

THE UNISON CALL

- Newsletter of the North American Crane Working Group -

Fall/Winter 2012 (2013)

Vol. 23 No. 2

Audubon Gala Honors George Archibald with Top Environmental Award

New York (January 18, 2013) — The National Audubon Society awarded two of the nation's most prestigious environmental honors on the same night: George Archibald, co-founder of the International Crane Foundation, received the inaugural Dan W. Lufkin Prize for Environmental Leadership and its \$100,000 award, and philanthropist Louis Bacon received the esteemed Audubon Medal.

The Moore Charitable Trust, of which Louis Bacon is the founder, will provide a new gift to Audubon to create a resource center and powerful new advocacy tools for citizens who want take action to minimize the impact of energy development on communities and wildlife.

“It is a wonderful honor to receive the Audubon Medal from the National Audubon Society, which for more than a century has fought tirelessly to protect and preserve our natural resources and environment for future generations,” Bacon said.

Of his achievement, Archibald said: “I am honored to be the first recipient of the Dan W. Lufkin Prize for Environmental Leadership, and I am especially grateful to Dan and Cynthia Lufkin for their loyal support and dedication to crane conservation. This award is recognition of the achievements of the entire International Crane Foundation staff, our colleagues around the world and the thousands of people who give annually to our global conservation

efforts. I really can't think of a better way to kick off the International Crane Foundation's 40th anniversary.”

“The Audubon Medal and the Lufkin Prize celebrate men of compassion and courage, and it's pretty remarkable to be able to honor both of these leaders at one event,” said Audubon President and CEO David Yarnold. “Not only that, it was the most successful fundraiser Audubon has ever had.”

The gala, held in New York City on January 17, 2013, raised over \$2.4 million for the organization.

Tom Brokaw hosted the event. “I had the privilege of serving as emcee at the National Audubon Society's Centennial Gala in 2005, and am thrilled to be here tonight to celebrate the achievements of two of this country's great conservationists,” Brokaw said.

The evening closed with a special performance by Bette Midler.

(more on page 2)



Dan Lufkin (left) awards ICF co-founder George Archibald with the inaugural Dan W. Lufkin Prize for Environmental Leadership in New York City in January 2013 “He’s devoted his life to crane survival,” said Mr. Lufkin. “The prize is for on-the-job, feet-on-the-ground environmentalists.” ICF is grateful to Mr. Lufkin, his family, and to the National Audubon Society for offering the award and \$100,000 cash prize, and to George for immediately donating the money to help cranes.

Photo by Cutty McGill/Audubon.

Excerpt from George's acceptance speech:

I accept this honor on behalf of the remarkable team at the Foundation and our colleagues worldwide. The National Audubon Society has been a leader in the conservation of birds for more than a century. In 1940, when the Whooping Cranes were reduced to barely more than a dozen in the migratory flock, Audubon’s remarkable researcher, Robert Porter Allen, made the salvation of these cranes his great passion. His book, the Whooping Crane, published in 1952, is the cornerstone upon which subsequent work has been based. We are encouraged that the Whooping Cranes have increased to almost 300 birds. But now they face grave threats as their wintering grounds in Texas are subject to sea level rise, as life-giving fresh water inflows are blocked for upstream cities and ranches, and as toxic tar sands are mined close to their breeding grounds in Canada. I am hopeful, though, because organizations like the International Crane Foundation and the National Audubon Society will continue to demonstrate the commitment and passion that Robert Porter Allen shared in the 1940s to ensure Whooping Cranes will forever be a part of our landscape.

From left to right: National Audubon Society President David Yarnold, Mayor Michael Bloomberg, Bette Midler, George Archibald, and Tom Brokaw.

Diane Bondareff/Invision for the National Audubon Society/AP Images



Adapted and edited from a news release of the National Audubon Society and additional information provided by Kate Fitzwilliams of the International Crane Foundation.

Louisiana Chosen as Venue for 2014 Workshop

In December 2012, the NACWG Board polled the general membership to help decide the venue for the next (13th) North American Crane Workshop in 2014. Two exciting choices were put forward at the Members' Meeting at the 12th Workshop: Louisiana and Tennessee. Using SurveyMonkey®, links to an electronic ballot were emailed to 86 members, of whom 37 (43%) responded with a preference. A slight majority selected Lafayette, Louisiana as the preferred site for the next Workshop, to be held in April 2014. Thus, the Board voted in favor of Louisiana, making the selection official. Sammy King and colleagues will host the 2014 Workshop in Lafayette, and David Aborn and colleagues will host the 2017 Workshop in Chattanooga, Tennessee.

The extracurricular attractions to look forward to at each venue can be found in the following two paragraphs by Sammy King and David Aborn, which accompanied the electronic ballot:

Come celebrate the return of the Whooping Crane to Louisiana! **Lafayette, Louisiana** would be the host site for the North American Crane Workshop if Louisiana is chosen. Lafayette is in the heart of the Cajun culture and there is a plethora of fine food and music. The chosen time would be April 2014. During April, the rice and crawfish fields of Louisiana support astounding numbers of migratory shorebirds and waterfowl, wading birds, and frequently several of the reintroduced Whooping Cranes. The region has been designated an Important Bird Area by the Audubon Society. In addition, we will visit the marshes of southwestern Louisiana that support a diverse array of waterbirds, alligators, and other wetland wildlife. It is also possible to visit the Chenier ridges of southwestern Louisiana. During this period, all eastern songbird species and most western species use these coastal forests as stop-

over habitat following their trans-gulf migration. Finally, crawfish season is in full swing at this time so we will make sure that boiled crawfish are on the menu! — Sammy King

I invite all Craniacs to consider **Chattanooga, Tennessee** as the site for the 13th North American Crane Workshop! Nearby Hiwassee Wildlife Refuge boasts a large population of migrating and overwintering Sandhill Cranes; up to 15,000 may be seen on the refuge at one time! In addition, Hiwassee was an important stopover point during the early years of Operation Migration, and Whooping Cranes from those past flights, as well as more recent DAR birds, are a regular sight there. Every January, there is a Sandhill Crane Festival at Hiwassee, attracting up to 5,000 people who come to view the cranes and other wildlife, hear the invited speakers, and see the exhibits. It has even been listed as one of the top winter events in the south by Southern Living Magazine! The workshop would be timed to coincide with the festival. Chattanooga has a lot to offer aside from cranes, and is a family-friendly destination. Attractions and points of interest include the Tennessee Aquarium, the Children's Discovery Museum, the Chattanooga Nature Center, which will soon be opening a Sandhill Crane exhibit, the Southern Belle Riverboat, the Hunter Art Museum, and the Chattanooga and Chickamauga National Battlefields. There are also plenty of good birding spots, with a nice diversity of waterfowl and wintering songbirds around. Come to the Scenic City and see why we are ranked as one of the nation's top vacation destinations! — David Aborn

Details of the 13th Workshop will follow in the next newsletter.

International Workshop on Crane Protection and Sustainable Agriculture in China

Jane Austin, USGS Northern Prairie Wildlife Research Center, Jamestown, ND

More than 50 crane specialists from 11 countries and four continents met in Beijing and Yueyang, China on December 3-7, 2012 for the international workshop, *Crane Protection and Sustainable Agriculture*. Participants from China, South Korea, North Korea, Russia, Japan, Mongolia, the United States, Canada, India, Germany, and South Africa shared relevant knowledge and experiences relating to crane conservation, sustainable agriculture, and community development and involvement activities. About 30 others, primarily from academic and research institutions in China, also attended and participated in discussions. The workshop and associated meetings were organized by the Crane Specialist Group of Wetlands International – IUCN Species Survival Commission, the North East Asia Crane Working Group, Beijing Forestry University, BirdLife International, and the International Crane Foundation (ICF).

This gathering of crane specialists generated productive discussions to move crane conservation forward on a number of fronts:

- Workshop participants crafted a *Call to Action: Recommendations for Expanding Sustainable Agriculture's Benefits to Cranes, Wetlands, and People in Northeast Asia*. This statement summarizes conclusions of the workshop, and asks governments, researchers, and those concerned with agriculture and crane or wetland conservation to implement a series of recommendations. The *Call to Action* will be posted on the ICF website (www.savingcranes.org). While the statement focuses on Northeast Asia, the message is pertinent to crane conservation in all parts of the world, and we encourage everyone to read and disseminate this widely.
- A portion of participants met to review the current outline and discuss content of a draft publication, *Cranes and agriculture – a practical guide to conservationists and land managers*, for integrating crane conservation with agricultural activities. The publication will include chapters and case studies by authors from around the world and is scheduled to be completed this year. Jane Austin (USGS), Kerryn Morrison (Endangered Wildlife Trust), and Claire Mirande (ICF) led the discussions and are the leads on the publication.
- Participants from six countries held discussions on the status and conservation priorities for the Red-crowned Crane. Their work will be incorporated into a species assessment to be included as part of the Crane Conservation Plan.
- Preceding the workshop, 18 specialists met on December 1-2 to work on the Crane Conservation Plan being prepared by the Crane Specialist Group. The specialists reviewed draft actions and priorities for conservation of the world's crane species as one step in developing the Plan (an update to the 1996 Crane Action Plan); this publication will be completed in 2014. Jim Harris (ICF and Chair of the Crane Specialist Group) and Claire Mirande (Program Officer) are leading this effort. If you have questions, contact Claire at: mirande@savingcranes.org.
- Following the workshop, 16 specialists met on December 8-9 to form a global network to reduce crane collisions with power lines. The session was organized by Megan Diamond, Endangered Wildlife Trust (South Africa). Megan and Gopi Sundar (ICF) are taking the lead in developing a guide to reduce threats of powerlines to cranes. Participants formed the new Crane-Powerline Working Group within the Crane Specialist Group. More information on this working group will be shared soon.



Spike Millington, Chief Executive of the East Asian–Australasian Flyway Partnership, addresses the participants at the workshop opening.

Funding for the meetings was provided by the China State Forestry Administration, Peter Jay Sharp Foundation, Fifth Age of Man Foundation, Lufthansa, East Asian–Australasian Flyway Partnership, Hanns Seidel Foundation, Endangered Wildlife Trust, Dohmen Family Foundation, and ICF members Hall Healy and Sara Simmonds.

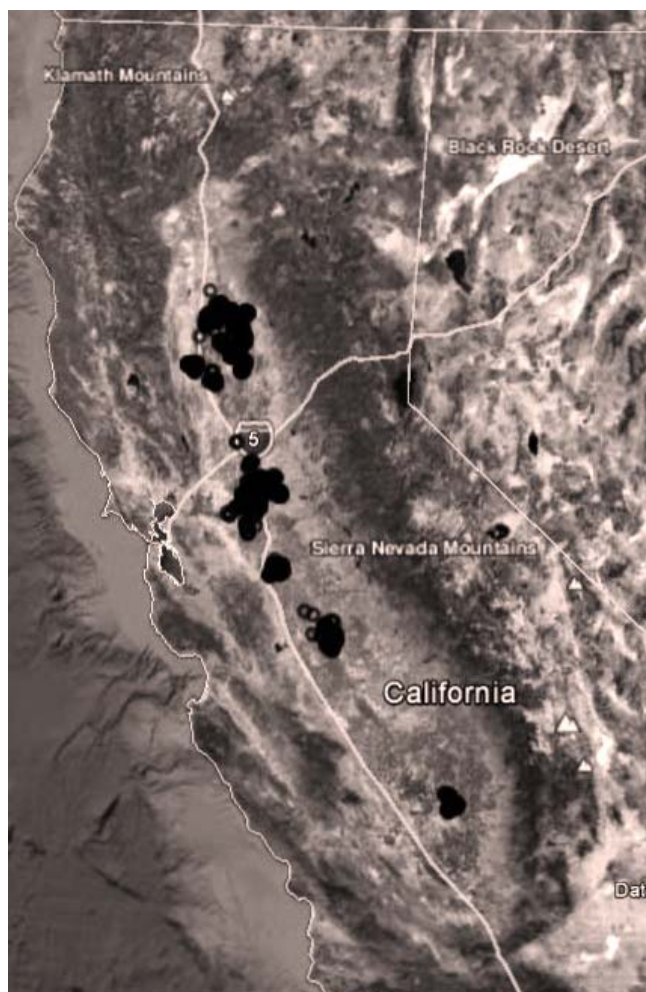
While in Yueyang, workshop participants did get out for some time in the field. The city of Yueyang is located along the Yangtze River and Dongting Lake, the second largest freshwater wetland in China and critical habitat for a wide diversity of waterbirds, including Siberian, White-naped, Hooded, and Common Cranes. We learned about an organic farming program developed by the World Wildlife Fund to improve wetland and waterbird habitat while providing sustainable agriculture for area farmers. We birded on the shores of the East Dongting Lake National Nature Reserve, toured the reserve’s visitors’ center, and visited the historic Junshan Island and Yueyang Tower for more birding. Our visit to Yueyang coincided with celebrations for the 7th Dongting Lake International Birds-Viewing Festival, and we were honored guests at the banquet and opening ceremonies.

The Unison Call is a forum to share updates, news and opinions. It is published twice yearly (spring/summer and fall/winter) by the **North American Crane Working Group**, a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization. Both print and electronic (PDF) versions are produced; PDFs of past issues of the newsletter can be downloaded free of charge from our website (www.nacwg.org). The views expressed in *The Unison Call* are those of the authors and do not necessarily represent the positions of NACWG. Comments and contributions are always welcome.

Daryl Henderson, Stony Brook, NY
 dshender@optonline.net

Regional Reports

Crane Rangers – Wintering Crane Atlas Project in California



Gary Ivey, Research Associate for the International Crane Foundation has partnered with The Nature Conservancy and Audubon California to identify areas where cranes winter in the Central Valley of California. This information will be used to identify important crane use areas on private lands where we can work with landowners and develop incentives for crane-friendly management. Sandhill Cranes are a priority species for the Natural Resource Conservation Service in California, so we are hoping they will be able to apply some of their wildlife incentive funds toward crane conservation and habitat management. This is a citizen-science project and we have invited birders and crane enthusiasts to participate by counting flocks of cranes (by subspecies when possible) and plotting their locations through the winter. We plan to continue this program for at least two more years to develop a good layer of baseline information on wintering crane distribution.

Distribution of wintering Sandhill Cranes in the Central Valley of California, winter 2012-13. (The dark blotches indicate crane concentrations.)

Gary Ivey
Research Associate
West Coast Crane Working Group
International Crane Foundation

Probable Longevity Record for a Sandhill Crane in the Eastern United States

Marty Folk writes: We recently learned of a "band encounter" for one of Steve Nesbitt's birds. Steve had banded an eastern Greater Sandhill Crane back on 3/11/82 in Florida. The bird was found dead at Jasper-Pulaski Fish and Wildlife Area (Indiana) last fall (11/28/12). Based on the age of the bird at banding time, when it died it had to be at least 32 years old. This is probably a longevity record for a Sandhill Crane in the eastern United States. Records of the USGS Bird Banding Lab show one Sandhill Crane that was older than this; a Sandhill Crane in the west was at least 36 years 7 months old when it died.

Marty Folk
Avian Research
Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission

Long-term Studies of Greater Sandhill Cranes in Wisconsin

The International Crane Foundation has conducted a long-term research project on Greater Sandhill Cranes in south central Wisconsin since 1990. Highlights from 2012 include:

1. Crop damage deterrence:

Since 2006, Avipel® (Anthra-quinone is the active ingredient) has been used successfully in the upper Midwest to deter cranes from damaging planted and emerged corn. Deployment of this deterrent has been accomplished through an emergency exemption to the Food Quality Protection Act and we expect a full label to be acquired by December, 2013. On an experimental basis, Avipel® is also being tested with Eurasian Cranes in Israel and on several species of cranes in South Africa. Avipel® is not currently allowed in the European Union. In 2012, 111,389 acres were treated in Wisconsin (a record), 16,830 acres in Michigan (also a record) and 2,674 acres in Minnesota for a total of 130,893 acres treated. To date, all of this treated acreage has been paid for by producers themselves, saving conservation dollars for other purposes.

2. Long-term research:

Using 22 years of research on 115 pairs (where both individuals in the pair were marked), Matt Hayes and Jeb Barzen submitted a paper testing hypotheses related to mate and site fidelity in long-lived, territorial birds that have substantial portions of their summer populations that consist of non-breeding birds. This is the most extensive dataset yet that has been applied to this question of sociobiology. In another long-term project, productivity, as measured on 61 territories containing at least one marked adult, reached a record low in 2012. Only one chick that survived to migrate south in the fall was produced per ten active territories. This trend is consistent with a declining trend in productivity observed for this population of breeding cranes over the last two decades. Finally, ICF's long-term research project currently benefits from collaborations with three different universities: University of Illinois – Urbana/Champaign where Jeff Fox is studying reproductive success and survival in Greater Sandhill Cranes within different landscapes; UW-Stevens Point where Lindsey McKinney has just started her research project on the role of energy reserves in reproduction for temperate-breeding Greater Sandhill Cranes; and UW-Madison where Matt Hayes is studying dispersal and gene flow within the Greater Sandhill Cranes.

3. Experimentation with quick-attachment harness and cell phone tracking technology:

ICF staff are also collaborating with the University of Nebraska-Lincoln to develop cell phone tracking technology that can be deployed for long periods on a variety of crane species. In 2012 we tested how to apply backpack harnesses quickly (thus reducing stress) on Greater Sandhill Cranes, using solar recharge panels for longer life, and three-dimensional measurements in crane movement so that crane behavior can be remotely tracked and meshed with geographic coordinates. This study also seeks to deploy this technology so that monitoring rates can be changed on the fly, saving battery life and providing the most data possible when birds are in locations or at times of the greatest interest.

Jeb Barzen
Director, Field Ecology
International Crane Foundation
Baraboo, Wisconsin

Regional Reports *continued*

Louisiana Whooping Cranes – January 2013

The saying 'no news is good news' holds pretty true for the Louisiana Whooping Crane project since our last update in July. Only one bird has died and 14 new birds have been released.

2010 Cohort

The two survivors from the 2010 cohort continue to do well. L5-10 continues to remain alone though she is often within 5-10 miles of several other birds but has never to our knowledge interacted with them. When last reported L3-10 was also alone but close to four other birds. I am happy to report that he found those other birds and is no longer alone. Starting in October data from his GPS transmitter indicated he was sometimes roosting in the same field as the 2011 trio and shortly after that we began seeing him in the same fields as the trio during the day. Even though we'd see him in the same field and clearly all four birds could see each other they usually kept a good distance between them. While L3-10 was, I'm sure, glad to have other Whooping Cranes to associate with, the trio was not so thrilled with his presence and would often chase him away if he came too close; however, he was persistent and would only retreat a short distance. In mid-December L4-11, the single female who had been a few miles north of the now loose group of four, joined them and she and L3-10 quickly became a pair. The two groups have remained in the same area and are often together as a loose group of five.

2011 Cohort

Since the previous update there has only been one additional mortality of the 2011 cohort, leaving 12 survivors out of the original 16 birds in this cohort. In August L16-11 was found dead on private property with predation suspected as the cause of death. Unfortunately the hot temperatures of August (as well as many other months in Louisiana) are not conducive to recovering a fresh or intact carcass. The death of L16-11 left L14-11 alone, but she continues to do well and has remained mostly on the same farm in Vermilion Parish since last June. The remaining 2011 birds consist of a group of seven that is still together in Avoyelles Parish in east-central Louisiana.

2012 Cohort

On 29 November we welcomed 14 new chicks (6 males, 8 females) to Louisiana from the Patuxent Wildlife Research Center where they were hatched and raised. We are grateful to Terry Kohler and the Windway Capital Corporation for providing the aircraft to safely transport the birds. Like the previous two cohorts the chicks were given a quick exam by our vet before being placed in a small section of the top-netted pen. Several days later each bird was handled again to have their bands and transmitters attached and were then put back into the full top-netted pen. On 17 December, ~2.5 weeks after they arrived, the birds were released to the open pen where food was provided but the birds were free to come and go and start exploring the surrounding marsh. The birds did well and continue to do well but unfortunately unprecedented rainfall and subsequent flooding in early-mid January increased the water depth in the refuge area where the crane pen is located to levels too deep for the cranes. Two chicks left the White Lake area by 19 January and moved to coastal marsh to the east where they remain. Shortly after their departure we discontinued providing food in the open release pen in order to encourage the birds to disperse to more suitable habitat. Eight chicks left on 26 January, shortly after the food ran out, and have remained together

using fields several miles north of the White Lake WCA property. The four youngest males were in no hurry to leave even without an easy meal being provided; they remained at the pen for about a week after the food was gone and just moved out of the marsh on 1 February.

On a side note, this year all the birds were shipped in a newly designed cardboard crane transport box manufactured for us by International Paper (IP). For the shipment of the 2011 cohort we used modified U-Haul shorty wardrobe boxes since I had experience using them while working with WCEP. From that idea and experience as well as our staff's previous experience moving turkeys in cardboard boxes made by IP, we began working with IP to design a box similar to the shorty wardrobe box. One huge improvement was having these boxes waxed inside and out to make them somewhat reusable and slightly weather/water resistant. IP was extremely patient with us as we went through numerous rounds of designs as well as several draft boxes and we are very grateful to them and thrilled with the final product, which not only looks nice but is very functional.

As of 2 February, 2013 there are 28 Whooping Cranes (12 males, 16 females) in Louisiana, 14 older birds and 14 newly released chicks.

Sara Zimorski
Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries



Crane transport boxes made of cardboard and manufactured by International Paper.

Regional Reports *continued*

Notes From The Field:

Update on the Eastern Migratory Whooping Crane Reintroduction

Summer and Autumn 2012 - As of 6 August 2012, maximum size of the Eastern Migratory Population was 105 birds (53 males, 52 females). Distribution included 98 Whooping Cranes in Wisconsin, 2 in Michigan, 3 not recently reported, and 2 missing for over one year. This total includes 2 fledged wild-hatched chicks. An additional 6 juveniles were added to the population by the DAR (direct autumn release) method at the Horicon NWR on 29 October. Five migrated on their own through South Carolina to south of Lake Okeechobee, Florida. The sixth juvenile migrated with Sandhill Cranes to east-central Florida.



Chick W1-12 prior to banding and his father, 12-02, on private land in Wood County, Wisconsin, October 3, 2012. Photo by Eva Szyszkoski.

Mortality – Mortalities from August-December included 1 adult female on breeding territory in Wisconsin and one adult male on wintering grounds in southern Georgia. The male's remains have not been located but mortality is suspected.

Injury – One juvenile DAR female (13-12) was captured on 26 January in Broward County, Florida, and transported to Disney's Animal Kingdom due to an injured right middle toe, which was amputated.



Toe injury on right foot of DAR 13-12, January 25, 2013. Photo by Jeannette Parker.

Autumn Migration of Ultralight-led Juveniles - The 2012 migration led by Operation Migration departed from White River Marsh State Wildlife Area, Green Lake County, on 28 September. One juvenile injured her leg during a flight in Illinois and was transported to the University of Illinois where she died. The remaining five birds arrived at the St. Marks NWR, Wakulla County, Florida, on 23 November where they were released 18 days later.

Winter 2012/2013 – As of 28 January 2013 or last known location, the maximum size of the Eastern Migratory Population was 114 birds (58 males and 56 females). Estimated distribution included 44 birds in Indiana, 16 in Florida, 16 in Alabama, 12 in Tennessee, 6 in Illinois, 9 in Kentucky, 3 in Georgia, 4 at unknown locations, and 4 long-term missing. The total in Florida includes the five recently released juveniles.

*Eva Szyszkoski
International Crane Foundation
Baraboo, Wisconsin*

Editor's note: Following successful surgery and recuperation, DAR 13-12 was transported from Florida and released at Hiwassee Wildlife Refuge in Tennessee on Saturday February 9, 2013. For details and a 5-minute video of the bird after her release (first walking and then flying), see the article at:

<http://www.nooga.com/159975/injured-whooping-crane-released-back-into-wild-at-hiwassee-state-wildlife-refuge/>

Regional Reports *continued*

ICF's Crane Chick Cam — Season Two

The second year of the International Crane Foundation's live Crane Chick Cam will begin this spring – bringing you behind the scenes as ICF raises Whooping Cranes for reintroduction into the wild. This year, in addition to live footage of the young cranes in our chick-rearing facility, we plan to share video of our hatching Whooping Crane eggs, along with special live chats with our aviculture and research staff. To learn more about the Crane Chick Cam and to view video highlights from last year, visit ICF's website at CraneChickCam.org.

Sara Gavney Moore
International Crane Foundation
Baraboo, Wisconsin



Whooping Crane chick and puppet.

Whooping Crane Update — Aransas National Wildlife Refuge

2012–2013 Winter Whooping Crane Survey:

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service personnel conducted 7 surveys of the primary wintering grounds [Lamar and Tatton units, Blackjack Peninsula, San Jose Island, West Marsh, Matagorda Island Central, Welder Flats] during December 2012. These efforts resulted in the training of 2 new observers and further refinement of the new survey protocol.

Preliminary analyses of the data indicated 257 (95% confidence interval (CI) = 178–362) Whooping Cranes inhabited the primary wintering grounds. Additional observations suggested that at least 22 Whooping Cranes were outside the primary wintering grounds during the survey period (see *Whooping Cranes Outside the Primary Survey Area* below). We estimated 105 (95% CI = 73–146) Whooping Crane pairs in the primary winter grounds and at least 33 (95% CI = 19–51) of those pairs arrived with at least one chick. We estimated the ratio of chicks to adults during the winter 2012–2013 was 14 chicks (95% CI = 9–21) to 100 adults. As our new observers gain experience and we work out methodological details, we anticipate precision in these estimates to increase.

Examination of the 60-year trend in Whooping Crane abundance reveals a slow, incremental increase with occasional declines. Such increase has been the rule rather than large year-to-year fluctuation. We do not expect to see wide swings in population growth from one year to the next unless there is a catastrophic event, like a hail storm or chemical spill. During winter 2010–2011, the traditional technique resulted in an estimate of 283 whooping cranes on the wintering grounds. We estimated 254 (95% CI = 198–324) Whooping Cranes in the primary wintering grounds plus approximately 13 were thought to occur in other areas (i.e., Bayside, Markham, and Granger Lake) during winter 2011–2012. Modeling of the historical time-series of Whooping Crane abundances predicted 272 (95% CI = 253–298) Whooping Cranes for winter 2011–2012 and 273 (95% CI = 250–301) for winter 2012–2013.

Measures of the uncertainty in our estimates are new to Whooping Crane monitoring. In the past, we did not include confidence intervals or other measures of precision because it was assumed that the traditional technique resulted in a complete count. The traditional technique assumed that 1) none of the birds were missed, 2) pairs consistently used a defined area throughout the winter, and 3) a single observer was able to see and account for every single bird over repeated survey effort. Previously, the traditional technique had no established protocol, there was not a survey area or flight pattern determined before each flight, and the observer flew wherever he thought birds might be seen. This made sense when the Whooping Crane population was small and occupied a relatively small geographic area. Now, we have a pre-established flight pattern that covers the primary wintering area, we used 2 observers on every flight, and accounted for missed birds. Because no statistical model was applied in the past, we had no way of knowing the uncertainty in our estimates. Now, with the application of a protocol-based survey design and statistical models, we can characterize our uncertainty and develop ways to reduce that uncertainty.

Every year we do this survey we will learn something new and different and apply it to the next season. Our knowledge and precision will grow and we will have more solid information that leads to better management decisions. We expect this process will take several seasons before the obvious and not-so-obvious factors can be incorporated into the survey protocol and statistical models. This is how science progresses. It is a very typical process and ultimately helps us make the best decisions for the Whooping Cranes.

Whooping Cranes Outside the Primary Survey Area:

It is important to note that, in addition to the estimate of 257 Whooping Cranes within the primary survey area, approximately 6% to 11% of the Whooping Crane population can now be found outside the survey area. This is not because the primary survey area is smaller than what was surveyed in the past; in fact, it is larger. This use of “nontraditional” wintering areas is great news and we are trying to get a better understanding of the expansion and use of Whooping Crane habitat.

As many have stated, in the long-run, having Whooping Cranes winter in a variety of places across a broader geographic range gives us greater confidence that a catastrophic event will not wipe out the population. For decades there has been genuine concern that one catastrophic event near the refuge could lead to the extinction of Whooping Cranes. This is such an important part of the ongoing recovery of Whooping Cranes and cannot be understated. Between **Texas Whooper Watch** and the increasing number of birds marked with satellite transmitters via the tracking study, we are in a much better position to document birds using areas outside the primary survey area.

The tables below provide our best understanding of birds that were outside the primary survey areas during mid-December. These numbers are concurrent with our aerial surveys. Keep in mind some birds may have been missed. Also, we cannot ever be completely certain that the birds did not move between these locations and to/from the primary survey area while survey flights were being conducted.

These are three different data sources that help document the proportion of the Whooping Crane population using areas outside of the primary wintering area during mid-December.

Table 1: Texas Whooper Watch

Birds documented outside of the survey area in mid-December via Texas Whooper Watch

General Area	Adults	Chicks	Total	Notes:
Granger Lake	6	2	8	Includes 1 marked bird.
North of El Campo	2	1	3	Includes 1 marked bird. One more pair was documented in the area but we do not have mid-
Total	8	3	11	

Table 2: Tracking Study*Birds documented outside of the survey area on December 17th via the tracking study*

General Area	Adults	Chicks	Total	Notes:
Mission Bay (secondary survey area)	1		1	Marked as chick.
North Matagorda Island (secondary)	2	1	3	Marked chick.
Holiday Beach (secondary)	2	1	3	Marked chick located on the edge of the primary survey area in early morning prior to aerial survey and in the secondary survey area twice in the afternoon.
Total	5	2	7	

Table 3: U.S. Fish and Wildlife Survey*Birds documented in the Whooping Cranes' secondary areas on December 13th via aerial survey*

General Area	Adults	Chicks	Total	Notes:
Powderhorn Lake (secondary survey area)	2		2	Pair located on Myrtle-Foester Whitmire Unit of refuge.
Guadalupe Delta (secondary)	2		2	Two pairs, total of 4 birds, were seen during the Christmas bird count on the 20th.
Total	4		4	

The data presented in this report are preliminary and subject to revision. This information is distributed solely for the purpose of providing the most recent information from aerial surveys. This information does not represent and should not be construed to represent any U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service determination or policy.

Editor's note: The above report was posted February 15, 2013 at <http://www.fws.gov/nwrs/threecolumn.aspx?id=2147512080>. It is reproduced in its entirety, with minor editing.

Cranes in the News

Sandhill Crane Named Audubon California's 2012 Bird of the Year

EMERYVILLE, Calif. (Dec. 10, 2012) — One of California's favorite bird species today was named the 2012 Audubon California Bird of the Year. The Sandhill Crane received the designation after winning 43 percent of nearly 12,000 votes cast during an online poll this fall. Although the bird was a nominee for the past three years, it experienced a surge in popularity this year, going from 234 votes in 2009 to 5053 in 2012.

"Cranes are a great bird to get into," said Brigid McCormack, managing director of Audubon California.

"They are easy to spot in the flooded fields of the Central Valley because of their large size and unique courtship dance."

Sandhill Cranes were once common throughout the west and especially in the California Central Valley. However their populations declined drastically as a result of unregulated hunting and habitat loss during settlement of the region. In California, the breeding population was reduced to fewer than five pairs by the 1940s. Fortunately, all populations of Sandhill Cranes have increased, and in 2000 an estimated 465 pairs were breeding in California. Nonetheless, much of their historic range remains vacant and the population remains far below historic numbers.

Audubon California is increasing the amount of Sandhill Crane habitat in California by partnering with private landowners. As part of the Migratory Bird Conservation Partnership, Audubon (along with PRBO Conservation Science and The Nature Conservancy) has an opportunity to take specific action targeting conservation in the Central Valley. In 2008, the Partnership negotiated easements in Surprise Valley and the Modoc Plateau to increase the amount of farmland in the Central Valley that is managed specifically for Sandhill Cranes.

Edited press release from Audubon California (<http://ca.audubon.org>).

Contributed by Gary Ivey

About Audubon California – Audubon California is building a better future for California by bringing people together to appreciate, enjoy and protect our spectacular outdoor treasures. With more than 50,000 members in California and an affiliated 48 local Audubon chapters, Audubon California is a field program of the National Audubon Society.

Celebrating Greater Sandhill Cranes in Colorado

Colorado enjoys seasonal abundances of Greater Sandhill Cranes during spring and fall migrations, providing stopover, staging and even breeding areas. The Centennial State is also home to ardent supporters of cranes and their crane festivities. Here we give a shout-out to Colorado cranes and craniacs alike.

Long-time NACWG member and volunteer monitor of the Rocky Mountain Population (RMP) of Greater Sandhill Cranes, Evelyn 'Evey' Horn, writes:

"...in the spring when the RMP Greater Sandhill Cranes leave Bosque del Apache, New Mexico, they move up into the San Luis Valley (**Monte Vista Crane Festival, March 8-10**). Then they cross the Continental Divide to come to Hart's Basin/ Fruitgrowers Reservoir for a one-night stand before going north to their nesting sites. Here in Eckert (Hart's Basin) we can't really have a festival because we never know how many birds will stop with us. But we have a celebration for them, **Eckert Crane Days, March 14-16**. We may have zero, or we may have hundreds: the largest number is 3300 (lots of folks saw 5000!). In the course of the migration, mid-March through mid-April, we have half to two-thirds of the flock of about 20,000. Since we are a 'stop-over' not a staging area, nobody seems to notice us. But we have a great crane show!"

"In the spring of 2012, a petition to hunt our Greater Sandhill Cranes was proposed for Moffat and Routt Counties in northwestern Colorado. The birding community opposed this petition at hearings of the Colorado Parks and Wildlife Commission. The petition has been withdrawn (for now). The people in the Yampa Valley came together after the hearings and created their first Crane Festival..."

The Greater Sandhill Crane is an iconic species of the Yampa Valley. Returning in the spring, cranes nest and raise their young in wetland areas throughout the valley. In late summer and early fall, hundreds of cranes from the Rocky Mountain flock join the local birds to rest and feed before continuing their journey south. — www.coloradocranes.org

Last year's inaugural **Yampa Valley Crane Festival** was a huge success; over 1200 people from 28 cities in Colorado and 12 states attended festival events. George Archibald gave the keynote presentation to an overflow audience of crane enthusiasts.

You are now invited to the second annual Yampa Valley Crane Festival, scheduled for September 6-9, 2013 in Steamboat Springs and Hayden, Colorado. Still in the planning phase, there will be crane-viewing sessions for all ages, a crane art show, family activities and a speakers' program. Additional information will be posted at www.coloradocranes.org as it becomes available or people can send queries to: coloradocranes@gmail.com

The Colorado Crane Conservation Coalition (CCCC) is a non-profit organization dedicated to the conservation and preservation of Sandhill Cranes in Colorado -- and lead organizer for the Yampa Valley Crane Festival each fall.

Thanks to Evey Horn, Eckert, CO and Nancy Merrill, President, CCCC, Steamboat Springs, CO

The following is the text of a letter sent to outgoing Secretary of the Interior Ken Salazar by outgoing WCCA President Lorne Scott. It sums up concerns held by some long-time Whooping Crane supporters over the new method now being used to estimate the number of Whooping Cranes wintering at Aransas National Wildlife Refuge in Texas (see pages 13-15). Thanks to Lorne Scott for providing the text.

January 4, 2013
Ken Salazar, Secretary
U.S. Department of the Interior
1849 C Street NW
Washington, DC 20240

Dear Mr. Salazar:

The annual winter census of endangered Whooping Cranes has been an event looked forward to by the conservation community since Aransas National Wildlife Refuge was established in 1937. The aerial total population count, done for the past 61 years, was changed by USFWS in the winter of 2011-2012 to a survey method using hierarchical distance sampling. As stated by USFWS, the new sampling method is only 85% accurate.

The Whooping Crane Conservation Association (WCCA) believes the total population count is much preferred to the current estimate that has little value. Estimates are not satisfactory when dealing with this bird which is considered a flagship among all endangered species. Only about 300 birds exist in this wild population and it is still possible to do a total population count. Potentially, a dozen or even thirty-five birds could die or disappear and the sampling technique would not detect the change. The new counting system only indicates that some low number of cranes are still present. It does not tell us whether this endangered population has increased or decreased from the previous year. The refuge's 2011-2012 estimate of 254 plus or minus 62 Whooping Cranes does not serve any management purposes, nor does it provide worthwhile public information. This degree of uncertainty for a critically endangered species is simply unacceptable.

The Whooping Crane is an internationally endangered species, and as such the concerns of the international community should be considered. Because of this high level of interest, and the endangered status of the species, accurate total population counts should be continued annually.

The WCCA sees the total count census as the most practical, economical and having the most scientific value. Three aerial counts between December 1 and 20 would provide a good count of the total number of birds arriving in the winter population. Flights every two weeks, after the December 20 count, until the cranes return north, would provide estimates of population losses during the winter. We note that as of December 27, 2012, the Aransas Refuge new website still does not report any crane numbers from approximately seven flights conducted this fall. We urge you to resume regular aerial total population counts as soon as possible. The WCCA looks forward to continuing its support of the international Whooping Crane conservation efforts, as we have done for the past fifty years.

Sincerely,

Lorne Scott, President
Whooping Crane Conservation Association

Potential Whooping Crane Deaths Demand EIS for North Dakota Wind Project, Groups Say

(WASHINGTON, D.C., February 8, 2013) — Seventy-six groups led by American Bird Conservancy (ABC), one of the nation's leading bird conservation organizations, have called on the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) to fully analyze the environmental consequences of a proposed North Dakota wind farm to the endangered Whooping Crane. FWS is considering issuing the first-ever Incidental Take Permit (ITP) to a wind farm for the killing of endangered Whooping Cranes and threatened Piping Plovers.

“Because there are fewer than 400 individual Whooping Cranes left in the wild, a decision to potentially authorize the killing of any of these birds is of great public concern,” said Kelly Fuller, Wind Campaign Coordinator for ABC. “This is also a precedent-setting decision that the agency should take the time to make sure is done right.”

FWS is being asked by the groups to prepare an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) in contrast to an abbreviated Environmental Assessment (EA) in connection with the Habitat Conservation Plan being prepared for the Merricourt Wind Power Project in North Dakota, related to a permit allowing the project to kill endangered Whooping Cranes and Piping Plovers. A letter signed by ABC and 76 groups raises concerns about the project and asks for an EIS.

The groups called for the action on the proposed 100-turbine project that would be built in a key migratory pathway for many birds in the Prairie Pothole Region of North Dakota. The Prairie Pothole Region is sometimes called “North America's duck factory.”

The highly endangered Aransas-Wood Buffalo population of Whooping Cranes is likely to be adversely affected since the entire population migrates through North Dakota in the spring and fall. FWS has already stated that the “mortality of any birds in such a small population also represents a loss of genetic material and represents a setback for recovery efforts.” Because of a recent change in the methodology of counting the cranes in this population, DOI does not even know with any degree of certainty, how many of these Whooping Cranes are actually left.

The comment letter asks DOI for three things:

1. Preparation of a full EIS which the groups say is warranted under the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) as opposed to the proposed, much shorter Environmental Analysis;
2. To extend the scoping comment period by 30 days since there has been inadequate public participation; and
3. To publish notice of the scoping comment period in the Federal Register, so that the public will have better notice.

The Merricourt Wind Project proposes to build approximately 100 turbines within a 22,400-acre project area and build about 33 miles of access roads. DOI has advised the project developer that the wetland stopover habitat in the project area is critical to the survival and recovery of the Whooping Crane. The site is also about two miles from designated critical habitat for Piping Plovers. In addition, DOI has told the developer that three ESA candidate species may be present at the site (Sprague's Pipit, Dakota skipper, and Powesheik skipperling).

Slightly abridged from an American Bird Conservancy news release at <http://www.abcbirds.org/newsandreports/releases/130208.html>

You are invited to join the North American Crane Working Group

Membership is based on a calendar year.

Dues: _____ Active \$10 _____ Sustaining \$30 _____ Contributing \$50 _____ Other \$

Name: _____

Address: _____

City: _____ State/Province: _____ Zip/Postal Code: _____

Country: _____

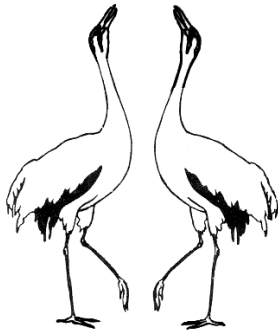
Both print & electronic* versions of the newsletter Electronic only* Print only

*Email: _____

Phone: (_____) _____

Mail completed form and check (US\$ payable to **NACWG**) to:

NACWG, c/o Daryl Henderson, 3 Elm Lane, Stony Brook, NY 11790-2117



Return address:

**North American Crane Working Group
c/o Daryl Henderson
3 Elm Lane
Stony Brook, NY 11790-2117**

Board of Directors

President: Jane Austin
Vice-President: Richard Urbanek
Treasurer: Daryl Henderson
David Aborn
Felipe Chavez-Ramirez
Barry Hartup
Sammy King

The Unison Call is published semiannually by NACWG

Daryl S. Henderson, *Editor*

Return service requested