



# THE UNISON CALL

A Newsletter of the North American  
Crane Working Group

Vol. 11, No. 2, 1999

## ANNOUNCEMENTS

### WORKSHOP REGISTRATION DEADLINE IS HERE!

Time is running out to register for the Eighth North American Crane Workshop in Albuquerque, New Mexico. The advance registration deadline is **December 15<sup>th</sup>, 1999**, so if you have not already done so, please send in your registration NOW.

**[-- Click Here for Registration Form --](#)**

The Workshop, hosted by the North American Crane Working Group, is taking place January 11-14, 2000. We are expecting the biggest turnout in several workshops, so it should be informative and lots of fun. The agenda includes: an ice-breaker on Tuesday evening the 11<sup>th</sup>, technical sessions on Wednesday the 12<sup>th</sup> and Friday the 14<sup>th</sup>, and an awards banquet on Friday evening. Thursday, the 13<sup>th</sup>, is set aside for an all-day field trip to Bosque del Apache Wildlife Refuge. Over 40 papers will be presented covering topics of breeding biology, population dynamics, disease and mortality, captive management, genetics, migration and wintering, reintroduction, and other management techniques. Details about the Workshop, including information about accommodations and transportation, were given in the last *Unison Call*. However, if you are a new member, or have misplaced your old newsletter (shame on you!), you can refer to the NACWG webpage, under "News", for the previous copy of *The Unison Call*. You can find our webpage at: [www.portup.com/~nacwg](http://www.portup.com/~nacwg).

### RESERVE YOUR WORKSHOP ACCOMMODATIONS NOW!

**Hotel reservations** must be completed directly with the Sheraton Old Town Hotel, 800 Rio Grande Blvd. NW. Albuquerque, NM, by **December 24, 1999** to ensure government rates. A block of 60 rooms has been set aside for workshop participants. Room rates are \$60.00 single and \$70.00 double plus 10.8% tax. To book your reservations call (505)

843-6300 or toll free (800) 237-2133 and reference the **Eighth North American Crane Workshop**.

### **ATTENTION WORKSHOP PARTICIPANTS!**

**Presentations:** For those of you presenting papers at the Workshop, time allotted for each oral presentation has been reduced from 20 minutes to 15 minutes (including discussion time). This change has been made to allow time for all 40 presentations to be made in the two days of paper sessions.

**Section Editors need drafts of papers!** Submission of papers is overdue. If you have not submitted a draft of your paper yet, please send it in NOW. Send to: Scott Hereford, MS Sandhill Crane NWR, 7200 Crane Lane, Gautier, MS 39553. If you have any questions, contact Gary Lingle, Compiling Editor, harrier@navix.net.

**Workshop Evenings:** Presently a Whooping Crane Recovery Team meeting (open), informal slide shows and a video are set for Wednesday evening, the 12<sup>th</sup>. If you would like to schedule something for Wednesday or Thursday evenings, please contact Scott Hereford. E-mail: scott\_hereford@fws.gov.

### **NOMINATIONS REQUESTED FOR NACWG BOARD**

We are inviting nominations to serve on the Board of Directors of the North American Crane Working Group. Elections will be held at the Business Meeting at the January Workshop. If you would like to serve on the Board or know of someone who would, send your nominations to the Chairman of the Nomination Committee: Gary Lingle, 7030 Kilgor Rd, Gibbon NE 68840; harrier@navix.net.

### **WELCOME to the following new members!**

Adonia Henry	Missoula, MT
Jerry Pratt	Sierra Vista, AZ
Rich Bard	New Orleans, LA
Tsuyoshi Watanabe	College Station, TX
Marilyn Spalding	Archer, FL
Sheryl Leffer	Jefferson, MD
Jay Roberson	Austin, TX
Sylvia Inglefield	Plant City, FL
Jeremy Phillips	Gautier, MS
Joel Trick	Green Bay, WI
Jessica Petersen	Mead, NE

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## **HOP TO IT!**

It's time to pay your NACWG dues. Your membership is about to expire if a '00 does not appear after your name on the mailing label. Please fill out the renewal form on the last page of this newsletter and send in with your dues.

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## **WHOOPIING CRANE RECOVERY TEAM MEETING**

### **Proposed Eastern Migratory Whooping Crane Reintroduction**

The Whooping Crane Recovery Team (WCRT) held their annual meeting September 21-23 in Baraboo, Wisconsin. A written resolution by the Team on the proposed eastern reintroduction is as follows:

The Canada/U.S. Whooping Crane Recovery Team recommends that a migratory population of whooping cranes be reintroduced in the eastern U.S. with birds summering in Wisconsin and wintering at Chassahowitzka NWR / St. Martins Marsh Aquatic Preserve in Florida.

The WCRT recommends that the first releases should occur in Central Wisconsin, contingent upon satisfactory results from:

1. Assessment of contaminant levels that a summering whooping crane population could be exposed to;
2. Assessment of aircraft overflights that could affect a breeding whooping crane population and reintroduction efforts using ultralight aircraft; and
3. A sandhill crane trial migration from central Wisconsin to Florida by ultralight.

When the migratory pathway and amount of dispersal of the new population ensure that no significant mixing will occur with the Wood Buffalo/Aransas population, then additional releases will be considered to include other sites in Wisconsin, Seney NWR in Michigan, the InterLake region of Manitoba, and a wintering population at Marsh Island Wildlife Refuge in Louisiana.

**BACKGROUND** - In the past year, potential release sites in Wisconsin had been studied for the establishment of a migratory population that would winter at Chassahowitzka NWR in Florida. A "Final Report - Wisconsin Whooping Crane Breeding Site Assessment" was written by Dr. John Cannon. Much information was brought up during the meetings that made two sites, Central Wisconsin and Crex Meadows, quite comparable. The Recovery Team basically decided that since the two sites were close in regards to habitat, then it made sense to start the reintroduction in Central Wisconsin since this would minimize possible mixing of the eastern migratory population with the Aransas/Wood Buffalo wild flock.

In the coming months, a large planning effort will take place to incorporate all aspects of the proposed reintroduction, including fund raising. Many contacts will have to be made with all the States involved, and work will begin to write the required environmental documents. This can hopefully be completed in time for Operation Migration to fly sandhill cranes along the proposed migration route in the fall, 2000, and lead the first cohort of whooping cranes south in the fall, 2001.

The Whooping Crane Captive Management Team met for two days prior to the Recovery Team meeting. Participants from the captive facilities shared many ideas on captive propagation. Based on genetics and behavior, the team made important decisions on pairing of subadult whooping cranes at the various facilities. The Team also took action on applications from new facilities wanting to display and/or breed cranes.

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

## **PUBLICATION AVAILABLE**

Castrale, J. S., and J. Bergens. 1999. Status of sandhill cranes in Indiana. *Indiana Audubon Quart.* 77:42-50. (Available from John Castrale, Indiana Div. Fish & Wildlife, RR 2, Box 477, Mitchell, IN 47446; wildlife@kiva.net)

Our listing of recent crane literature has gotten very sparse in the past few years. We'd like to hear about what everyone out there is working on and publishing. If you have recently published, or have run across something that you'd like to share, please send the citation to the Editor.

## **REGIONAL REPORTS**

### **FLORIDA**

The Florida whooping crane flock consists of about 63 birds. There are 9 pairs and by breeding season there potentially could be around 12. Summer rains have restored marsh water levels in the south part of the whooper range (Osceola, Okeechobee, Brevard Counties) and the prospects look good for nesting. There has been much less rain where the north birds are (Lake and Sumter Counties) but some marshes have fair water levels. We plan to release 30 or so chicks this winter beginning mid-November.

*Marty Folk, Kissimmee, Florida*

### **GREAT LAKES**

1998 Fall Sandhill Crane Census--Results were compiled by Len Schumann. Of 37,827 individuals tallied during 28 October-6 November, 19,696 were counted at specific sites in Wisconsin, 6,807 in Michigan, 11,154 at Jasper-Pulaski Fish and Wildlife Area (J-P) in Indiana, 127 at other sites in Indiana, and 43 in Georgia/Florida. Peak count at J-P was 15,333 on 12 November.

1999 Fall Sandhill Crane Census--The count at J-P on the coordinated count date, 29 October, was 13,348.

*Richard P. Urbanek, Seney, Michigan*

## **ROCKY MOUNTAINS**

Greater sandhill cranes of the Rocky Mountain Population (RMP) were counted by air and ground surveys at 57 sites in Colorado, Idaho, Montana, Utah and Wyoming during mid-September 1999. Migrants that had arrived at the autumn staging area in the San Luis Valley, Colorado were also counted. The annual survey is a cooperative effort of the Pacific Flyway states and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service; 33 individuals from various agencies and personnel from Grand Teton National Park and the Jackson Hole Bird Club assisted in the count.

A total of 19,501 cranes was recorded with 44.9% in Idaho, 21.5% in Wyoming, 16.1% in Montana, 11.8% in Utah and 5.7% in Colorado. Over 72% of all cranes were recorded at 14 areas. The 4 most important areas were: 1) Bear River Valley in the tri-state area of Idaho, Utah and Wyoming (1,567), 2) Ashton-St. Anthony area along the Henry's Fork of the Snake River, Idaho (1,516), 3) Teton Basin, Idaho (1,470), and 4) the Beaverhead Valley, Montana (1,464). The 1999 September survey tallied the highest number of RMP cranes recorded during 7 counts conducted since 1987.

Two whooping cranes were recorded during surveys including 1 foster-parent reared bird hatched in 1982 and observed in Teton Basin, Idaho and the only surviving ultra-light bird at Chesterfield Reservoir, Idaho. A second foster-parent reared bird, hatched in 1984, was not observed during the September survey but was found in the San Luis Valley, Colorado in October.

*Rod Drewien, Wayan, Idaho; Phil Thorpe and Doug Benning, Lakewood, Colorado*

## **CANADA**

**Report from the Whooping Crane Breeding Grounds:** At least 48 pairs nested during the 1999 breeding season. Annual precipitation between 1 May, 1998 and 30 April, 1999 was 25.4 cm which was below the 49 year average of 35.2 cm. Wetlands in the majority of the crane breeding area were low with many exposed wetland margins. Substantial rain fell during May and June filling some ponds to levels above those of early May. Drier conditions returned in July and ponds were dry throughout much of the nesting area by mid August. At least 46 chicks successfully hatched and 17 survived to fledging age.

As part of Wood Buffalo National Park's Diet and Chick Survival Study adult/chick behaviour was observed at 3 nests. Twelve young in 6 family groups were captured and radio marked on June 3. Twin young were marked in families 1/99, 2/99, 5/99, 7/99, 10/99 and 13/99. D. Bergeson (WBNP) radio tracked and determined the fate of the marked young.

**Canadian Migration Report:** The first fall migrants (2 birds) arrived at the Last Mountain Lake National Wildlife Area, in Saskatchewan, on August 31. By the end of October 121 cranes had been reported. These cranes were in 30 different groups including 6 families, each with a single young. One of the families was made up of a single adult and its chick. The largest confirmed group of whoopers in Saskatchewan in recent times (14 adults and 1 young) was observed at Muskiki Lake on October 15 and 16. Most cranes were gone from Canada by October 25.

*Brian Johns, Saskatoon, Saskatchewan*

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*The Unison Call* is published twice a year, winter/spring and summer/fall. Membership is based on a calendar year. All contributions, suggestions, opinions, drawings, cartoons are very welcome! Send newsletter items to:

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Deadlines are June 10 and December 10. Please send information on a disc (either size) in WordPerfect or as a WordPerfect attachment (e-mail) whenever possible.

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**Best wishes to everyone for a safe and healthy new year.  
HAPPY 2000!**