

THE UNISON CALL

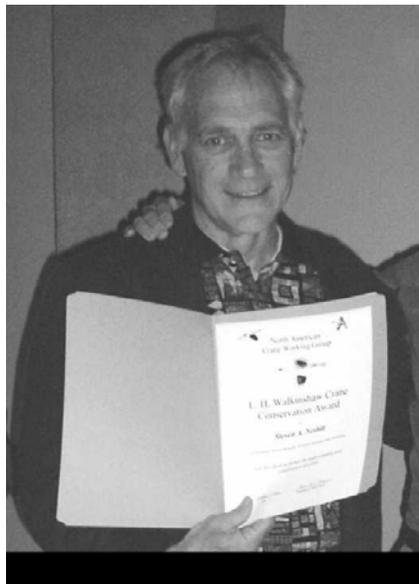
A Newsletter of the North American Crane Working Group

Spring/Summer 2006, Vol. 17 No. 1

Steve Nesbitt Receives Walkinshaw Award

(From the newsletter of the Fish and Wildlife Research Institute, Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission)

At the 10th North American Crane Workshop held in Zacatecas, Mexico on February 7-10, 2006, Steve Nesbitt was awarded the group's highest honor, the L. H. Walkinshaw Crane Conservation Award. The meeting was attended by nearly 100 crane researchers from the United States, Canada, Mexico and Cuba. The group's president, Dr. Glenn Olsen, presented Steve with a certificate. Steve also received a nice framed print from photographer Michael Forsberg.



Steve is an avian biologist in the Fish and Wildlife Research Institute, within the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC). He works out of the Wildlife Research Lab in Gainesville.

The following narrative is taken from the award: "Steve's work with Florida sandhill cranes began over 3 decades ago. He first published a paper on cranes in 1974, and since has authored or coauthored 59 more publications on cranes. Prominent publications include co-authoring the Sandhill Crane account in *The Birds of North America* series. . . . Steve has banded 1,093 individual sandhill cranes. And of course, Steve, since 1980, has been the major driving force in Florida for the reestablishment of non-migratory whooping cranes. In more recent years, Steve has served on the Project Direction Team for the Whooping Crane Eastern Partnership. This year he is the president of the Whooping Crane Conservation Association."

On a more somber note, it is with deep regret to announce that Steve will be retiring in April after nearly 35 years of service with the FWC. He has been involved with the research and conservation of many other species in Florida. His resumé contains over 50 publications on species such as red-cockaded woodpeckers, wild turkeys, brown pelicans, wading birds and bald eagles. Steve organized the first statewide wading bird survey in the latter 1970s and continues the monitoring effort for bald eagles and brown pelicans in Florida. Although employed by FWC, Steve's conservation efforts go way beyond Florida's boundaries. He was instrumental in the translocation and recovery efforts for brown pelicans to Louisiana in the 1970s and bald eagles to Arkansas in the 1980s from Florida populations. His knowledge of avian biology, species identification and occurrence of birds in Florida is second to none. Steve will be missed on a personal and professional basis by many FWC employees, but especially his friends at the Gainesville Lab. An avid fly fisherman, we wish Steve the best during his retirement and fishing forays around the state.

Marty Folk, Florida Fish and Wildlife

Regional Reports

Record Whooping Crane Production in 2006

It has been a record production year for all three whooping crane populations in the wild. In addition, the captive flocks have produced about 28 chicks that will be reintroduced back into the eastern migratory population. Approximately 6 chicks with especially valuable genetics will be kept in captivity for breeding. Production in the wild flocks is described below.

Wood Buffalo National Park, Canada

Production surveys on the nesting grounds were carried out June 13-17 in a Partanavia twin-engine aircraft piloted by Jim Bredy, USFWS-Region II and documented a record hatch of 76 chicks from the record 62 nests found by Brian Johns and Lea Craig-Moore of the Canadian Wildlife Service in May. Previous highs were 66 chicks hatched and 61 nests found a few years ago. Fifty-two of the 62 nests (84%) produced one or more chicks. The 76 chicks included 24 sets of twins. The record chick production in 2006 resulted from both high productivity and a large number of nests. An estimated 9 known adult pairs including two single adults failed to nest but were present on their territories, comparable to the 7 pairs that failed to nest in 2005. Thus, there are an estimated 71 breeding pairs in the Aransas-Wood Buffalo population.

Water conditions on the nesting grounds looked slightly above average and the weather was good throughout most of June, so I am optimistic that survival of the chicks will be above average. Based on the excellent production in June, approximately 230+ whooping cranes are expected to

reach Aransas in the fall, which would surpass the record high of 220 present in the 2005-06 winter. This increase of the population is anticipated since it is in the growth portion of the 10-year population cycle that has occurred during the middle of every decade.

Florida

It has been a record production year for the nonmigratory whooping crane flock in central Florida. Five chicks are still surviving at the end of June from a total of 7 chicks hatched from 12 nests. Recent rains have improved wetland habitat that had been dealing with drought.

Wisconsin

On June 22nd, the first wild whooping crane chicks were hatched in Wisconsin in over 100 years. The parents were both 4-year-old whooping cranes hatched in captivity at the Patuxent Wildlife Research Center and led in migration in 2002 behind ultralight aircraft from central Wisconsin to Florida. The hatching of the twin chicks validates that captive whooping cranes isolation-raised and taught a migration have the behaviors needed to become successful parents.

From a Whooping Crane Eastern Partnership news release: “‘This is a long awaited moment,’ said Signe Holtz, director of the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources' Bureau of Endangered Resources, ‘the success of this effort sets a goal for endangered species recovery efforts everywhere. The partnership of public, private and government organizations that has made this possible shows what can be done when we all pull together with a common goal in sight. These chicks have a long and dangerous road ahead of them, but with luck we'll see them wing south with their parents this fall.’”

Aransas National Wildlife Refuge

Three whooping cranes did not migrate in the spring of 2006 and are still at Aransas. The three includes the 2004 Lobstick chick that was injured in spring 2005 and has not migrated in 2005 or 2006. All three cranes look fine but are a cause for concern since the failure to migrate may be an indication of a health problem.

Results

The record production in all three wild populations and a good production year in captivity are expected to bring the number of fledged whooping cranes in North America in Fall 2006 to around 500.

Tom Stehn, U.S. Whooping Crane Coordinator, USFWS

Eastern Migratory Whooping Crane Reintroduction

Winter 2005/06.--Early winter distribution of HY2001-04 birds was Florida (33), Tennessee (5), South Carolina (1), North Carolina (1), and undetermined (1). One of the birds in Florida had been retrieved and relocated from North Carolina. By late winter, 4 of the birds in Florida and 1 in North Carolina had moved to South Carolina. HY2005 DAR (direct autumn release) juveniles wintered with sandhill cranes in Florida (2) and Tennessee (2). The flock of 19 juvenile ultralight-led whooping cranes arrived on Halpata Tastanaki Preserve, Marion County, Florida, on 13 December. This site was used to hold the juveniles until older returning birds had cleared

the winter release area on Chassahowitzka NWR. Eighteen of these juveniles were led by ultralight aircraft to the Chassahowitzka pensite on 9-11 January; the remaining bird was transported.

Spring Migration 2006.--Spring migration of HY2001-04 birds began mid-February to late March and was completed by mid-March to mid-April. Migration of DAR birds began late February to late March. Three returned to Central Wisconsin by late April-early May before continuing spring wandering. The HY2005 ultralight-led birds left Chassahowitzka 27-28 March. The main group of 14 birds completed migration to the Necedah NWR area on 6 April, and 2 others returned on 19 April. Normal spring wandering followed, this year including substantial time by some groups in Iowa before returning to Necedah NWR by the end of spring.

A 3-year-old female with a history of errant migration and an accompanying HY2005 female were retrieved from New York and relocated to Central Wisconsin. A HY2005 male that had missed some of the northern part of ultralight-led migration was also retrieved from Lower Michigan. By the end of spring, three birds, including one DAR female, remained east of Lake Michigan.

Mortality.--A 2-year-old male was apparently killed by a predator, possibly a coyote, while on a drawn down flowage on Sandhill SWA, Wood County, Wisconsin, in late May. This was the only mortality to occur in the population since October 2005 and the 13th mortality of a released bird to occur since the reintroduction began in 2001.

Reproduction.--Five pairs began nesting in early April. All clutches were gone by late April. Two eggs from one nest were collected and transferred to captive propagation after the parents left them unattended. One pair of 4-year-olds renested on 23 May. Parental behavior observed on 22 June indicated successful hatching. Presence of 2 chicks was verified on the following day.

Current Population Size.--As of late June 2006, the eastern migratory population numbered 63 adults or subadults and 2 newly hatched chicks.



First wild-hatched whooping crane chicks in the reintroduced eastern migratory population, East Rynearson Pool dike, Necedah NWR, 23 June 2006 (photo by Richard Urbanek, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service).

Richard P. Urbanek, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, on behalf of Whooping Crane Eastern Partnership

Mississippi Sandhill Crane National Wildlife Refuge

Continuing the 26th year of restocking, eight captive-reared Mississippi sandhill cranes comprising the third release cohort of the season were transferred to the refuge's Duck Pond site for acclimation February 14 and debrailed March 16. Nineteen total were transferred for the season. Two that were exhibiting inappropriate behavior for wild cranes were returned to ACRES.

In May, we had the first documented report of nonmigratory (Mississippi) sandhill cranes in Alabama in over 40 years. This was also the first report of Mississippi outside of Jackson County and the state of Mississippi. Seven members of a recently released cohort were observed 32 miles east of their normal location at the release site. They were in the Irvington, Alabama, area for less than a week before returning to the Duck Pond site on the refuge. This was by far the longest recorded movement in this population.

Recovery from the effects of Hurricane Katrina continued. The extended drought since the storm included a 30" rain deficit in the previous ten months. Roads that were never passable even in a 4WD with a winch can now be traversed in 2WD. Crane mortality rates are up since last summer due to the hurricane, the ensuing drought, or a combination of the two. There have been 12 carcasses discovered since August and an increased rate of disappearance. Losses include the North Valentine female, Eglin female, South Valentine pair, West Wet Cell male, Little German pair, and others.

Eight additional, commercially built blinds for crane observation were erected on the refuge in the continuing effort to replace those destroyed by Hurricane Katrina. The 16x80 trailer that was occupied by the Hereford family in Camp Crane is now available for interns, detailers, and visiting researchers. Dry conditions allow for work with machinery. With help from two FWS employees on temporary assignment from another refuge in northern Mississippi, 20 acres of chufa were planted for the cranes on the refuge food plots during a short period in June.

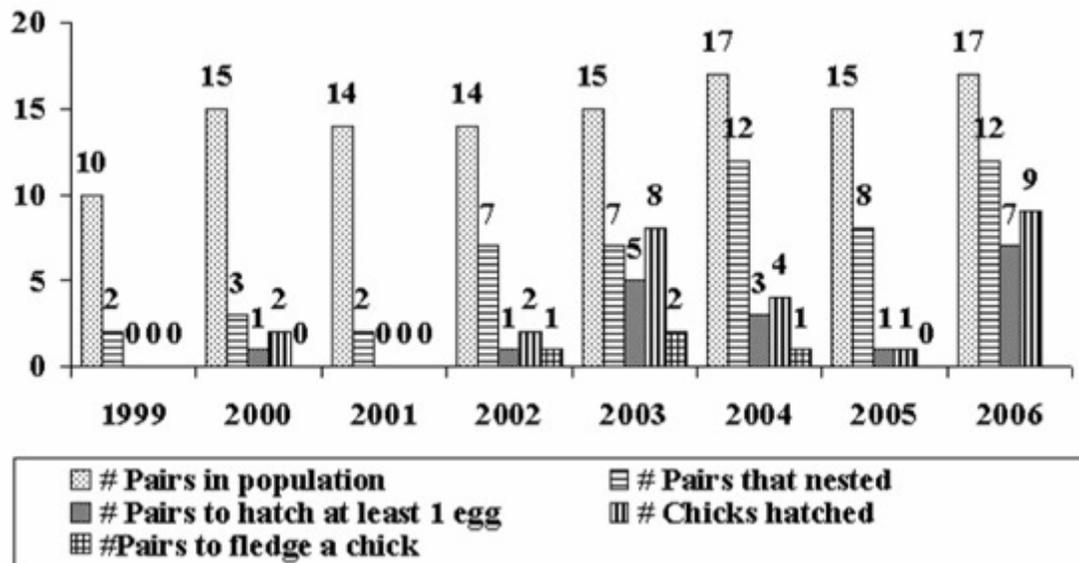
Due to the loss of breeding birds and drought, nesting was about half of recent activity; 13 pairs produced 14 nests. Approximately six nests hatched at least one chick. One nest was still active at the end of June. The Sawdust and South Turcotte chicks were possibly still alive. A new nesting territory was added at the old Ben Moore Pond off the refuge just east of Gautier Unit and was used for the first time.

Jessica Stocking did a great job as an emergency hire Biotech in January-February to conduct a post-storm crane assessment. Her work was made possible through NACWG from a generous donation from member Heather Henson. Researchers from Mississippi State University visited the refuge and appear interested in entering into a partnership to investigate several aspects of the crane recruitment failure. The refuge manager position, vacant since 2002, was advertised and filled. Ted Rentmeister is scheduled to report for duty in early July. He comes to us from a refuge in Arizona.

Scott G. Hereford, U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, Mississippi Sandhill Crane National Wildlife Refuge, Gautier, Mississippi.

Florida Non-Migratory Whooping Crane Flock

At the Recovery Team meeting, held in Mexico just before the Crane Workshop, the Florida team recommended that we hold off on releasing more birds again this coming winter. Instead, efforts would be concentrated on identifying problems with reproduction (see below) and survival. Currently we monitor 46 birds (but suspect a number of un-trackable birds are still at large) in the Florida non-migratory flock.



Another big news item for the Florida project this year is the surprisingly successful breeding season! The surprise is the dramatic improvement compared to the past 2 breeding seasons, despite an unusually dry spring. At the time of this newsletter, the season is wrapping up, and we probably will not see more nests. A number of “records” were either tied or broken. The number of pairs in the population, 17, tied the record from 2004 (see graph). Twelve of those pairs nested, also tying the record from 2004. Seven pairs hatched at least 1 egg, setting a record over the 5 pairs in 2003. Nine chicks were hatched, breaking the record for 2003. As of mid-June, 5 of the chicks survived, with the oldest one already fledged. If 3 of this year’s chicks fledge, it will set a new record. However, it will be very challenging for these crane parents to raise their chicks to fledging this year. Wetland water levels are very low, making access to the marshes much easier for predators such as bobcats, foxes, and coyotes. Rainfall for the first 4 months of 2006 was the lowest on record.

At this time there are no obvious answers as to why this flock has demonstrated such dramatic fluctuations in breeding success. Low genetic diversity, due to the population going through 2 “bottlenecks,” may have an influence. The first bottleneck took place when the only self-sustaining population (Wood Buffalo/Aransas Flock) dwindled to 15 or 16 individuals. The second bottleneck is a result of only a few individuals doing most of the reproducing in the captive flock, thus resulting in many closely-related birds being released into the wild. It is not easy to determine how negative these genetic bottlenecks are for the reintroduced populations, but they probably have a significant negative effect. We can, however, measure other variables that might influence breeding success.

We are collecting data, more intensively than ever before, regarding the breeding biology of the flock. This data collection begins early in the breeding season and proceeds throughout the season as we watch for a *natural progression* of events. First we look for appropriate territoriality—each morning a pair of whooping cranes should announce their territory with a unison call. Whooping crane pairs should also exclude, by postures and behaviors, other whooping cranes. Also each morning during the breeding season, pairs should copulate. The next step in the season is nest-building, then egg laying, followed by proper incubation by both members of a pair. We watch to make sure the parents are incubating properly—which means they tend the eggs constantly, but take short breaks (up to 10 minutes but usually 1-3 minutes) to trade duties and to turn the eggs. We use a video surveillance camera to help us collect data during nesting. The surveillance system allows us to collect many hours of information that normally would take an “army” of biologists to collect.

As hatch time approaches, we check nests more intensively to watch for signs of hatching—we often cannot see the chicks (unless we are flying overhead) for several weeks because they remain hidden in the marsh plants (a good survival tactic). However, the behavior of the parents is unmistakable as they tend their new chick(s), so we can tell if things are right. If the nest fails to hatch, we collect the eggs to examine them for signs of development. Next we document proper care of the chick(s).

During the entire season we collect data on adjacent sandhill crane activity and reproduction.

Whooping cranes and sandhill cranes interact and may compete for some resources; we collect data on how they get along. When we visit whooper nests (after they succeed or fail), we take measurements and document the vegetative composition present in the area. Also, we monitor environmental variables such as temperature, water depth in the nest marsh, and rainfall.

We have learned from post-mortem examination of dead whooping cranes that some do not appear to have functional reproductive tracts. We plan to capture and examine, by means of portable laproscopic technology, some old females that have never reproduced to see if it is because of their anatomy (or lack thereof); however, one such female that we “threatened” to capture and examine this year, laid eggs for the first time, at the age of 13.

All of these factors (and more!) have an influence on the breeding success of the cranes. Our challenge is to sort things out, somewhat by the process of elimination, in order to get down to the most important factors. We will compare behavioral data of nesting whoopers with those collected for the Wood Buffalo flock. The productivity of the Wood Buffalo flock also varies year to year, but it does not vary as widely as what we have seen in Florida. In fact the Wood Buffalo flock is the most productive crane population in North America, with a reproductive output that exceeds that of any sandhill crane population.

Marty Folk, Florida Fish and Wildlife

West Coast Crane Working Group Report

Sandhill Cranes nest in Washington in only one area, at the base of Mount Adams. In the Glenwood Valley and surrounding region, Joe Engler and Jessica Stocking are continuing Sandhill Crane monitoring and nest searching efforts. They will be capturing unfledged chicks toward the end of the summer, hopefully with the help of community volunteers. We are also working with Jay McLaughlin, of the Mount Adams Resource Stewards and the USFWS, to remove trees from crane nesting habitat.

There are five pairs of cranes on the Conboy Lake Refuge that are raising eight total colts. Eight pairs are currently nesting, at least five of which are second or third attempts. The helicopter flight on May 31st confirmed seventeen active nesting territories on the refuge.

Ellie Thomas, the local science teacher, is incorporating an awareness of crane conservation into her classroom. Ellie is working with Jessica over the summer, doing field work and learning about the cranes. Four school tours viewed cranes in May. Community education and involvement is a major component of our project.

The most significant advancement seems to be an alignment of several forces concerned with conservation in the Glenwood Valley and surrounding areas. A joint application for an Intermountain West Joint Venture grant has been made. All parties expressed interest in convening regularly as an extended working group. The WCCWG, partnered with U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Conboy Lake National Wildlife Refuge [NWR]), The Nature Conservancy, Columbia Land Trust (Klickitat-Columbia Hills Project), Washington Dept. of Natural Resources (Trout Lake Natural Area Preserve [NAP]), is applying in the interest of the Glenwood and surrounding valleys for a North American Wetlands Conservation Act grant.

Along the coast of British Columbia we are working with the Raincoat Foundation to study habitat protection for breeding Sandhill Cranes that are part of the subpopulation that migrates along the Pacific Flyway. This is the same population of about 4,000 cranes that Gary Ivey studied at the mouth of the Columbia River and monitored their migration route.

A two-week field project in May at 15 sites near Bella Bella, B.C., led by Briony Penn, provided key preliminary findings which have answered some important conservation questions. We have a much clearer idea of the distribution pattern and density of breeding pairs in the region studied. We understand some of the key habitat requirements of these cranes. We observed and documented some unique behavior illustrating their dependence on, and use of, the forest in these isolated island breeding territories.



Photo of typical crane habitat on the British Columbia Coast

There are three zones used by cranes along the British Columbia coast: salt water inlets, wooded upland barrier, fresh water wetlands.

Interesting behavior as described by Briony Penn includes: When arriving by boat, landing on the beach and approaching a crane, one of two interactions may occur.

- If the crane senses it has been spotted, it will fly away and try to draw the intruder away from its site.
- If the crane senses it has not yet been observed, it will proceed to run up a trail into the wooded upland, crouching under the brush.

Also there are distinct crane trails through the woods which differ from trails made by other animals, such as wolves. The trails may have a very steep rise and drop to the wetlands. Once a crane has escaped via its trailhead into the woods it is very difficult to track.

Are these behaviors unique? If you are aware of similar behavior or habitat use please let us know.

We have the beginning of the scientific rationale now for protecting forests on coastal islands in the cranes' breeding range. As a first priority, a citizen science project is being conducted this summer and autumn to round out our knowledge. With support from the Heiltsuk First Nations community, oral histories of crane sightings and stories are being collected from the elders.

Tom Hoffmann (thoffmann@hoffmanns.com), Jessica Stocking, and Birney Penn

September 2005 Population Estimate for Rocky Mountain Sandhill Cranes

Greater sandhill cranes of the Rocky Mountain Population (RMP) were counted on 12-16 September 2005 from the ground and air at 67 premigration staging areas in Colorado, Idaho, Montana, Utah, and Wyoming. Migrants that had arrived at the RMP staging area in the San Luis Valley, Colorado were also counted. The coordinated count was organized by the U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service and Pacific and Central Flyway states which have RMP cranes; 40 individuals from various agencies and the private sector assisted with the survey.

A record high count of 20,865 RMP cranes was recorded at 68 areas with 36.8% in Idaho, 26.8% in Montana, 18.7% in Wyoming, 12.7% in Utah, and 5.0% in Colorado. Five sites had concentrations exceeding 1,000 cranes: (1) Teton Basin, ID- 1,834, (2) tri-state Bear River Valley in ID, UT, & WY- 1,784, (3) Beaverhead-Ruby River Valley, MT- 1,443, (4) Grays Lake NWR, ID- 1,384, and (5) Farson, WY- 1,382. Seven other sites each held over 500 cranes. The 2005 survey accounted for the highest number of RMP cranes recorded during 13 surveys conducted in 1987, 1992, 1995-2005. Count data show that the population has been relatively stable during this period (x=18,239, range 16,559-20,865).

Rod C. Drewien, Wayan, Idaho and Philip P. Thorpe, U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Denver, Colorado

Captive Propagation

Whooping Crane Production at the International Crane Foundation–2006

The International Crane Foundation (ICF) is once again contributing to the breeding and release of Whooping Cranes (*Grus americana*) on several fronts this year. We are contributing chicks to the two releases of the Whooping Crane Eastern Partnership (WCEP) to establish an eastern migratory population and are producing genetically valuable chicks for the captive flock.

This year 9 females laid 47 eggs, the best production we have had so far. Twenty-six of the eggs were fertile, all by artificial insemination (AI), and 15 chicks hatched. Four of these eggs were transported to the Patuxent Wildlife Research Center and all hatched. These four birds will return to Wisconsin for continued rearing and training at the Necedah National Wildlife Refuge and will be part of the ultralight-led migration this fall.

Also part of the ultralight group is one chick that resulted from the rescue of 2 eggs laid but abandoned by a wild pair of released birds at the Necedah Refuge. Both eggs were rescued by Richard Urbanek of the U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service, transported to ICF, and placed into an incubator. Still viable, these 2 eggs later accompanied the 4 ICF eggs to Patuxent and both hatched. One chick later succumbed to respiratory and leg problems.

Seven eggs laid at ICF hatched for allocation to the second release method, the Direct Autumn Release (DAR), along with 2 eggs from the Calgary Zoo. These 9 chicks started life in the Felburn & Leidigh Chick Rearing Facility that opened last year. This year, we completed the second phase of construction that doubled our capacity to now house 20 chicks. Seven of the DAR chicks have survived and will also journey to the Necedah Refuge where they will be raised separately from the ultralight birds. Later this fall, after the ultralight migration begins, the DAR birds will be released with older Whooping Cranes that will hopefully serve as guides for the chicks' first migration.

Finally, we hatched 4 chicks as genetic holdbacks for the captive flock along with one chick hatched from 3 eggs sent to ICF from Patuxent. Two are being reared by costumed aviculturists in the chick rearing facility while the other 2 are being parent reared. One of these is being parent reared on public display at our Whooping Crane Exhibit. In addition, earlier this year we sent 4 genetic holdbacks reared in previous years to Patuxent and 3 to San Antonio Zoo.

This year 33 eggs were covered by AI and 26 (79%) were fertile. One of these was the first fertile egg produced by the female Ioshchi (studbook number 1219); this chick is in the DAR flock. In contrast, 5 eggs not covered by AI were all infertile. Fifteen of the 26 fertile eggs hatched (58%); this is below our average. This year we were plagued by some very persistent Sandhill Cranes (*Grus canadensis*) that evaded our regular means of discouraging wild cranes from visiting our breeding facility, Crane City. At least 8 of the 11 dead embryos died while being incubated by pairs of surrogate incubators. In addition, we had a higher number of eggs

broken by surrogates or lost from nests. We attribute this higher number of embryonic deaths and egg breakage to disturbance by wild cranes.

This year we implemented the Whooping Crane Recovery Team's recommendation to release half of the offspring from genetically valuable pairs in order to broaden the genetic foundation of the Eastern Migratory Population. Previously, we held back all of these offspring for the captive flock. As a result, we contributed chicks from 2 females that had not previously provided offspring to this population and increased the representation of other pairs.

Looking forward, ICF will be hosting a Whooping Crane genetics summit in September. Because of the growth of the captive flock, we will be reviewing the pairing of each bird in the captive flock and considering which pairs should be contributing to future releases in conjunction with members of the other breeding centers, Tom Stehn, and geneticist Dr. Ken Jones.

It was a thrill for us when the first 2 chicks hatched at the Necedah Refuge in June. Additionally rewarding was the fact that the mother of those chicks came from a pair of older Whooping Cranes at ICF, Bubba and Ginger (studbook numbers 1128 and 1101, respectively). Bubba and Ginger once lived at Patuxent but came to ICF in 1989. Their wild daughter is paired with a male produced at Patuxent. The successful pairing of these 2 birds symbolizes the long history of cooperation between Patuxent and ICF, as well as that among all the partners of WCEP that made this historic event possible. [Erratum: The ancestry referred to applies to 2 chicks originating from eggs collected from a nest on Necedah Refuge and then hatched at Patuxent. The 2 chicks that hatched at Necedah Refuge in June were descendants of grandparents at Patuxent.]

Michael S. Putnam, Curator, International Crane Foundation, Baraboo, Wisconsin.

Calgary Zoo Has Its Most Successful Year Ever in 2006

The Calgary Zoo's captive whooping crane breeding program had its most successful year in 2006. Out of a total of 24 eggs laid by 5 females, there were 17 fertile eggs, and 13 hatched chicks. We had 4 broken eggs (all by the same pair), and only 3 infertile eggs. This success was due to the zoo's increased commitment to artificial insemination (AI) and the training and comfort level of both the zookeepers and birds involved. We did have some initial success with AI in 2005 when 3 chicks were produced, but we increased our production in 2006 with 11 of 17 fertile eggs due to AI and 9 of 13 chicks hatched due to AI.

The most exciting news was that a total of 12 eggs were transported to the United States this year, 10 to the Patuxent Wildlife Research Center and 2 to the International Crane Foundation. Of those 12 eggs, 8 hatched, with 6 birds at Patuxent and 2 at ICF. The Patuxent birds will be imprinted on an ultralight aircraft and will be a part of the Whooping Crane Eastern Partnership (WCEP) ultralight migratory flock. The ICF birds will be costume-reared for inclusion in the Direct Autumn Release (DAR) project at the Necedah National Wildlife Refuge in central Wisconsin.

This will be the first year that the Calgary Zoo has been able to provide birds to WCEP. The Calgary Zoo received their first pair of whooping cranes from the International Crane Foundation in November of 1992 and has been an active participant in the whooping crane recovery program ever since. We currently have 7 breeding pairs and 1 unpaired male in our breeding flock, along with three 2005 birds, and five 2006 chicks. We also have 2 birds on display at the Calgary Zoo, in Calgary, Alberta, Canada, for a grand total of 25 whooping cranes as of June 2006. Since

1996, we have released a total of 16 birds to the non-migratory whooping crane flock in central Florida.

Dwight P. Knapik, Zookeeper, Calgary Zoo

News and Announcements

Report of the Tenth North American Crane Workshop

Zacatecas City, Mexico, February 7-10, 2006

The paper sessions were held in a truly unique setting with large murals looming overhead in the ruins of a 16th century building that had been converted to a garden and museum housing a large collections of masks. There were eight paper sessions and our first (?) poster session. One of the paper sessions focused on Mexican and Caribbean crane conservation, and included a special presentation by the Director of Wildlife Conservation in Mexico, Felipe Ramirez Ruiz De Velasco. Forty-five papers and seven posters covered nesting ecology, genetics, behavior, survival and reproduction, research techniques, whooping cranes, management, physiology, diet, health and captive management, distribution, population numbers and ecology. Presenters came from Mexico, Cuba, Germany, Canada, and the United States.

Kristi Candelora, one of the Florida people at the Crane Workshop in Mexico, won the award for best student paper presentation. The title of her paper was “*Infectious Bursal Disease in Wild Populations of Florida Wild Turkeys and Sandhill Cranes, Preliminary Findings.*”

Editor’s Note: *The Unison Call* is a forum to share updates and opinions. Articles are not peer reviewed. Reviews and opinions included in any section of the newsletter are those of the author and do not necessarily represent the views of the NACWG.

The Unison Call is published twice yearly, winter/spring and summer/fall. Membership is based on a calendar year. Contributions, suggestions, opinions, drawings, cartoons, and photographs are welcome. Items can be sent to:

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Deadlines are normally June 10 and December 10. Please send information as a Microsoft Word attachment (e-mail) whenever possible.