other organizations in Nebraska in March 2011

The WCCA will hold a business meeting in association with the 12th North American Crane Workshop. Details of when and where the WCCA will meet will be shared with our members prior to the event. There will be awesome field trips and many presentations on cranes and other water birds. It will be a great event!

THE TWELFTH NORTH AMERICAN CRANE WORKSHOP will be held in Grand Island, Nebraska, March 13 – 16, 2011 and will be held jointly 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 (EM: fchavez@whoopingcrane.org) and DAVID ABORN, Scientific Program Chair (EM: david-aborn@utc.edu).

The Platte River and nearby wetlands in mid-March provide staging habitat for nearly 10 million waterfowl and half a million Sandhill Cranes--a phenomenon of global significance. Due to its use by large numbers of migrating shorebirds, the area also is designated a Landscape of International Importance by the Western Hemisphere Shorebird Reserve Network.

Additional information on the meeting can be found at the websites of the Waterbird Society (http://www.waterbirds.org/annual_meeting) and North American Crane Working Group (<http://www.nacwg.org/>).

Notice of Updates to WCCA By-Laws

There have been some edits to our group's By-laws. If you would like to receive a copy, please contact the newsletter editor (see contact information on lower right side of page 2).

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:

Allan and Anita Beach
Scott R. Derrickson
Mary Peace Douglas
Jacqueline Duke
Jake Edwards

Ray M. Prohett
Carl Racchini
Sara Simmonds
Howard A. Telosky

Answer to Today’s Trivia Question from page 4: Crane pairs call together in what is described as the “unison call”. It is useful to biologists because it allows them to distinguish males from the females. During this call, the male’s voice is lower in pitch and consists of fewer notes than the female’s. The male also generally holds his head higher during the call.

Please renew your membership in the Whooping Crane Conservation Association for 2011

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For Membership information, e-mail jmaeparker@cox.net, or call Jeannette at 407-460-2399. Also visit our great web site: <http://whoopingcrane.com/> for lots of additional information and past newsletters.

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

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Whooping cranes in a wintering pen at Chassahowitzka National Wildlife Refuge, Florida. Volunteers have made huge contributions toward building and maintaining these pens. See inside for article.****Photo by Sara Zimorski, International Crane Foundation****