



# THE UNISON CALL

A Newsletter of the North American  
Crane Working Group

**Vol. 11, No. 1, 1999**

## YOU ARE INVITED TO THE EIGHTH NORTH AMERICAN CRANE WORKSHOP

Pack your bags and make your reservations because it is time for the Eighth North American Crane Workshop. The North American Crane Working Group will host this event January 11-14, 2000 in Albuquerque, New Mexico. Join the fun, comradery, and at the same time learn about the latest developments concerning the conservation of cranes and their habitats in North America as the leading figures in crane research, management, captive breeding, and education descend upon beautiful New Mexico.

### **Highlights**

Plans for the Workshop to be held at the Sheraton Old Town include: an ice-breaker on Tuesday evening the 11th, technical sessions on Wednesday the 12th and Friday the 14th, and an awards banquet on Friday evening. Thursday, the 13th, is set aside for an all-day field trip to Bosque del Apache National Wildlife Refuge. We have planned the event to precede the Martin Luther King holiday for those who can take advantage of the long weekend to extend their visit. Please mark the dates on your calendar and plan to attend the Workshop! It's a great opportunity to spend time with a whole flock of craniacs!

### **Setting**

The beautiful Middle Rio Grande Valley in central New Mexico, walled by rugged mountain peaks, is the setting for the workshop and field trip. Albuquerque is a metropolitan area of nearly 1 million people and a major southwestern United States ground and air transportation hub. Easy day excursions can be made to nearby famous cultural and recreational sites including Indian pueblos and ski areas. The neighboring cities of Santa Fe and Taos, rich with cultural history, harbor world class museums and shopping districts.

Northern and Central New Mexico weather can be unpredictable in January. Days can be sunny with highs from 40-50°F or snowy with highs of 20°F. Nights are always cold.

Come prepared for these extremes to assure a comfortable stay. Thursday's field trip to Bosque del Apache National Wildlife Refuge will require comfortable field clothing appropriate for these local weather conditions. Warm coats, gloves, and hats are always advisable.

## **Accommodations**

Workshop "headquarters" is at one of the city's most beautiful hotels. The Sheraton Old Town is a spacious Southwestern-style hotel within walking distance of Albuquerque's historic Old Town complete with gift shops, restaurants, galleries, and the New Mexico Museum of Natural History.

**Hotel reservations** must be completed directly with the Sheraton Old Town Hotel, 800 Rio Grande Blvd. NW. Albuquerque, NM, by December 24, 1999 to assure 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**.

## **Transportation**

*Air:* Air transportation should be made to the Albuquerque International Sunport. This is a major air traffic hub with direct flights or connections easily obtained from most cities in North America. Make your travel arrangements early to avoid inconveniences and higher costs.

*Local:* Albuquerque hosts two major ground transportation highways. Interstate 25 bisects the city north to Denver and south to Las Cruces. Interstate 40 bisects the city east to Flagstaff and west to Amarillo. Most rental car agencies are present in Albuquerque. Local arrangements for rental cars can be made at the Albuquerque International Sunport. Make your arrangements early to avoid inconvenience.

For those without local ground transportation, hotel shuttle service is not available. We recommend Checker Airport Express available at the airport (\$18 round trip) or taxi service which may be cheaper with several people (\$15 one way).

## **Program**

Travel day is Tuesday, January 11 with a southwestern mariachi reception in the evening. You won't want to miss this ice-breaker, New Mexico style!

Wednesday, January 12 and Friday, January 14: Paper sessions and business meetings. It's shaping up to be an outstanding program as over 30 papers have been submitted covering topics like reintroduction, migration, nesting, mortality, captive propagation, management problems, techniques, and wintering ecology.

Thursday the 13th is reserved for an all-day field trip and New Mexican luncheon at Bosque del Apache National Wildlife Refuge, widely recognized as one of the jewels of the national wildlife refuge system. See below.

Friday, January 14: A dinner and awards banquet that you won't want to miss will cap things off in the evening.

## **Field Trip**

**Bosque del Apache National Wildlife Refuge.** Thursday, January 13, 8:00 - evening. Bosque del Apache NWR is one of the show places of the National Wildlife Refuge System. Journey with refuge biologists as we tour the Middle Rio Grande Valley in route from Albuquerque south to the refuge. The Valley is home to the majority of the Rocky Mountain Population of Greater Sandhill Cranes and has been the southern terminus for experimental populations of endangered Whooping Cranes since 1975. The tour will pause at the state managed Bernardo Waterfowl Management Area to view concentrations of waterfowl and sandhill cranes. State personnel will briefly describe management programs coordinated with adjacent federal wildlife refuges. Upon arriving at Bosque del Apache National Wildlife Refuge, participants will be treated to a world class Southwestern New Mexico luncheon prepared by refuge staff members themselves. Following the luncheon, participants will tour refuge wetland and agricultural habitats for up close viewing of some of the highest concentrations of waterfowl and sandhill cranes in the world while refuge biologists describe innovative management programs. Topping off the day will be an unforgettable viewing experience as thousands of waterfowl and sandhill cranes return to evening roosts. Transportation will be by modern bus service to and from the Sheraton Old Town Hotel lobby.

An optional field trip is being considered on Saturday, January 15. Dale Stahlecker and Wendy Brown are offering to lead a canoe birding trip on the Rio Grande to a limited number of people. Six canoes (up to 12 people) would float the Rio Grande north of Albuquerque. Winter birds would be similar to Bosque del Apache. Participants will need to bring warm clothing and be familiar with the basics of canoeing in flat moving water. Cost will be about \$20-25 per person. Contact Dale (505/466-3453, [dwseagle@rt66.com](mailto:dwseagle@rt66.com)) or Wendy (505/246-6664, [wendy\\_brown@fws.gov](mailto:wendy_brown@fws.gov)).

## **Call for Papers!**

There have been 33 abstracts and/or draft papers submitted. **Submissions** are still being considered for inclusion in the **Proceedings**, which will be published immediately after the workshop. Send drafts to SCOTT G. HEREFORD, MS SANDHILL CRANE NWR, 7200 CRANE LANE, GAUTIER, MISSISSIPPI 39553 Fax: 228/497-5407, E-mail: [scott\\_hereford@fws.gov](mailto:scott_hereford@fws.gov). **FINAL DRAFTS WILL BE DUE AT THE WORKSHOP.** Even if you are planning on submitting your work for publication elsewhere, you are still invited to make an oral presentation and submit an abstract for the Proceedings.

FORMAT for abstracts and papers will follow Journal of Wildlife Management or Society for Conservation Biology guidelines.

ORIGINAL RESEARCH is encouraged, but review papers will be considered.

PAGE CHARGES, (\$25.00 per page), will help defray the costs of publication. Individuals lacking such funds may apply for a waiver.

STUDENT AWARD. A monetary award will be presented to the student with the best paper.

Gary Lingle has agreed to serve as Compiling Editor. The following have volunteered to serve as section editor/session chair:

Population Dynamics: Rod Drewien  
Reintroduction: Richard Urbanek  
Disease & Mortality: Glenn Olsen

Needed: Section editors for Breeding Biology, Migration/Wintering, Captive/Genetics, and Management/techniques. Contact Scott Hereford if you wish to serve in this capacity.

Oral Presentations: A printed program including date and time of the oral presentations will be available to all participants at the workshop. Each oral presentation will be limited by maximum 20 minutes, 15 minutes for presentation and 5 minutes for discussion. If an author's presentation is longer than 15 minutes, the time for discussion will be shortened adequately. All session chairs will be instructed to make authors respect the time limit. Standard overhead projectors, slide projectors, and multimedia projectors will be available.

## **Awards**

Nominations are **still** being accepted for the *L. H. Walkinshaw Crane Conservation Award*. The purpose of this award is to recognize those individuals whose efforts have advanced our ability to conserve a species, subspecies or population of cranes in North America. Criteria for consideration for the award are long-term involvement with conservation of cranes through research, management, education, or application of biological principles to the preservation of cranes in North America. The award is named after L.H. Walkinshaw because his life long pursuit of knowledge of cranes in North America epitomizes what the NACWG wishes to express with this award. If a candidate is selected, the award will be presented at the Workshop in January. Send letters of nomination to:

Scott Hereford, MS Sandhill Crane NWR, 7200 Crane Lane, Gautier, MS 39553.

## **Workshop Registration**

To register, you must complete the Registration Form (below) and send it with the correct fee by check or money order to John Taylor, local arrangements coordinator, by December 15, 1999 to avoid late fees. Mail the form to:

Eighth North American Crane Workshop/Attention John Taylor  
Bosque del Apache National Wildlife Refuge  
P.O. Box 1246  
Socorro, New Mexico 87801

Registration confirmation will be made by mail by December 24, 1999. Questions regarding registration can be made by calling (505) 835-1828 or email:

**John\_P\_Taylor@fws.gov**. Always reference the **Eighth North American Crane Workshop**.

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

## **ANNOUNCEMENTS**

### **NACWG LAUNCHES NEW WEBSITE!**

The North American Crane Working Group has joined the World Wide Web. A round of applause goes to Board member **Richard Urbanek** for creating the NACWG website and working out all the details associated with maintaining it. He has spent a great deal of time on it and done a marvelous job. Thanks Richard! Our home page contains crane biology information, an historical summary of the NACWG, details about the upcoming Workshop, previous issues of *The Unison Call* and much more. Check it out at:

**[www.portup.com/~nacwg](http://www.portup.com/~nacwg)**

### **WHOOPIING CRANE CONSERVATION ASSOCIATION ANNUAL MEETING**

The Whooping Crane Conservation Association (WCCA) will be meeting in Albuquerque on Saturday, January 15th. The meeting will be held in the same Sheraton Old Town and the same room rates apply as for the NACWG workshop. The WCCA welcomes offers for presentations at our annual meeting. While we will consider any offers for programs - interest of course will focus on whooping crane studies or research; or, work with sandhill cranes that deal with preliminary work to whooping crane research. In view of a different audience, a repeat of programs presented at the Workshop will be considered. You can contact Lawrence S. Smith, President for WCCA at:

1525 Cedar Ridge Dr. NE  
Albuquerque, NM 87112-4570  
Phone: 595-293-0454

E-mail cmfs00a@prodigy.com (where the 0's are zeros) (This e-mail address good only through September, 1999, as Prodigy is not Y2K compliant)

**SORRY FOR THE DELAY!** This issue of *The Unison Call* was delayed while details of the Workshop were being finalized. Please note that most items were submitted in June, and therefore may not be current to date. We apologize for the delay and thank you for your patience.

**WELCOME to the following new members!**

Robert Kruidenier\*, Socorro NM  
Barbara Niccolai, Mitchelville MD  
Wesley Abler, Douglas GA  
Joe Ball, Missoula MT  
Lorraine Grassano, San Francisco CA

\*Robert Kruidenier was our first new cyberspace member following the launching of our website last February!

## REGIONAL REPORTS



### FLORIDA

**WHOOOPER EGGS IN FLORIDA!** A major milestone event took place this spring for the Florida reintroduction project. On 8 April we discovered a pair of whoopers incubating. The 2 Patuxent isolation-reared birds laid 2 eggs just before their 4th birthdays. Their nest attendance and protection was impressive until the nest with egg fragments was discovered abandoned on 18 April. Declining water levels may have predisposed the nest to predation.

Just 2 days later (20 April) another pair was observed with one bird sitting on a nest. Both birds were reared at Patuxent; the male, about to turn 4 years old, was parent-reared. The isolation-reared female had just turned 5 years old. On 29 April we found that the pair abandoned the nest which contained 1 egg. Ironically, it appeared that rising water levels caused the abandonment. The previous evening, an intense thunderstorm dumped 5+cm of rain in a short time. The bottom of the egg lay against wet vegetation in the nest; Florida sandhill cranes abandon nests under these circumstances.

Neither pair nested at previous release sites. They did, however, nest in some of the wettest habitat available during the drought. Neither pair had nested in the past and both pairs stayed in their territories following nest failure. We did not observe re-nesting attempts.

Of 28 chicks released this past winter, 20 survive (9 June 1999). Our last chick mortality was in February. 53 older whoopers inhabit Florida. This spring, as during last, some (9) older birds have undergone simultaneous molting of flight feathers.

*Marty Folk, Kissimmee, FL*

## **MISSISSIPPI**

Fifteen cranes in three cohorts were transferred from Audubon's Species Survival Center to the refuge for acclimation in January and later released at three "pond pen" sites. In one of the poorest short term post-release survivals in years, only nine survive. All the Ocean Springs cohort died, mainly mammal predation. The January population was estimated at 124 cranes.

There have been 23 nests including six renests. There were two new CNAs. #637, a HY82 male, was documented nesting for the first time! At visits to two nests, pipped eggs were observed being attacked by fire ants. Three eggs, including one from a "fire ant nest", were taken to Audubon SSC for rearing and release later this year. Currently, only two chicks were still alive, a clutch of two were due to hatch in 1-2 days, and there was another active nest. Nest searching will continue into July. As part of a pilot chick mortality study, Glenn Olsen implanted small radios in three chicks. One died from hawk predation. Over two years, three of four known chick mortalities appear to be due to hawk predation. Plans are to have another three chicks radio-tagged by June 22. An SCA Resource Assistant Heather Pruiksma was recruited for 12 weeks to help monitor the radio-tagged chicks.

Five AHY cranes were captured using three different methods and marked and/or radio-tagged.. The carcasses of two breeding birds were discovered. #926, a HY 89 female and one of "Mini's birds", appeared to die as result of a fence. #234, a radio-tagged HY 92 male, was killed by predation, while the pair had an active nest.

The 2nd Annual Gautier Crane Festival in late March was a success. About 1000 people attended, a 300%+ increase over the first year. A refuge Friends Group is forming. Please visit our new web site at [www.fws.gov/r4mis](http://www.fws.gov/r4mis).

Biotech and NACWG member Tracy Grazia was promoted to GS-7.

*Scott Hereford, Gautier, MS*

## **ROCKY MOUNTAINS**

Greater sandhill cranes of the Rocky Mountain Population (RMP) were counted by air and ground surveys at 51 premigration and staging areas in Colorado, Idaho, Montana, Utah, and Wyoming in mid-September 1998. Migrants that had arrived at the staging area in 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; 28 individuals

from various agencies and members of the Jackson Hole Bird Club assisted with the count.

A total of 18,202 RMP cranes was recorded with 44.3% in Idaho, 18.8% in Montana, 17.9% in Wyoming, 12.0% in Utah, and 7.0% in Colorado. Over 68% of all cranes were recorded at 12 areas. The 3 most important were: 1) Bear River Valley in the tri-state area of Idaho, Utah and Wyoming (1,723), 2) Blackfoot Reservoir, ID (1,626) and Yampa Valley, CO (1,200). The 1998 count tallied the second highest number of cranes recorded during 6 surveys conducted since 1987 and was exceeded only in 1992 when 19,297 cranes were counted.

*Rod Drewien, Wayan, ID, Doug Benning and Phil Thorpe, Lakewood, CO*

## **TEXAS**

The peak population at Aransas during the 1998-99 winter equaled 165 white-plumaged birds and 18 juveniles totaling 183 cranes. The 183 cranes is probably the peak population this century and was an increase of one over the peak of 182 during the 1997-98 winter. The flock consisted of 102 adults (51 pairs or potential pairs), 63 subadults, and 18 juveniles. One subadult wintered with sandhills south of Houston and apparently never made it to Aransas.

An estimated 181 whooping cranes were present at Aransas in the spring of 1998. With the addition of 18 young that arrived at Aransas, the flock could have reached a maximum of 199 whoopers. The peak population of 183 thus represents a loss of 16 cranes (8.8% of the spring, 1998 population of 181). High mortality is believed to have occurred in the fall, 1998 migration. Adult female o/w-BWsp (1986) had a broken leg and was last observed at Quivira NWR in Kansas on December 29. Another notable sighting in the fall migration was one bird photographed just north of Chicago following a strong wind storm.

No mortality was documented during the 1998-99 winter. Adult cranes and/or potential pairs occupied 51 territories and/or use areas, two more than last winter. Thirty-seven cranes were color marked (2 less than last winter), representing 20.2% of the population. All cranes departed Aransas by April 21 in the spring migration.

Refuge Manager Brent Giezentanner retired at the end of 1998 after 12 years at Aransas and 35 years of government service. He has moved to Colorado Springs and is planning to start an environmental consulting business. The acting refuge manager at Aransas is assistant project leader Jim Halpin.

*Tom Stehn, Aransas, TX*

## **CANADA**

**Report from the Whooping Crane Breeding Grounds.** The 12 month period prior to nesting was the driest recorded in Fort Smith in over 20 years. In years with low water levels, chick survival is usually poorer than average and in years with high water levels, survival is higher than average. With such low water conditions, the outlook for chick survival looked bleak at the outset of the breeding season.

From the winter surveys at Aransas we were expecting as many as 51 breeding pairs to nest in 1999. As many as 4 pairs may have lost mates prior to their arrival on the breeding grounds as only single birds were seen in 2 territories and another 2 banded birds were not accounted for on their territories. Forty-eight pairs were known to have nested, including a new pair north of the traditional nesting area. At least 46 chicks hatched including 10 sets of twins. As of June 14, 35 chicks were still alive including 1 set of twins. Cool wet weather during the chick hatching period June 4-7 took a heavy toll on the families with two young. Even though the wet weather was hard on chick survival it provided much needed rainfall for the crane nesting marshes. Water levels increased and the marshes now appear reasonably full which should be conducive to increased survival of the remaining young.

*Brian Johns, Saskatoon, Saskatchewan*

## **CAPTIVE FLOCKS**

Among the captive crane flocks, the International Crane Foundation, Baraboo, WI (ICF), has had the most success this year with 100% survival of the 8 whooping cranes and 3 Siberian cranes hatched. In September, ICF will be playing host to the Whooping Crane Recovery Team and the annual captive propagation meeting.

At the Calgary Zoo, Calgary, Alberta, they had potentially 9 pairs of whooping cranes this spring. Unfortunately, two of the pairs had to be split because of mate-aggression. Still, 13 whooping crane eggs were laid (6 fertile, 6 infertile, 1 unknown). Of the 6 fertile eggs, one was broken by parent birds (as was the egg of unknown fertility), 3 chicks died before hatching, and 2 chicks hatched (May 22,24) and are doing fine at this time.

Patuxent Wildlife Research Center, Laurel, Maryland, had 8 producing whooping crane pairs (44 total whooping cranes). Altogether, 52 eggs have been laid, 29 chicks hatched and 26 are still alive. One whooping crane chick was killed by an adult in an adjacent pen. Two others had serious congenital problems and were euthanized. Patuxent is also rearing 26 greater sandhill cranes for release in Utah and Arizona, plus 7 Florida sandhill cranes for various projects in support of the program.

The San Antonio Zoo isolation reared 2 Whooping Cranes to fledging this year. While the staff consistently performed AI on both pairs, one pair exhibited daily natural copulation also. Of the 7 eggs produced, 5 eggs were fertile and artificially incubated, 3 chicks hatched, and 2 birds were successfully reared to fledging. Arrangements are currently being made for the 0.2 Whoopers (representing both pairs) to join a release cohort.

White Oak Conservation Center, Yulee, Florida, has 5 producing pairs of Mississippi sandhill cranes. Six eggs have been moved to Audubon Zoo and 4 chicks are being costumed reared from these eggs. Currently, one chick is being parent reared at White Oak, but two more clutches are still due at this time. Other crane species being reared at White Oak include Waddled Cranes, with one egg being sent to South Africa to join 7 or 8 other eggs from other institutions for a release project. Also, a pair of East African crowned cranes have a clutch of eggs. White Oak had two female whooping cranes; one has been sent to the Audubon Zoo, while one remains at White Oak.

At the Audubon Center for Research and Endangered Species, they have 33 adult Mississippi sandhill cranes with 12 laying females. All together, 65 eggs were laid by these birds and an additional 6 eggs were received from White Oak and 2 eggs and one chick from the Mississippi Sandhill Crane National Wildlife Refuge. Seven eggs are still being incubated. Twenty-one chicks have hatched so far this year with 16 surviving. However, one of these has scoliosis so there are fifteen potential birds to release and bolster the wild flock in Mississippi. In addition, Audubon now has its first pair of whooping cranes. These two birds were just recently introduced to each other so no production is expected this year.

I wish to thank Dr. Susan Mikota (Audubon), Nancy Businga (ICF), Mike Taylor (White Oak), Angela Langs (San Antonio) and Dwight Knapik (Calgary) for supplying the information used in this report.

*Glenn Olsen, Laurel, MD*

## **CRANE RESEARCH**

### **ROCKY MOUNTAINS**

The two ultralight whooping cranes led south behind an ultralight in the fall of 1997 survived the 1998-99 winter and stayed out of trouble. The two cranes had split up in the 1998 fall migration. One wintered near Wilcox, Arizona but then on February 13, 1999 joined the second ultralight whooper at Bosque del Apache NWR. The two departed Bosque on March 12, then weren't reported again until April 11 when both birds were together near Heber City, Utah. This was on the course they were led behind the ultralight in the fall of 1997. The two ultralight cranes then split up, with one reported in the Arbon Valley of southeast Idaho on May 16.

### **WISCONSIN**

Dr. John Cannon continued work on an assessment of potential reintroduction sites. On March 5, at a meeting in Madison, involved parties agreed to limit the study to 3 sites (Crex Meadows, Necedah/Sandhill, and Horicon). Public meetings were held at these locations in May with much valuable information provided to the public that showed much enthusiasm for the project. Sampling of crane foods will be done this summer, and

a decision about the suitability of Wisconsin reached September 19-23 when the Captive Management and Recovery teams will meet in Baraboo.

*Tom Stehn, Aransas, TX*

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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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LAUREL, MD 20708  
PHONE: 301-497-5758  
FAX: 301-497-5744  
E-MAIL: [jane\\_nicolich@usgs.gov](mailto:jane_nicolich@usgs.gov)

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.

Thanks to all who contributed to this newsletter!