

# THE UNISON CALL

- Newsletter of the North American Crane Working Group -

Fall / Winter 2013-14

Vol. 24 No. 2

## North American Crane Workshop Update

**W**e hope that you have registered for the 13<sup>th</sup> North American Crane Workshop 14-18 April 2014 at the Hotel Acadiana (<http://www.thehotelacadiana.com>) in Lafayette, LA. **We need you to register now as we will soon begin releasing rooms and buses for the field trip if they are not needed.** You can register at: <https://savingcranes.conference-services.net/>. Please contact the hotel (337-233-8120) to make room reservations (\$83 for single or double; \$10 additional per person above that). The hotel will provide free shuttle service from Lafayette Regional Airport.

We have a total of 37 oral presentations and 11 posters (**see pages 2-3**), including special sessions for the wild Aransas/Wood Buffalo flock and the Whooping Crane Eastern Partnership. We will have a Monday evening social with some local flavor for your arrival. Tuesday morning we will be welcomed in by Lieutenant Governor Jay Dardenne; Jay's office was responsible for the development of the Louisiana birding trails and he is an enthusiastic supporter of the Whooping Crane reintroduction. In addition, Secretary Robert Barham of Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries will also provide a welcome to all the craniacs. The opening addresses will be followed by full days of presentations on Tuesday and Thursday. On Wednesday, we will visit White Lake Wetlands Conservation Area, a rice and crawfish farm, and Lacassine Pool of the Lacassine National Wildlife Refuge. In addition, we will have lunch at the Gueydan Civic Center where we will be welcomed by the mayor of Gueydan, Mr. David Dupre; Dr. Steve Linscombe of the LSU Agricultural Center's Rice Experiment Station will provide a brief presentation on the rice culture of south Louisiana. Of course, a fine, fattening meal will be provided! On Thursday evening we will wrap up the conference with a nice banquet.

For those wanting to arrive early or stay late, you will find spectacular birding during April. The Neotropical migrants and shorebirds should be in the peak of their spring migration, a few waterfowl stragglers should be viewable, and a lot of our resident birds and other wildlife (including alligators) are out and about. It is also crawfish season! You can download *A Birder's Guide to Louisiana* at: <http://www.louisianatravel.com/virtual-visitor-center>. Another great birding area within 15-20 minutes of the hotel is The Nature Conservancy's Cypress Island Preserve (<http://www.nature.org/ourinitiatives/regions/northamerica/unitedstates/louisiana/placesweprotect/cypress-island.xml>). The preserve hosts a large wading bird rookery, several walking trails, a visitor center with a beautiful mural and a boardwalk through the bald cypress trees.

There are a few things you can do to help us out! Please register for the conference and the hotel! This helps us with meal and field trip planning and maintaining adequate room availability. We also need items for the silent auction. Please let us know if you have any contributions you would like to donate to the silent auction! Finally, start dieting now so you can truly enjoy the culinary delicacies of south Louisiana! We look forward to seeing you!

Sammy King ([sking@agcenter.lsu.edu](mailto:sking@agcenter.lsu.edu))

# 13<sup>th</sup> North American Crane Workshop Scientific Program (draft)

## Tuesday 15<sup>th</sup> April

Plenary (TBD) 0800-0830  
Meeting Dedication 0830-0900

Scientific Sessions 0900-1000 **Whooping Crane Reintroduction in Louisiana**

- ◆ Whooping cranes return to Louisiana: The First Three Years, Zimorski
- ◆ Behavior ecology of pen-reared, reintroduced whooping cranes within the Louisiana landscape, Perkins
- ◆ The spatial and temporal use of habitats by a reintroduced population of whooping cranes in Louisiana, Perkins

Morning Break 1000-1030

Scientific Sessions 1030-1130 **Cranes and Power Lines; Whooping Cranes**

- ◆ People of a feather flock together - a global initiative to address crane and power line interactions, Diamond
- ◆ A model for mitigating loss of cranes from power line collisions, Ivey
- ◆ Whooping crane distribution and habitat use: past, present, and future?, Austin

Lunch 1130-1300 Hotel Acadiana

Scientific Sessions 1300-1500 **Whooping Crane Tracking Partnership Symposium**

- ◆ Capture and deploying GPS PTTs on Aransas-Wood Buffalo whooping cranes: lessons learned with new techniques and technologies, Brandt
- ◆ Health assessment of juvenile whooping cranes in Wood Buffalo National Park, Hartup
- ◆ Space use of wintering whooping cranes, Metzger
- ◆ Migration ecology of Aransas-Wood Buffalo whooping cranes, Pearse
- ◆ Characterization of stopover sites used by whooping cranes as determined from telemetry-marked birds, Harner
- ◆ Habitat use and movement patterns of whooping cranes in the oil sands mining region, Bidwell

Poster Session/Break 1500-1540 Refreshments & meet authors in poster area

Scientific Sessions 1540-1710 **WCTP Symposium cont.; Whooping Cranes**

- ◆ Behavioral movements of Aransas-Wood Buffalo whooping cranes: anomalies or indications of ways to further enhance species' recovery, Baasch
- ◆ Meshing new information from the Whooping Crane Tracking Partnership with species recovery goals—next steps, Harrell
- ◆ A comprehensive habitat type dataset for whooping crane conservation planning in Texas, USA, Smith
- ◆ Movement strategies of subadult individuals on winter habitat influence winter range expansion of a migratory bird, Davis

Informational Session 1710-1730 **Whooping Crane Capture Video & Discussion**

Dinner on own

## Wednesday 16<sup>th</sup> April

NACW Field Trip 0630-1800 (includes pre-trip breakfast and lunch)

## **Thursday 17<sup>th</sup> April**

Scientific Sessions      0800-1000      **Whooping Crane Eastern Partnership Research Symposium**

- ◆ Parent-rearing and releasing whooping cranes in Wisconsin, Olsen
- ◆ Social learning of migratory performance, Mueller
- ◆ Natal dispersal of whooping cranes in the reintroduced eastern migratory population: The first ten years, Thompson
- ◆ Changes in winter distribution of the reintroduced eastern migratory whooping crane population, Urbanek
- ◆ Pair Formation in the reintroduced eastern migratory whooping crane population, Urbanek
- ◆ Determining diet composition and ingestion rate of cranes through field measurement, Barzen

Morning Break            1000-1030

Scientific Sessions      1030-1130      **WCEP Research Symposium, cont.**

- ◆ Egg fertility rate of the reintroduced eastern migratory whooping crane population from 2005-2012, Whitear
- ◆ Influences on nest success in a reintroduced population of whooping cranes, Barzen
- ◆ Predicting outcomes of reintroduction strategies in a decision-analytic setting, Converse

Lunch                      1130-1300      Hotel Acadiana

Scientific Sessions      1300-1500      **Sandhill Crane Research**

- ◆ The role of populations and subspecies in sandhill crane conservation and management, Gerber
- ◆ The use of satellite telemetry to evaluate migration chronology and distribution of eastern population sandhill cranes, Fronczak
- ◆ Age-specific autumn foraging and migratory behavior of eastern population sandhill cranes, Hanna
- ◆ Migration and winter habitat use patterns of four eastern greater sandhill cranes, Thompson
- ◆ Territory availability best explains fidelity in sandhill cranes, Hayes
- ◆ Mississippi sandhill crane conservation update 2011-13, Hereford

Afternoon Break        1500-1530

Scientific Sessions      1530-1730      **Sandhill Crane Research, cont.**

- ◆ Activity budgets of successful and unsuccessful nesting pairs of Mississippi sandhill cranes, Howard
- ◆ Remote cameras aid crane behavior studies: wet meadow utilization by sandhill cranes along the Platte River, Nebraska, Wright
- ◆ Annual variation of young of the year in the Rocky Mountain population of sandhill crane, Gerber
- ◆ Survival of the Rocky Mountain sandhill crane, Drewien
- ◆ Migration routes and wintering areas of Pacific Flyway lesser sandhill cranes, Ivey
- ◆ Breeding distribution of sandhill cranes in Russia, Bysykatova

Social                    1800-1900

Banquet                1900-2000

NACWG members business meeting and elections      2000-2030

Awards                2030-20:45

# Beneath the Surface of Sandhill Crane Behavior

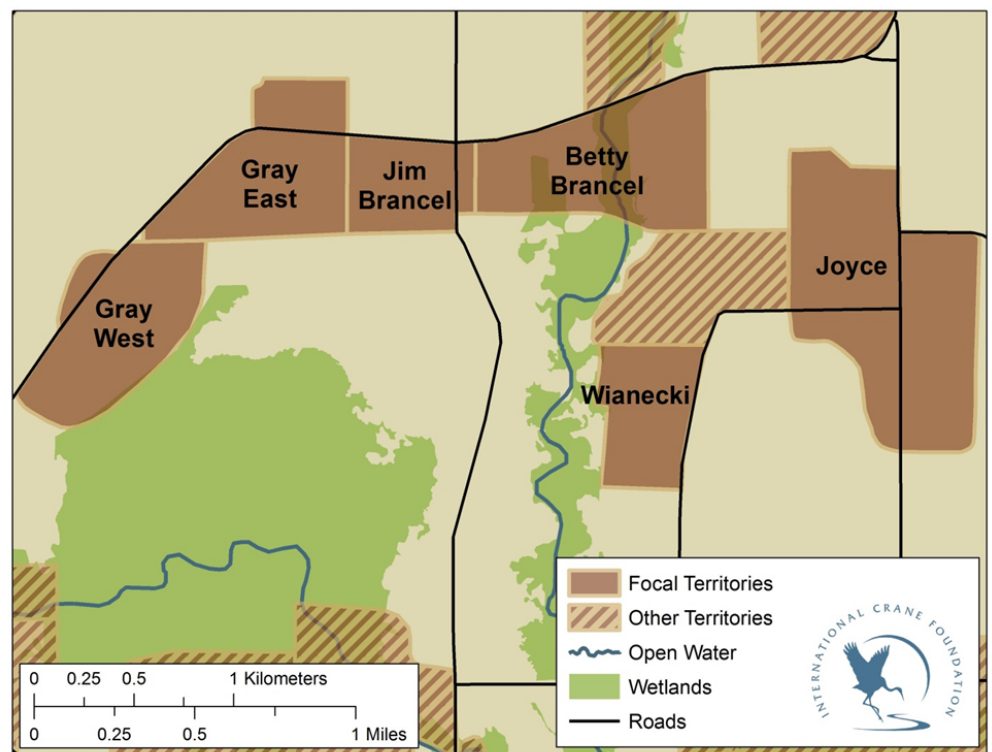
By Jeb Barzen and Andy Gossens, International Crane Foundation

We all know of the long lifespan and tendency of cranes to form long-term pair bonds. Rarely, however, do we observe the actual behavioral or demographic details that are associated with both of these traits. Here is a narrative detailing the color-marking of a male sandhill crane in 1991, located in south-central Wisconsin, and our observations over the subsequent 23 years.

We captured a family group, consisting of a male, female, and their fledged chick, in September, 1991, on Mrs. Gray's old, un-grazed pasture. Beyond characterizing the breeding pair as adults, we knew nothing of their age or history because we were just beginning a long-term study of marked sandhill cranes. A few days before the capture of this family group, we had also captured an adjacent family group with a single fledged chick. We called the first pair of this narrative Gray West and the adjacent pair Gray East because both pairs defended portions of Mrs. Gray's field (see Fig. 1). In the first 8 years of our observations, the Gray West pair managed to fledge 4 chicks to fall migration and the pair personified our perceived concept of crane behavior – they stayed faithful to their territory and to each other throughout that time.

In fall 1999, the Gray West Male fledged two of his lifetime total of 5 chicks, however the female disappeared. About two months after the Gray West Female disappeared, we observed the Gray West Male and his two chicks together with the Gray East Female (from 1991). The Gray East Male was not banded, so we did not know his fate. In 2000, the Gray West Male and Gray East Female remained paired and nested on the Gray East territory, while a new, unmarked pair took up residence on the Gray West territory. Why the Gray West Male moved to the Gray East territory is unknown. Each territory had fledged roughly the same number of chicks from 1991-1999 (Gray West = 4, Gray East = 3). The Gray East Female had at least two mates during this time

frame: a banded male from 1991-1992 and an unbanded male from 1993-1999. When the Gray West male moved onto the Gray East territory we renamed him the Gray East Male C (the third male to inhabit that territory).



**Figure 1. Locations of crane territories that interacted with the life of the Gray West Male.**

From 2000-2005 the new Grey East pair fledged only 1 chick. Hay was no longer harvested from their old field and it grew rank, making it more difficult to successfully raise chicks. In September 2005, we observed the original Gray East Female for the last time. It is likely that she died at a minimum age of 16 or 17 (14 known years on territory plus at least 2 or 3 years of maturation before becoming territorial), but the Gray East Male C was still going strong. By spring, 2006, we observed the Gray East Male C on territory and paired with a female that was originally banded as an adult on the Joyce Territory,

located about 1.5 miles to the southeast (see Fig. 1). The Joyce female had left her territory after her mate died to join the Grey East Male C, becoming Gray East Female B. In 2006 and 2007, this Gray East pair fledged no chicks.

By March, 2008, the original Joyce female and the Gray East Male divorced; the female left the Gray East territory. Gray East Male C next paired with an unmarked bird in 2008, which we banded in 2009 and named Gray East Female C. No chicks fledged from this Gray East territory 2008-2010.

More trouble arose for our original Gray West male (yes, he was still considered the Gray East Male C) in 2011. In March, Gray East Male C re-established his territory after spring migration as usual with Gray East Female C. A young, 4-year old male, however, usurped the Gray East territory and paired with Gray East Female C. This Gray East Male D became the 4<sup>th</sup> male (at least) to occupy the Gray East territory since 1991. Gray East Male C was forced from his territory and was seen with other non-territorial cranes in July, 2011. For the first time in 20 years, the male who was originally banded on territory as the Gray West Male, was without a territory.

In spring 2012, the original Gray West Male was still actively trying to regain a territory. He paired with a banded female (originally from the Jim Brancel territory, but who had nested in 2011 with Wianecki Male C on his territory – see Fig. 1). This new pair was seen together 5 times from March to June 2012 on the Jim Brancel territory, the Gray East Territory and the Betty Brancel territory but there was no evidence of a breeding attempt. The Wianecki Female was at least his 5<sup>th</sup> mate. This new pair did not persist, and by the end of June the original Gray West Male was again seen associating with non-territorial birds. In 2013, the Wianecki Female moved back to the Wianecki territory and re-paired with Wianecki Male C.

Throughout 2013, the original Gray West Male was seen associating with an unmarked female (his 6<sup>th</sup> mate?) but also with two territorial pairs. When observed with the pairs, he always appeared to be the satellite bird (i.e. non-dominant bird) in this association. Regardless of whether he was really trying to force his way into a breeding pair or not, he did not regain a territory. One of these pairs he associated with was the Betty Brancel pair, which contained the same female that he was paired with from 2006 to 2008.



**Figure 2. The original band from the Gray West Male that was deployed in 1991 and replaced in 2013.**

By fall 2013, the original Gray West male had lost his U.S. Geological Survey band (a butt band) and his auxiliary plastic band was dilapidated (see Fig. 2). It appeared as though the bands could fall off any day. With no bands our story would end. Fortunately, we managed to recapture him in September and replace his plastic bands so that our knowledge of the saga could continue.

What will become of the original Gray West Male in 2014? If he survives this cold, long winter it is possible that he might return to our study area and re-establish a territory, even though he was non-territorial at the end of 2013. This scenario, however, rarely happens. In our study area, we have more adults that are capable of breeding than we have apparent breeding territories. At a minimum age of 25 (at least 20 years on territory plus 2 years minimum to reach sexual maturity and 3 years as a non-territorial male), after fledging 5 chicks, and after pairing with at least 5 females on three territories, the original Gray West Male's remaining life may well be spent associating with non-territorial birds in the summer flock of our study area. Most assuredly, if we had not marked the original Gray West Male, and the other birds he associated with, our knowledge of these idiosyncrasies would be restricted to the simplistic observation that, as long as anyone can remember, there have always been two pairs of cranes using Mrs. Gray's old field.

---

---

# Regional Reports

---

---

## Whooping Crane Eastern Partnership Parent-Rearing Annual Report, 2013

In 2014 we were able to begin the parent-rearing research first proposed as long ago as 2007, and fully funded for the past 3 years. Despite possible egg/chick shortages to meet all expected goals for both the WCEP eastern migratory population (EMP) and Louisiana releases, we received 5 eggs for the parent-rearing research project at USGS Patuxent Wildlife Research Center, Laurel, Maryland. All 5 eggs hatched and we were able to rear 4 chicks (80%) for release (**Fig. 1**). This rearing success rate is similar to the overall success rate over the last decade.

The parent-reared (PR) chicks hatched between 2 and 5 June 2013. Other than the one mortality from an accident on 8 July, no unusual problems were encountered. All chicks received vaccinations for West Nile virus and eastern encephalitis virus on 17 July and 14 August. A final comprehensive health examination was done on 5 September. At that time all 4 remaining chicks were tested for Salmonellosis and found negative. Routine complete blood counts and serum chemistries were within normal limits for that age group. No external or internal parasites were identified. All PR chicks were shipped to Necedah National Wildlife Refuge on 19 September on a flight donated by Windway Corporation.



**Figure 1. Parent-reared whooping crane chick at USGS Patuxent Wildlife Research Center, Laurel, Maryland, September 2013.**

During the PR chicks' stay at Patuxent, daily behavioral observations were made, using techniques formerly applied in our study of the differences between parent-reared sandhill crane chicks and costume raised whooping crane chicks. In 2013 we used the costume raised Louisiana whooping crane chicks as our comparison group, as the WCEP costume raised ultralight chicks were almost a month older than the PR whooping crane chicks. We intend to report these results at the next North American Crane Workshop in April 2014. After arrival at Necedah NWR, the PR chicks were held one night together at site 3 (the former Direct Autumn Release (DAR) pen, **Fig. 2**), and then banded the next day. Each chick received colored legbands with a conventional vhf radio transmitter on one leg and a PTT (satellite radio) on the other leg. In addition, each chick had distinct color banding of the transmitter legbands and an aluminum Bird Banding Laboratory legband above the foot. After banding, 3 of the chicks were transported to 3 other sites on the refuge where temporary pens had been created. At least one adult whooping crane pair was known to use the area surrounding all 4 temporary pen sites.

The pen sites were visited several times daily and checked for chick behavior and adult crane presence and behavior. In addition, all sites had remote cameras that recorded chicks and a limited field of view around the pen during daylight hours. Adult pairs of whooping cranes visited all chick pen sites on numerous occasions.

At 0600 hours on 23 September, we opened one wall of the temporary pen at site 1 and immediately the PR chick flew out and entered a low area about 50 m from the pen site. The adults that frequented this pen site came back within 10 minutes and appeared to be searching for the chick, locating the chick shortly afterwards. After that, the PR chick (24-13) was consistently seen with this pair of adult birds (2-04 and 8-09) at Necedah (**Fig. 3**), at a staging area on the Wisconsin River near Baraboo, and finally on the wintering grounds for these adult whooping cranes in Hopkins County, Kentucky.



**Figure 2. Sarah Converse and Brad Strobel releasing a parent-reared whooping crane into the site 3 pen at Necedah NWR, Necedah Wisconsin, 19 Sept. 2013.**

Over the next two days, 24-25 September, we released the other 3 PR whooping crane chicks. Chick 22-13 stayed at site 3 for several days, but despite being observed within 10 m of the resident adults, was never accepted by the adults, though no aggression was seen. Eventually the chick left the site 3 area and briefly associated with the site 1 birds for one morning. The chick was next seen several miles northeast of the refuge on a cranberry farm and associated marshes. There were sandhill cranes and a pair of whooping cranes there. Eventually the chick migrated east to the area used by the ultralight aircraft trained whooping cranes around Berlin, Wisconsin. The chick briefly visited the DAR area at Horicon NWR, and then migrated to the Kankakee River bottomlands in northern Indiana.



**Figure 3. Parent-reared whooping crane chick with adults one week after release, Necedah NWR, 30 Sept. 2013.**

## Regional Reports *continued*

This is a known staging area for sandhill cranes and at least some of the EMP whooping cranes. Here the chick was seen frequently in association with 4 adult whooping cranes (identities unknown). Eventually, during a cold spell with northerly winds, the chick migrated in one day from northern Indiana to Meigs County, Tennessee. Here the chick has been seen with a pair of EMP whooping cranes on the Hiwassee and Moon River state lands and the Armstrong Ferry Recreation Area. Chick 21-13 was released from a site in the central part of the Necedah NWR. In the pen the chick was visited numerous times by one, or two pairs of adults. After release the chick was seen in association with two different pairs of adult whooping cranes, but never for an extended period of time. No aggression by the adults was ever observed. Eventually, this chick moved several miles north, still on the refuge, but it was hit by a vehicle and killed on 2 October. Chick 20-13 was released from site 5 and associated with 9-05 and 35-09 and an unbanded pair of sandhill cranes that stayed near the adult whooping cranes. This chick was killed by a canid predator on the adults' territory in mid-October.

The PR research project has been a big success this year. We have been able to successfully introduce 4 PR whooping crane chicks, have 3 of the PR chicks form bonds with adult pairs of whooping cranes, and have 2 PR chicks successfully migrate to wintering areas.

The following individuals substantially helped with this project in 2013:

*From Patuxent –*

Glenn Olsen and Sarah Converse, Co-investigators  
John French, Branch Chief  
Jane Chandler and Robert Doyle, lead caretakers for this project  
Sharon Peregoy, biological technician  
Barbara Clauss, biological technician  
Brian Clauss, biological technician  
Charles Shafer, biological technician and chief helper with remote cameras  
Carlyn Caldwell, veterinary technician  
Anna Jiang, University of Maryland  
Mary Ashley, 4th year veterinary student  
Anne Harshbarger, Glenelg High School

*From Necedah NWR –*

Doug Staller, Refuge Manager  
Brad Strobel, biologist  
Richard Urbanek, biologist  
Jessica Jaworski, intern  
The entire refuge staff helped with various details

*From International Crane Foundation –*

Eva Szyszkoski for help banding, and then monitoring cranes on migration  
Anne Lacy and others for monitoring 24-13 and adults when they were in the Baraboo area  
Marianne Wellington and the DAR folks for watching 22-13 at Horicon NWR

*Contributed by Glenn Olsen, Laurel, MD*

## WCEP Parent-Reared Project Q&A

1. How does the parent-reared (PR) project differ from the direct autumn release (DAR) project?

**The project differs from both the DAR and the ultralight reintroduction in that all rearing is done by whooping cranes, not by people. The birds are first reared by parents at Patuxent, sometimes their natural parents and sometimes other well-qualified parent whooping cranes. Then they are released near adult crane pairs in Wisconsin in the fall. The young cranes will follow adult whooping cranes or possibly sandhill cranes on migration, similar to the DAR project releases.**

2. At Patuxent, are the PR eggs incubated by the parents or are the chicks placed with parents sometime after hatching?

**Both. Sometimes the adults incubate the egg and hatch the chick and sometimes we place a hatching or recently hatched chick in the nest of the adult pair. Both types of introducing the chick to the pair work well.**

3. Is the DAR effort not meeting expectations in terms of DAR bird survival and integration into the eastern migratory population?

**DAR is doing well and meeting expectations. However, there is some concern related to the costume rearing process for both DAR and ultralight.**

4. In Figure 2 of your report, Sarah and Brad are not disguised in costumes. DAR birds are costumed reared but PR birds are not?

**All DAR birds are costume reared. All parent-reared chicks see people out of costume most of the time. The only time they saw the costume was a 10-day period when they were getting pond exposure in a pen next to some Louisiana release birds that were being costume reared for release. Normally when working around the parent-reared birds we do not wear costumes.**

Thanks to Glenn Olsen for kindly answering these questions.

### Yampa Valley Crane Festival 2014

The third annual Yampa Valley Crane Festival takes place in Steamboat Springs and Hayden, Colorado from September 12-15, 2014, featuring crane viewing sessions, expert speakers, films, family activities, nature and bird walks, workshops, and more. The complete schedule will be available in spring at [www.coloradocranes.org](http://www.coloradocranes.org). Send questions to [coloradocranes@gmail.com](mailto:coloradocranes@gmail.com)

## Regional Reports *continued*

### Update on the Eastern Migratory Population of Whooping Cranes

*Summer and Autumn 2013* – As of 31 July 2013, maximum size of the Eastern Migratory Population was 101 birds (55 males and 47 females) including 95 whooping cranes in Wisconsin, 2 in Michigan, 3 not recently reported and 2 long-term missing. This total includes one wild-hatched chick.

*Parent-reared Release* – This year marked the first year of a new experimental release where adult captive cranes are used to care for and rear young birds. The juveniles are then transferred to the Necedah NWR where they are held in individual temporary pens located on the territories of adult breeding pairs and then released near the free-ranging adults. Four juveniles were part of this experiment in 2013. They were released from their pens on 23-25 September. Two juveniles were killed within 7-20 days after release (one to suspected predation and one to a likely vehicle strike). One juvenile migrated with sandhill cranes to the Hiwassee WR in Tennessee where he began to associate with a newly formed adult pair. The final juvenile immediately joined an adult pair and migrated with them to their former wintering territory in Kentucky.

*Direct Autumn Release* – Nine more juveniles were added to the population by the DAR method at the Horicon NWR on 24 October. Four died within 45 days after release (three to suspected predation and one to illness). One juvenile migrated with sandhill cranes to the Hiwassee WR in Tennessee. Three others left the Horicon NWR on their own on 11 December to Mason/Tazewell Counties, Illinois, where they died in early to mid January. The last juvenile was captured at the Horicon NWR, held overnight at the International Crane Foundation and transported via airplane to the Wheeler NWR in Alabama on 12 December. We thank Windway Capital Corp for their assistance in relocating this bird.

*Mortality* – Mortalities from August-December included 4 juvenile females, 2 juvenile males, 1 adult wild-hatched male, 1 adult wild-hatched female and 1 adult male in Wisconsin, 1 wild-hatched juvenile female on wintering grounds in Illinois, and both members of a breeding pair on wintering grounds in western Kentucky. An additional adult wild-hatched female was found injured at the Necedah NWR in Wisconsin and later died during rehabilitation (see below). One additional adult female is missing and suspected dead.

*Injury* – Female no. W1-10 was reported with an injury on 9 September during an aerial survey conducted by the Wisconsin DNR. She was captured on the Necedah NWR on 12 September and transported to the International Crane Foundation. She had sustained wounds on her left foot and her lower right leg. While her left foot wound healed well, her right leg wound was deeply infected and healing was slow to progress. She succumbed to internal injuries from an unknown cause on the night of 3 November.



**Wild-hatched female no. W3-13 with parents nos. 9-03 and 3-04 at the Necedah NWR, Wisconsin, 30 October 2013.  
Photo by Eva Szyszkoski/ICF**

*Autumn Migration of Ultralight-led Juveniles* – The 2013 migration led by Operation Migration departed from the White River Marsh State Wildlife Area, Green Lake County, on 2 October with 8 juveniles. They arrived at the St. Marks NWR, Wakulla County, Florida, on 5 January where they were released 16 days later.

*Winter 2013/2014* – As of 29 January 2014 or last known location, the maximum size of the Eastern Migratory Population was 106 birds (59 males and 47 females). Estimated distribution included 17 birds in Indiana, 7 in Kentucky, 17 in Tennessee, 28 in Alabama, 2-5 in Georgia, 2 in South Carolina, 16 in Florida, 9-12 at unknown locations, 3 with no recent reports and 2 long-term missing. The total in Florida includes the 8 recently released juveniles.

***Eva Szyszkoski, WCEP Tracking Field Manager  
International Crane Foundation  
Baraboo, WI***

## **Regional Reports *continued***

### **Louisiana Whooping Cranes – January 2014**

December 2013 marked several important milestones for previously released cohorts; 75% of the 2011 cohort continues to survive two years after they were released and 71% of the 2012 cohort has now survived one year since they were released. We are pleased to see these high survival rates and are optimistic that this trend will continue with the 2013 cohort. Additionally several new pairs appear to have formed and though they're still young we'll be watching for signs of reproductive behavior and nesting from 4-5 different pairs in the next few months.

#### **2010 Cohort**

The sole survivor, L3-10, continues to do well. L4-11, the female he was previously paired with moved back and joined up with him this past fall and they remain together, hopefully this time for good! We are regularly monitoring this pair as we hope to see some nesting from them again in the coming months.

#### **2011 Cohort**

The members of this cohort spent the fall in their same groups except for L4-11 who rejoined her previous mate. However, in December things started to change. A group of seven birds and a group of three independently returned to the White Lake marsh just before Christmas and found each other as well as the new cohort in the top-netted pen. There was both some interest and aggression through the fence between the various adults and the juveniles and also between adults from the two different groups. When the dust settled one lone male from the group of seven remained at WL and eventually joined the juveniles once they were released. The extra male from the trio paired with a female from the group of seven and they have settled in a new location in Avoyelles Parish. This finally left the pair from the trio as a pair and although the remaining five birds from the group of seven still spend time together there appears to be one and possibly a second pair developing within this group.

#### **2012 Cohort**

The biggest story with these birds is that seven of them spent most of last year in Texas! All spring, summer, and fall we kept close tabs on these birds through their transmitters and through assistance from Texas Parks and Wildlife Department staff and Whooper Watch volunteers. There were numerous discussions on what to do and we started to make plans to capture the birds and return them to Louisiana. I even went to Dallas to see the birds, meet with local staff and landowners, and start to formulate a plan for how we might capture them if it came to that. The difficulty with a potential capture is that the heat and humidity in this area remains too high to safely capture and handle cranes until well into the fall. At the end of October when the weather finally cooled but before a final decision was made two of the birds returned to LA and several weeks later the remaining five returned. Both groups checked in at White Lake before moving on to other locations. Unfortunately one bird hit a power line and died several weeks after returning to LA but the rest of the birds continue to do well. Since the birds remained in TX so long and their return coincided with fall migration we are curious to see what they do this spring, if they will return to TX in a mini-migration type of movement pattern or if with better habitat conditions this year they will remain in LA.

In addition to the bird who hit the power line one additional bird disappeared in late summer, likely due to predation, leaving 10 birds remaining in this cohort. The 10 birds are currently in the following groups: a trio of females, the group of five that returned from TX, and two single birds.

## **2013 Cohort**

Unfortunately the 2013 cohort shrunk a little more prior to their shipment to Louisiana and only 10 chicks were sent (7 males, 3 females). The chicks were safely delivered to Louisiana on 11 December, thanks again to the generosity of Terry Kohler and the Windway Capital Corporation. The birds adjusted well to their new surroundings and had 10 different older whooping cranes visit them while they were still in the top-netted pen. After a few days all the adults except for one left and returned to their normal home areas. The submissive male who remained in the marsh joined the chicks once they were released on 2 January and has remained with them. Several weeks after the chicks were released an aggressive pair of adult cranes visited the pen once again and drove the birds away from the pen and into the nearby marsh. Food was removed from the pen to discourage the aggressive pair from sticking around and after several days they left and the 11 birds (10 chicks + 1 adult) were able to return to the pen site. Food will be provided for several more weeks before being removed and officially leaving the birds on their own. Unlike last winter when we had extreme flooding in January, the White Lake marsh appears to be in excellent condition and I expect some birds may remain in the marsh even after the food is discontinued.

As of 31 January 2014 there are 33 whooping cranes (16 males, 17 females) in Louisiana.

Sadly, shortly after the report above was submitted the project suffered another setback when a pair that was being monitored for signs of nesting was found to have been shot. On the morning of 7 February project staff had gone to check on the 'Pine Island' birds which include a single male and two separate pairs all living in the same general area. L4-11, an almost three year old female, was found dead and her mate, L3-10, an almost four year old male, was seen nearby with an injured left wing. L3-10 was caught, transported to White Lake, and held in a temporary pen overnight, then taken to the LSU School of Veterinary Medicine the following morning. An exam and radiographs revealed an open and badly broken left wing, with fractures of both the humerus and the radius. The bird was given fluids, pain meds, and antibiotics and his wing was cleaned and bandaged to try and stabilize him for surgery scheduled the next morning. A pin with an external fixator was attached to the humerus during a five hour surgery and though he was slow to recover, L3-10 has proved again that he's a survivor! He is by no means 'out-of-the-woods' as there is a high risk of infection since the fracture was open and the treatment and confinement during the recovery and rehabilitation can be very stressful. Even if he survives it's unknown whether his wing will heal well enough for him to be able to fly and be released again or if his future might instead be as a display bird at a zoo. Regardless, he is getting excellent care from the staff at the LSU Vet School and we are very grateful to have them as our partners! This incident is being investigated and there is currently a \$15,000 reward for information that leads to the arrest and conviction of the person or persons responsible for this crime.

**Sara Zimorski, Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries**



## Regional Reports *continued*

### Florida News

I recently retired but am still working on a few papers. One just out is titled "**Predation and Scavenging by American Alligators on Whooping Cranes and Sandhill Cranes in Florida**" and can be found at <http://www.eaglehill.us/SENAonline/sena-v13-n1-2014.shtml>. It was fun publishing an article with Woody Woodward, an alligator authority within our agency, and long-time colleague Marilyn Spalding. This article will also be posted soon on BioOne, and the paper edition of the journal will be published at the end of the quarter. Contact me ([martyfolk@embarqmail.com](mailto:martyfolk@embarqmail.com)) for a pdf. In my new "career" I am volunteering 2-3 days/week at Give Kids the World Village (<http://www.gktw.org/>). The Village, in concert with many partners, provides cost-free dream vacations to families that have kids with life-threatening illnesses. I'm also catching up on long-neglected house maintenance and assisting my wife Monica with some biological field work (mainly with red-cockaded woodpeckers).

**Marty Folk, Kissimmee, FL**

### Mississippi Sandhill Crane National Wildlife Refuge

As part of the long-term supplementation program, 22 captive-reared juveniles were transferred and released onto the refuge during Nov-Dec 2013. They were hatched and reared at the Audubon Species Survival Center (LA) and the White Oak Conservation Center (FL). This was the first time there were releases at four different pen sites in the same season. Four were lost to predation in the first weeks post-release but the remaining 18 seem to be slowly incorporating into the wild.

Refuge biologists are modifying an existing drop net design to be used to capture cranes to deploy 6 GPS loggers. The prototype should be tested by February.

The January 2014 wild population is about 120 individuals, including about 25 pairs.

**Scott Hereford, Gautier, MS**

**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](http://www.nacwg.org)). The views expressed in *The Unison Call* are those of the individual authors and do not necessarily represent the positions of NACWG. Comments and contributions are always welcome.

**Daryl Henderson, Editor**  
**Stony Brook, NY**

## CALL FOR NOMINATIONS TO THE EXECUTIVE BOARD

*Interested in getting a bit more involved in the Working Group?*

*Gain some experience by serving on an organization's board?*

*Put your name forward to join us on the board!*

The Executive Board of the North American Crane Working Group includes 7 members. Bylaws require all board members be elected at the general membership meeting, held at the time of the North American Crane Workshop (every 3-4 years). So we are seeking nominations for anyone interested in serving on the board.

*What does the board do?*

- Meets at least once a year, usually by conference call, to conduct the organization's business.
- Plans a crane workshop every 3-4 years.
- Publishes the Workshop Proceedings.
- Maintains the finances of the Working Group.
- Maintains the organization's website to provide information about cranes, the Working Group, and workshops.
- Publishes a semi-annual newsletter.
- Honors individuals who have contributed to crane conservation (L.H. Walkinshaw Award).
- Provides awards for student travel and awards for presentations at the workshop.
- Contributes to the Ornithological Council on issues relating to crane research and conservation.

Assisting the board on these tasks are the Workshop's Program and Local Arrangements Committees, Awards Committee, Proceedings Editor, Newsletter Editor, representative to the Ornithological Council, and Webmaster.

Officers on the board include the President, Vice President, Secretary, and a Treasurer, and 3 general board members. Officers are not elected directly to those positions by the general membership, but rather elected by the board at their first board meeting.

**The new board will be elected at the upcoming Workshop.** Nominees will be announced, and the top 7 receiving the most votes will be elected. If you are not planning on attending but wish to have your name entered as a candidate, please email Jane Austin by 4 April 2014.

**Questions? Interested?** Contact Jane Austin (jaustin@usgs.gov, 701-253-5510) or any of the board members.

Current board members are David Aborn, Jane Austin, Felipe Chavez-Ramirez, Barry Hartup, Daryl Henderson, Sammy King, and Richard Urbanek.

*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: \_\_\_\_\_

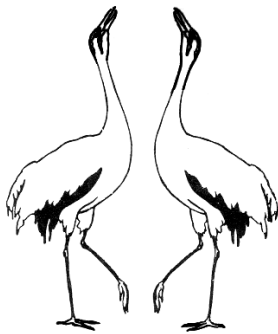
Both print & electronic\* versions of the newsletter       Electronic only\*       Print only

\*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**