

Wildlife conservationists reported sighting whooping cranes at 61 locations stretching from North Dakota to Texas during the past week. Martha Tacha, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Grand Island, Nebraska advised that, "As you might expect, many sightings have been confirmed since my last report. Although it would seem from the confirmed sightings that the migration has drifted southward, location information from the radio-tagged whoopers shows that there were still whooping cranes in North Dakota as recently as yesterday, 11/15."

Tacha's report shows a total of 277 whooping cranes were spotted, including 26 on Aransas National Wildlife Refuge in Texas. Two hundred and fifty-one were adults and 32 were juveniles. The 26 whoopers on Aransas Refuge were not identified by age. The total whooper population still migrating towards Aransas NWR is expected to number 300. This would be a record number that has grown from a low of 15 birds in the 1950s.

Twenty-one whoopers have active Global Positioning System (GPS) receivers attached to their bodies. The GPS is a satellite-based navigation system made up of a network of 24 satellites placed into orbit by the U.S. Department of Defense. The GPS receivers provide a means to track the movements of whooping cranes. Twelve of the 21 whooping cranes with active GPS receivers have reached the south Texas coast, with many confirmed sightings on and off Aransas National Wildlife Refuge (26 whoopers are occupying the Blackjack Peninsula on Aransas Refuge as of 11-15-2011). With daily high temps forecast below freezing as far south as Pierre, SD, perhaps the cranes will move south to find open water.