

Texas Whooper Watch: Is it a Whooping Crane?

There are many birds, that at a distance, appear similar to Whooping Cranes. Review the following checklist to help you in identification. To see bird species that can be mistaken for Whooping Cranes, visit [Whooping Crane Look-alikes](#).



Click image to enlarge.

1. **HEIGHT** — Whooping Cranes stand nearly 5 feet tall. They will be the tallest bird you see.
2. **COLOR** — adult birds have bodies that are pure white except for a red patch on the head and a black “mustache.” Juvenile birds will have rusty feathers with the white.
3. **WINGS** — the wingtips (primary feathers) are black in Whooping Cranes, but black does not extend all the way along the wing edge to the body. Wingspan is 7-1/2 feet.
4. **FLIGHT** — Whooping Cranes fly with long necks and long legs fully extended. Wingbeats are slow and steady.
5. **FLOCK** — Whooping Cranes usually travel and feed in small groups — from one to eight or ten birds. They may sometimes travel with Sandhill Cranes, but never as a large flock of Whooping Cranes.
6. **VOICE** — whoopers are known for their loud, bugling call. In flight they may produce a deep trill, similar to sandhill cranes.

7. **WHEN** — Whooping Cranes do not arrive in Texas until mid-October and are gone from the state by late April.
8. **WHERE** — Whoopers are usually seen in the areas of Texas shown below, although there may be possible sightings in southeast Texas. It is not necessary to report cranes that are seen while visiting Aransas National Wildlife Refuge or while participating in whooping crane tours.



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Texas Whooper Watch: Whooping Crane Look-alikes

American White Pelicans can look like Whooping Cranes in flight. They have a large wing-span (9 feet), and the long bill can give the appearance of a long neck in flight. Unlike the Whooping Crane, their legs do not extend beyond the tail in flight, and the black on the wings extends all the way to the body. They often circle and soar in large groups.



[Click image to enlarge.](#)

Courtesy Alan D. Wilson.

Great Egrets are common wetland birds. Their long legs extend beyond the body in flight, but the long neck is usually tucked in flight. Their all-white wings have a 4-1/2 feet wingspan.



Click image to enlarge.
Courtesy Michael L. Baird.

Sandhill Cranes are related to whooping cranes, but are smaller (4 feet in height; 6-1/2 feet wingspan). Color is gray, with slightly darker wingtips. They can be found in large flocks.



[Click image to enlarge.](#)

Courtesy Steve Emmons.

Like Whooping Cranes, **Snow Geese** are white with black wingtips, but their legs do not extend beyond the body in flight. Wingspan is 4-1/2 feet. They are often found in large flocks.



Click image to enlarge.

Courtesy Cephas.

American White Ibis have long necks and legs that are extended in flight, but they have a long, curved bill. The wings have only a small patch of black on the wingtips and reach only 3 feet in wingspan. They flap and glide in flight.



[Click image to enlarge.](#)

Courtesy Mike Fisher.

Wood Storks have long necks and legs that are extended in flight; however, the black on the wings extends all the way to the body. Black may also be visible on the neck and the tail. Their wingspan is 5-1/2 feet. They flap slowly, glide, and soar.



Click image to enlarge.
Courtesy Hans Stieglitz.