



U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

Aransas National Wildlife Refuge

Whooping Crane Update – March 1, 2012

Precipitation/Salinity:

As of February 29, the precipitation totals for Aransas, TX are 3.75 inches and salinity levels in San Antonio Bay are recorded as 20.4 parts per thousand. Salinity levels have dropped due to recent freshwater inflows from rain in Central Texas, as well as localized rainfall.

Food Sources:

Since the last update, the refuge has conducted additional prescribed burns bringing the total to 10,852 acres of habitat. The whooping cranes have been observed eating the roasted acorns and other food sources. There are still approximately 1,110 acres planned for the remaining whooping crane season. The refuge had originally hoped to burn approximately 14,200 acres but weather conditions prevented firefighters from safely and effectively conducting the prescribed burns to help alleviate low food sources for the cranes.

Reports:

The refuge is still waiting for the final report on the second chick carcass sent to the National Wildlife Health Center in Madison, WI in January.

Surveys:

The February survey has had some challenges due to weather but that updated information will be posted on the website as soon as it becomes available. The January survey, three flights conducted on January 26, 27, and 29th, indicated the population of cranes to be 245 individuals. This number does not reflect whooping cranes outside the survey area, including those that have dispersed.

Supplemental Feeding:

The refuge continues to get questions regarding supplemental feeding. At this time, the refuge is concerned about the negative impacts of supplemental feeding. Previous efforts to supplemental feed were not considered successful as only a small portion of the birds actually fed on the shelled corn. Whooping cranes are territorial and do not naturally gather together to feed. Encouraging them to do so changes their natural behavior; it also creates greater opportunities to transmit diseases, parasites, and makes them more vulnerable to predators. Furthermore, when left out in warm and moist environments, like coastal marsh areas, corn can grow Aspergillus molds. Aflatoxins, which are produced by the molds, can be lethal to whooping cranes and other wildlife. Where whooping cranes may be present, landowners should be aware of the risks that aflatoxins pose. If corn is being used for feeding other wildlife in areas where whooping cranes may be present, we highly recommend purchasing aflatoxin-free corn.

Helpful Information:

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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