

THE UNISON CALL

- Newsletter of the North American Crane Working Group -

Spring/Summer 2011

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President's Note — August 2011

A short six months ago, we were meeting at Grand Island, Nebraska for our 12th Workshop to share new findings of crane conservation and research and view the thousands of cranes that stage on the Platte River. For the first time, we met in conjunction with another organization. From all comments received, it appears our joint meeting with the **Waterbird Society** was a great success, providing opportunities for members of both organizations to share our knowledge and passions for waterbirds of all types and expand our membership and network of colleagues. We had more than 180 participants from across North America as well as from Russia, Germany, France, The Netherlands, and Australia. Joint technical sessions encompassed presentations of 128 papers and 34 posters of crane and waterbird ecology, populations, and research methods. These included 32 oral presentations and 14 posters on cranes. Susan Skagen gave a plenary presentation on *Climate change and prairie wetlands: implications for migratory birds*, and Gary Krapu gave a plenary presentation on *The role of the central Platte River Valley to the midcontinent population of sandhill cranes*. My sincere thanks to Felipe Chavez-Ramirez, Kathy Parsons, David Aborn, and all the others who helped make this such an enjoyable and informative meeting, and to the Crane Trust for hosting our evening barn socials and dinners each night.

Although this was a joint meeting, we are continuing our tradition of publishing crane papers from this meeting in a 12th Proceedings. David Aborn stepped up to be Editor, and welcomes submissions, even if you were unable to present at the meeting. The Proceedings of the 11th Workshop is now available through the International Crane Foundation, as are copies of past proceedings. You can find them under Books at their on-line store at www.savingcranes.org.

I was very proud to present the Walkinshaw Award to Brian Johns, a biologist for 36 years with the Canadian Wildlife Service. Brian has been a key player in the conservation and research on Whooping Cranes for many years and was a primary force in getting the Whooping Crane recovery plan updated and approved in 2007. He also has started efforts to get Critical Habitat declared in Canada. Brian is known for his tremendous knowledge of Whooping Cranes, his birding skills, and his friendship to all he has met and worked with.

Our Members Business Meeting was well attended, and we received good feedback on the joint meeting, proceedings publication efforts, and future plans. This year saw some major changes to our Executive Board: Tracy Grazia, secretary and long-time member, stepped down from the board. Gay Gomez, Associate Professor of Geography at McNeese University of Lake Charles, Louisiana, was elected to replace Tracy.

A few weeks after the meeting, Glenn Olsen unexpectedly had to step off the board, and we appointed Daryl Henderson, our newsletter editor, to replace him and to serve in the role of treasurer. Welcome and thanks to both Gay and Daryl for taking on these roles on the board! I thank Glenn for his many years of service and knowledge on the board but expect he will continue to be an active member and valuable resource. The current board is myself as President, Richard Urbanek (Vice-President), Daryl Henderson (Treasurer), and Gay Gomez (Secretary); Felipe Chavez-Ramirez, Barry Hartup, and Marilyn Spalding serve as board members at-large. We welcome member input at any time.

Planning for the next workshop is already underway. At the Members Business Meeting, members supported meeting again in three years at either Chattanooga, Tennessee, near an important staging area for Sandhill Cranes and the eastern population of Whooping Cranes, or in Louisiana, near the new re-introduction site for Whooping Cranes. The board decided to select *both* sites for the next two workshops (2014 and 2017); we will be consulting with hosts at both locations to determine which place will be the first host.

Sharing a meeting with the Waterbird Society was just one way to connect our organization with the larger ornithological world, which shares many of the same passions and concerns about avian and habitat conservation. This year the NACWG joined the Ornithological Council (OC), a consortium of scientific ornithological societies in the Western Hemisphere. The mission of the OC is to 1) ensure that the best ornithological science is incorporated into legislative, regulatory, and management decisions that affect birds; 2) enhance the ability of ornithologists to pursue professional activities; and 3) promote the influence of ornithology in public affairs. By joining this consortium, the NACWG will improve awareness of our organization as an science-based ornithological organization, and as a source of expertise when issues related to cranes arise; increase the internet links from other bird organizations to ours via the Ornithology Exchange website; share in scientific dialogue and information exchange about ornithological issues, such as banding/marking permits, animal welfare guidelines, agency policies; and

have the OC as a resource to assist with weighing in on scientific aspects on policies affecting cranes. Ellen Paul, executive director of the OC, is a valuable resource to help with any questions or problems you may have with banding or importation permits. Please check out the website that links all the ornithological groups together at www.ornithologyexchange.org/ — a treasure-trove of information.

As evidenced by the many presentations at the meeting and the diverse news here about projects and activities, much is happening across the continent to make a better world for cranes. Welcome to all our new members, and keep up all the great work!

Jane Austin
USGS Northern Prairie Research Center
Jamestown, ND

12th Proceedings Announcement

David Aborn is now accepting submissions for the *Proceedings of the 12th North American Crane Workshop*. As with previous proceedings, submissions may be in one of three formats: traditional abstract, brief communication (<1000 words, minimal references and few tables/figures, no subdivisions within the body of the text, see PNACW 7:256-7 for a good example), and traditional full-length manuscript. Abstracts submitted to the Workshop that are not replaced by another format by the deadline will be published as is. Those wishing to publish reports in another periodical should submit abstracts only.

Please email your manuscripts (Microsoft Word preferred) to David by December 2, 2011. **THIS DATE IS FIRM.**

Please follow the format of the “Unified Manuscript Guidelines for The Wildlife Society Peer-Reviewed Publications,” http://wildlife.org/publications/wild-70-01-guide_304%20320_ebook1.pdf

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FWS Announces Scoping Period for Commercial Wind Facility EIS

The Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) is seeking information from the scientific community on the scope of issues to be addressed in an environmental impact statement (EIS) for a commercial wind facility that will impact nine western states: North Dakota, South Dakota, Montana, Colorado, Nebraska, Kansas, New Mexico, Oklahoma, and Texas. The EIS covers a habitat conservation plan and incidental take permits for the endangered Whooping Crane, endangered Interior Least Tern, endangered Piping Plover, and a candidate species, the Lesser Prairie Chicken. The EIS will address a 200 mile wide corridor based on the Whooping Crane migration path and will span the Gulf coast of Texas to the Canadian Border. The incidental take permit is being requested by a group of 19 wind energy companies called the Wind Energy Whooping Crane Action Group. No details are yet available concerning the size or generating power of the facility, though the states involved have great wind energy potential.

The corridor is being designed to minimize disturbance to species under the incidental take permit, but some wildlife advocacy groups, such as the American Bird Conservancy, are concerned by the threat the facility could pose to nesting or migrating birds. The FWS welcomes comments on any impacts of the commercial wind facility as well as alternatives, mitigation techniques, minimization techniques, research, and expertise. Specifically, the agency is looking for information on areas such as: wildlife and aquatic resources; special status species; wetlands; and environmental justice. Please see the notice from the Federal Register for more details. FWS will also be accepting requests for information concerning the habitat conservation plan, incidental take permits, and proposed EIS. Send comments or requests for information to WindEnergyHCPCComments@fws.gov This e-mail address is being protected from spam bots, you need JavaScript enabled to view it by October 12, 2011. Detailed information can be found on the FWS Ecological Services Great Plains Wind Energy website. – <http://www.fws.gov/southwest/es/wind.html>

Source: The Wildlife Society. *Wildlife Policy News*, vol. 21, no. 8, August 2011

Of related interest is a recent article from The Mercury News (San Jose, California) on efforts to reduce the high number of bird deaths (including Red-tailed Hawks, Golden Eagles and other raptors) at one of the nation's oldest wind farms, the Altamont Wind Resource Area in northern California. "Altamont Pass wind farm gets major upgrade", by Dana Hull (posted August 28, 2011) www.mercurynews.com/business/ci_18778324?IADID=Search-www.mercurynews.com-www.mercurynews.com

Regional Reports

Thanks Tom!!

Tom Stehn writes:

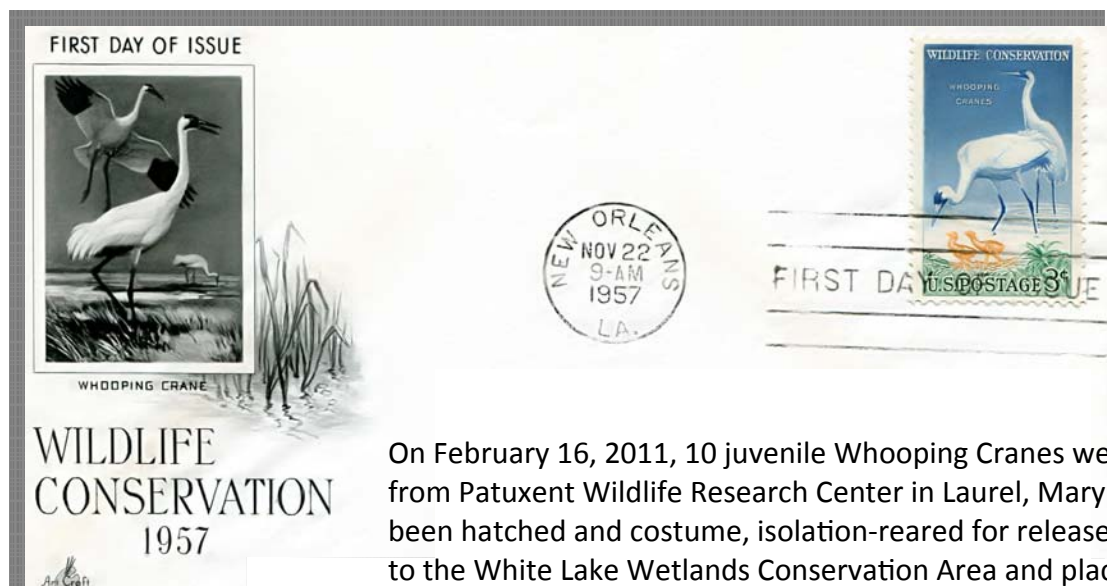
My news from Aransas is that I am planning to retire September 30th! Things are going well and I want to leave on an "up" note. After 29 years at Aransas doing crane work and 32+ years of federal service, it's time for a change, whatever the future may bring. We'll stay in Aransas Pass on the Texas coast since my wife will continue her practice as a family physician. I'll be windsurfing daily and planning trips to the mountains to do more hiking.

We wish Tom all the best, and expect to see him at future workshops.



Regional Reports *continued*

Whooping Cranes Return to Louisiana



On February 16, 2011, 10 juvenile Whooping Cranes were shipped to Louisiana from Patuxent Wildlife Research Center in Laurel, Maryland, where they had been hatched and costume, isolation-reared for release. They were transported to the White Lake Wetlands Conservation Area and placed in a top-netted acclimation pen. On March 14 the birds were released from the top-netted pen and took their first flight over the marshes of SW Louisiana. The birds were provided with supplemental food and 9 of them remained in the vicinity of the release pen for the next two months. One bird left the pen area almost immediately after being released and has remained separate ever since. By mid-May the group of 9 had separated into smaller groups, with most birds leaving the marsh and dispersing to other locations within the state. By early June the satellite transmitters of 2 birds had stopped functioning, with data from one indicating a likely mortality which was confirmed in late July. The second bird has not been detected and is considered missing and likely dead. A third bird was found sick on June 8th and after two weeks of treatment and a declining condition with little chance of recovery she was euthanized. As of August 10, 7 birds remain alive.

Sara Zimorski, Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries

USGS Patuxent Wildlife Research Center Whooping Crane Report

Patuxent Wildlife Research Center (USGS) in Laurel, Maryland, had one of its most successful years ever for rearing Whooping Cranes. A total of 32 Whooping Crane chicks were hatched, exceeding our previous records of 27 (2008) and 31 (2009 and 2010). We hatched 11 Whooping Crane chicks for the Whooping Crane Eastern Partnership (WCEP) reintroduction program. These birds were trained at Patuxent to follow costumed people and ultralight aircraft. Both Patuxent and Operation Migration shared the job of rearing these 11 Whooping Crane chicks. Ten of the chicks were shipped to Wisconsin on June 28, 2011. The eleventh chick remained at Patuxent, not for any medical issue, but because the chick did not get along with the other 10 Whooping Crane chicks in the group. In fact, this chick was quite aggressive toward the other chicks.

At present (August 12), the remaining chicks are being costume-reared for release in Louisiana in early winter, probably December, but no actual date has been set. This group now includes the dropout from the ultralight group, as this Whooping Crane chick has become more social and much less aggressive to his new pen mates.

Even though we successfully reared the Whooping Cranes for WCEP without any major problems or losses other than the uncooperative chick, we have not been so fortunate with the birds for Louisiana. We had to

ethanize one chick that hatched with congenital glaucoma. Another chick died from disease, and a third older chick recently had to be euthanized after apparently crashing into the side of the pen during the night and luxating two cervical vertebrae resulting in partial paralysis of legs and wings that was unresponsive to treatment. So, starting with 21 whooping crane chicks for Louisiana, we have lost 3 and gained the one ultralight dropout, giving us 19 birds at the present time (mid August). This is well above the 16 hatched chicks and 12 Whooping Cranes for release that was the goal for the project this year.

Patuxent's 32 Whooping Crane chicks this year came from 4 sources. The largest number (15) of chicks came from eggs produced by the breeding flock at Patuxent. This is a 27% increase in our production in 2008 (11), but slightly under our production in 2009 (17) and 2010 (18). Still, not a bad year for Whooping Crane production by any means. Other sources of eggs for the 2011 hatch year chicks included the Calgary Zoo (3), the Audubon Zoo (5), and Necedah National Wildlife Refuge (9). We thank all these partners for contributing these fertile eggs to make this a record year for rearing Whooping Crane chicks.

Glenn Olsen, USGS Patuxent Wildlife Research Center, Laurel, Maryland

Update on Eastern Migratory Whooping Crane Reintroduction

Winter 2010/11 and Spring 2011.—Winter distribution, including 10 ultralight-led (UL) juveniles at 2 winter release sites, was Florida (52), Kentucky (0.5), Tennessee (14), Indiana (4), Alabama (19.5), South Carolina (4), Georgia (9), and state undetermined (9; 6 of the latter not reported since spring 2010) (decimal values resulted from birds that wintered in more than one state). One 10-year-old male was removed from the population and placed in permanent captivity after reoccurring human avoidance issues in Florida.* Mortalities included 3 direct autumn-released (DAR) juveniles in southern Georgia in December and 1 female DAR juvenile and 1 adult male in Alabama in January. Those 5 mortalities are under investigation. Late spring mortalities consisted of 1 breeding pair in Adams County, Wisconsin, 1 breeding pair in Juneau County, Wisconsin, and 1 adult male on Necedah National Wildlife Refuge.

Reproduction.—Twenty pairs (15 on Necedah National Wildlife Refuge, 2 on State Wildlife Areas, 2 in private cranberry reservoirs in Wood and Adams Counties, and 1 in Juneau County Forest) began incubation in the core reintroduction area during April. Unlike in the previous 6 years, when all nests initiated at the beginning of the nesting season failed mainly because of desertion, 6 pairs incubated full-term and chicks hatched from the 4 nests which had fertile eggs. One of the pairs included a 2-year-old female, the youngest bird to produce an egg (infertile) so far in the project. The remaining nests were deserted in a synchronous pattern similar to previous years. Two renests occurred and both were unsuccessful. By 1 July, no chicks remained alive.

Current Population Size.— As of 8 August 2011, the Eastern Migratory Population consisted of an estimated 99 birds (51 males and 48 females) including 86 in Wisconsin, 1 in Minnesota, 1 in Michigan, 1 in Indiana, 4 at undetermined locations, and 6 long-term missing.

Richard P. Urbanek, Necedah, Wisconsin

***see News article on "Levy" and Peepers on page 12 — Ed.**

FYI: The ornithology library at Cornell University in Ithaca, New York (Cornell Lab of Ornithology Adelson Library) has a complete set of *The Unison Call*, if you are ever in need of archival material from the newsletter.

**<http://www.birds.cornell.edu/Adelson>
adelson_lib@cornell.edu**

Regional Reports *continued*

Florida Resident Whooping Crane Flock Update

As of August 5, 2011 we monitored 20 Whooping Cranes (*Grus americana*) in the Florida resident population (9 males, 11 females) including 8 pairs. A first this spring was a male Florida resident Whooping Crane migrating north to Wisconsin with a migratory female Whooping Crane. Both birds were paired prior to this temporary *fling*. One can imagine that the chemistry between these 2 must have been pretty strong! Within days after arrival in Wisconsin, the Florida male returned to his mate in central Florida, having covered a total of >3,660 km, the length of 2 migrations, in a short time (a pretty athletic feat for a “non-migratory” bird!). The female in Wisconsin also returned to her mate. What will happen next winter? Stay tuned...as the Crane World Turns...

We employed video surveillance, data-logging eggs, and camera traps in our continuing nest studies. New this year was the use of camera traps at nests to document nest attendance and identify disturbances. This breeding season we studied 22 Florida Sandhill Crane (*G. canadensis pratensis*) nests and 7 Whooping Crane nests. We anticipate collecting data again in 2012 to bolster sample sizes (especially for Whooping Cranes) and have not begun to analyze incubation temperature (based on data-logging eggs) and incubation behavior (based on video and still photos). However, we have done some preliminary determinations of nest fate and factors associated with nest failure.

One of 22 Sandhill Crane nests and 3 of 7 Whooping Crane nests were abandoned at the time of initial nest visits by biologists. Some pairs abandoned without returning to their nest marshes so it was human disturbance, rather than equipment at nests, that caused some abandonments. Two of the abandonments of whooper nests were by the same pair, a known “sensitive” pair. Pairs (both species combined) that abandoned had longer flushing distances than those who did not abandon and this measurement may prove useful in predicting future risks of abandonment. We will be analyzing other factors associated with the abandonments to look for trends.

Six of 22 Sandhill Crane nests and 1 of 7 Whooping Crane nests failed concurrently with drying of their marshes. Wetland water levels this spring, though sufficient for nesting, were marginal.

Camera traps did not always capture activity at nests and we will be analyzing photos and video to gain an understanding of why. However, the camera traps were useful in documenting many occasions of visitors (representing disturbances or potential disturbances) to nests. These included cattle, raccoons (*Procyon lotor*), a bobcat (*Lynx rufus*), coyotes (*Canis latrans*), and an alligator (*Alligator mississippiensis*). A Whooping Crane nest failed when a cow walked over the nest (Fig. 1).

It is not known at what point the incubating bird left the nest and why it did not defend the nest. We know from camera trap data at Sandhill Crane nests that they will not abandon at approach of livestock, and instead, always defend their nests from curious or wayward cows (Fig. 2). More data will need to be collected in order to determine if this is a behavioral difference between Whooping and Sandhill Cranes. If so, it could explain a considerable proportion of the difference in nest success between Whooping and Sandhill cranes in Florida. Most cranes in Florida nest on ranch land and all but one of the nests in this year’s study were in actively grazed cattle pastures.

Camera traps also were useful in determining nest success because the eggs were often visible within the nests and could be seen to either hatch or not. Other useful information collected by camera traps was water levels at nests. Finally, cameras documented important behaviors of the birds at their nests, including exchange of incubation duties by a pair of Whooping Cranes at night. This work was funded in part by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.



Figure 1. Composite of 2 photos showing Whooping Crane on nest (center of photo) with mate to left, and later the cow walking over the nest.



Figure 2. Sandhill Crane defends nest against Angus bull (outweighing the bird by 200 times).

Regional Reports *continued*

On a different note...check out the new, improved, greatly expanded web site of our sister organization the Whooping Crane Conservation Association: <http://whoopingcrane.com/>. Chester McConnell has done great things with this site. Please note that it is now possible to pay membership dues on-line (wink, wink!).

Marty Folk, Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission

Mississippi Sandhill Crane Update

There were about 106 endangered Mississippi Sandhill Cranes in the population at the beginning of the year. We released two cohorts totaling 8 captive-reared juveniles in winter 2010/11 to supplement the population.

In January/February, Biologist Hereford traveled to Thailand to participate in the Eastern Sarus Crane Reintroduction Workshop and provide technical assistance with the first releases of captive-reared birds. In March, Biologists Hereford and Billodeaux traveled to Nebraska to participate in the North American Crane Workshop.

Until July, this area was dry and eventually in "exceptional drought." Twenty-four pairs produced a record-high total of 35 nests. Eighteen chicks hatched from 12 nests; 3 chicks fledged. That anything hatched, let alone fledged, was greatly due to work by our contractor trapper removing 43 large predators and 128 raccoons.

But the drought provided an extended period of dry soil conditions favorable for machine-based habitat work. Timber contractors made great headway on removing pines from 800 acres in the east Ocean Springs Unit. Jackson County Utility Authority Contractors cleared 250 acres of wax myrtle, Chinese tallow, and cogongrass to begin the process of reclaiming the south spray fields. One family and a group of 8 subadults began using the newly opened spray field area daily.

Scott Hereford, Gautier, Mississippi

The Great Crane Project

The European subspecies (*Grus grus grus*) of the Eurasian Crane, a close cousin of the Whooping Crane, was extirpated from Britain about 400 years ago. In 1979, a resident population of the cranes began to establish itself in the East Anglia region of England as the continental population expanded. The Great Crane Project is a recent joint effort of three conservation groups and one funding partner (The Wildfowl & Wetlands Trust, The Royal Society for the Protection of Birds, The Pensthorpe Conservation Trust, and Viridor Credits) to aid in the establishment of further resident populations of the species in suitable crane habit in the UK. Reintroduction methods include hand-rearing of chicks from wild-sourced eggs. Current efforts are centered in Somerset, in southwest England. A video, "Crane Country," produced by the RSPB, gives an excellent overview of the project. <http://www.thegreatcraneproject.org.uk/>

Cranes in the News

Cranes Falsely Blamed in Collision with Commuter Jet

On April 1, 2011 a Delta/Atlantic Southeast Airlines flight from Atlanta, Georgia to Little Rock, Arkansas struck a flock of “large white birds” as it was descending toward Little Rock. A number of online news stories at the time implied that the birds were Whooping Cranes, with some reports even showing stock images of a Whooping Crane. *The Aviation Herald* (<http://avherald.com>), for example, reported that the CRJ-200 jet “was on approach to Little Rock about 15 nautical miles east of the aerodrome when the plane collided with a flock of cranes. The crew climbed to 4000 feet, overflew the airport before safely landing at Little Rock about 30 minutes later.” The *Herald* report included a photo of the damaged nose cone of the plane after landing, with the torso of a white bird still embedded.

Questioned recently by email about the true identity of the unfortunate bird(s), Little Rock National Airport spokesperson TJ Williams responded that the species was in fact determined to be an American White Pelican.

Convictions in Whooping Crane Shooting in Indiana: Lenient Sentences Draw Condemnation

Wade Bennett of Cayuga, Ind. and an unnamed juvenile pled guilty and were sentenced on March 30, 2011 for their involvement in the 2009 shooting death of a Whooping Crane in Vermillion County, Ind. Each received one year of probation, were assessed approximately \$550 in court fees, and fined \$1 for the crime (source: M. Mendenhall).

The crane, known as 17-02 (or 2-17), was the mother of ‘W1-06,’ the first Whooping Crane chick to have successfully hatched and fledged in the reintroduced Eastern Migratory Population.

Wildlife law enforcement agents with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) and the Indiana Department of Natural Resources investigated the shooting. The crane, last observed alive by an International Crane Foundation (ICF) staff member on Saturday, November 28, 2009, was found dead by an ICF volunteer found on Tuesday, December 1, 2009, in rural Vermillion County. According to an article by Matt Mendenhall, the shooting occurred on November 30, 2009:

Indiana conservation officer in Vermillion County had received information “about a group of boys who were road hunting,” said Special Agent Buddy Shapp of the USFWS. “They would drive around shooting whatever (animals) they saw, kind of like target practice. They had been squirrel hunting, and then they came upon a large white bird and just shot it.”

The unnamed juvenile pulled the trigger, Shapp said, and he was charged with unlawful take of an endangered species. Bennett, who was 18 at the time of the shooting, was charged with providing false information.”

In early spring 2010, a citizen came forward with information concerning the shooting of the crane. The citizen’s information was valuable to investigators during subsequent interviews of Bennett and the juvenile. Defenders of Wildlife, the Indiana Turn in a Poacher Program and other conservation partners committed to

matching the original USFWS \$2,500 reward, brought the citizen reward to almost \$10,000.

The lenient sentences drew intense rebuke from the birding community and beyond, especially in light of the rarity of Whooping Cranes, the reproductive significance of 17-02, and the much harsher sentences meted out for past shootings of Whooping Cranes of the Aransas–Wood Buffalo flock. As noted by Mendenhall:

In 2004, a man who shot and killed a crane in Texas pleaded guilty to federal charges and was sentenced to six months in prison and fined more than \$10,000 (\$8,100 in state fines and \$2,025 in federal fines). A year later in Kansas, seven hunters who shot and killed two cranes were fined \$23,586. They each spent two years on probation and had to perform 50 hours of community service.

In response to the outcry provoked by the lenient sentencing, the Deputy Prosecuting Attorney in Vermillion County, Indiana, Gregory S. Carter issued a press release explaining the case's legal considerations: "Statement in response to questions pertaining to the prosecution and conviction of those individuals involved in the death of a Whooping Crane on December 1, 2009." The document is available at www.vermilliongov.us/pressreleases.html, but several paragraphs are reproduced below.

In the summer of 2010, this case was brought to this office by the U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the Indiana Department of Conservation. It was represented to us that a decision was made not to prosecute this case under the applicable federal statutes. I do not recall if the U. S. Attorney having jurisdiction over this matter declined prosecution or the Fish and Wildlife Service did not want to submit the case to the U. S. attorney. It is my recollection that the special agent from the Fish and Wildlife Service indicated that the applicable federal statutes required the proof beyond a reasonable doubt that the killing of the endangered animal required an awareness that the animal was, in fact, an endangered species and that under the facts of this case there was a serious question as to whether or not such could be proven. There was also the issue that the person directly responsible for the killing of the animal was under 18 years of age and therefore subject to juvenile court jurisdiction.

...The adult entered a plea of guilty to False Informing, an A misdemeanor. The factual basis in his case established that he had a peripheral involvement and did not participate in the actual killing of the bird but did not disclose the nature and extent of his knowledge of the incident when questioned by the authorities. He received a sentence of one year which was suspended and he was placed on probation for that period of time. His sentence and the disposition of the juvenile were consistent with those accused and convicted of A misdemeanors with their respective legal history.

A question as to the issue of restitution arose in the case given the rareness of the bird. Specifically, could restitution be calculated and made payable to a party meeting the definition of a victim in the Indiana statute on restitution. We requested information on this matter and received some information that this bird could have a value in excess of \$100,000.00. The computation of this amount and the certainty required by our statute on restitution was a source of some concern. More problematic, however, was the question of who would be entitled to this restitution. We did not receive any satisfactory answer to this question and decided to defer the issue of restitution so that anyone who feels that they have the legal standing to bring such a claim in a civil lawsuit for damages may do so. That is still the case. The possibility of such a lawsuit was brought to the attention of both attorneys for the involved individuals. As of yet, no one has commenced such an action.

Sources: USFWS news release: April 18, 2011. Citizen tip leads to closure of whooping crane shooting in Indiana.

Matt Mendenhall (April 19, 2011) Killers of Whooping Crane in Indiana receive probation, \$1 fine. http://cs.birdwatchingdaily.com/BRDCS/blogs/field_of_view/archive/2011/04/19/killers-of-whooping-crane-in-indiana-receive-probation-1-fine.aspx

Kentucky Fish and Wildlife Commission Votes to Establish a Sandhill Crane Hunt

FRANKFORT, Ky. (June 3, 2011) — The Kentucky Fish and Wildlife Commission voted 8-0 on Friday June 3, 2011 in favor of establishing a Sandhill Crane hunting season. If the plan is ultimately approved by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, it would mark the first time in nearly a century that the Eastern Population of Greater Sandhill Cranes (*Grus canadensis tabida*) would be exposed to hunting.

Under the proposal, the first season would open December 17, 2011 and close January 15, 2012 as part of a 3-year test program. The seasonal quota would be 400 birds. The seasonal bag limit would be two birds per hunter. Those selected for a hunting permit would be required to pass a bird identification test. A maximum of 400 hunters would be allowed to participate annually.

The Kentucky Coalition for Sandhill Cranes (represented by Mary W. Yandell) and the Kentucky Ornithological Society (represented by Carol Besse) have jointly petitioned Kentucky Governor Steve Beshear to use his authority to withdraw the regulation, citing flaws in the Commission's review process, including insufficient opportunity for "meaningful" public input, failure to give due consideration to scientific data on population trends and sustainability presented to the Commission by the International Crane Foundation, and lack of a cost-benefit analysis to measure the value of Sandhill Cranes as a "watchable wildlife species versus a hunted game bird", among others (the letter to the governor and supporting documents can be accessed at www.kc4sandhillcranes.wordpress.com).

Sources: James Bruggers (2011) State agency approves sandhill crane hunt. *Courier-Journal* (Louisville; www.courier-journal.com); Kentucky Department of Fish and Wildlife Resources (<http://fw.ky.gov/newsrelease.asp?nid=965>); Kentucky Coalition for Sandhill Cranes (www.kc4sandhillcranes.wordpress.com)

Editor's note: The Tennessee Wildlife Resources Commission considered a similar proposal in 2010 to allow hunting of Sandhill Cranes near Hiwassee State Wildlife Refuge, but voted to put off making a decision on the matter for at least 2 years (see The Unison Call, vol. 21, no. 2, Fall/Winter 2010). The outcome in Kentucky could have repercussions for Sandhill Cranes in Tennessee and beyond.

National Zoo Celebrates Arrival of Rocky the Whooping Crane

WASHINGTON, D.C. (July 5, 2011) — After an 88-year hiatus, a Whooping Crane is once again on exhibit at the Smithsonian's National Zoological Park.

Rocky, an 11-year-old male, was transferred in June to the National Zoo from the Ellie Schiller Homosassa Springs Wildlife State Park in Florida.

"It's an honor for the National Zoo to once again exhibit this magnificent species," said Dennis Kelly, director of the Smithsonian's National Zoological Park. "Although most people have heard of Whooping Cranes, very few have had the privilege of seeing one in person. We are thrilled to have Rocky here as an ambassador for his species."

Rocky is only the fourth Whooping Crane to call the National Zoo home. The Zoo's first crane, a wild-caught bird of unknown sex, arrived in 1897. Its last, a female, died in 1923.

Visitors can see Rocky in the “Crane Run” exhibit outside of the Bird House. However, there is one behavioral trait visitors will not see Rocky perform: the loud “whoop” call these birds are named for. “We don’t know why Rocky is mute,” says Sara Hallager, biologist at the Zoo’s Bird House. “The reason behind his silence is a mystery known only to him.”

The Zoo has no plans to breed Rocky, but his genes will not go to waste. He will participate in a study by the Zoo’s Smithsonian Conservation Biology Institute that determines the impact of genetic diversity on Whooping Crane sperm quality and fertility rate in captivity.

Adapted from: <http://nationalzoo.si.edu/publications/pressmaterials/pressreleases/NZP/2011/whoopingcrane.cfm>

Ultralight-led Whooping Crane Chooses Love in Captivity

A male Whooping Crane from the first-ever ultralight-led cohort of 2001 – variously known as 5-01, Romeo, and now named Levi (after the popular 501 style of denim jeans) – has relinquished his wild status for love in captivity. The object of his affection, a captive female named Peepers, is an educational Whooping Crane at the Ellie Schiller Homosassa Springs Wildlife State Park, several miles northeast of the Whooping Crane Eastern Migratory Population (EMP) wintering area at Chassahowitzka National Wildlife Refuge. Until June of this year, Peepers shared her enclosure non-romantically with Rocky, a handsome but silent type (see preceding article).

Although Levi had successfully paired and migrated with two wild females in the EMP, both females were lost to predation, the first in 2007, the second in 2010. Beginning in the spring of 2007, shortly after his first mate was predated, Levi would make a total of six visits to Peepers over several years. However, on each occasion he was crated and relocated in hopes that he would continue to associate with birds of the EMP. When, in the fall of 2010, Levi paid another visit to Peepers, the difficult decision was made to pull Levi from the EMP and allow him to be with Peepers. To make room for Levi in the Whooping Crane exhibit of the Ellie Schiller Homosassa Wildlife State Park, Rocky the crane was found a new home at the Smithsonian’s National Zoological Park in Washington, DC.

Main source of information: Report by Heather Ray, July 3, 2011, www.operationmigration.org

Whooping Cranes Threatened by Alberta’s Oil Sands Activity

*The following press release was issued in July by Global Forest Watch Canada (GFWC). The 13-page document referred to in the press release — **Migration of whooping cranes (*Grus americana*) through Alberta’s bitumen sands region** (available at www.globalforestwatch.ca) — sounds an alarm on the potential negative impact of oil sands extraction activities on Whooping Cranes of the Aransas–Wood Buffalo flock, which according to GFWC has not been adequately addressed.*

A vast region of the northern Alberta boreal forest has been destroyed by oil sands activity — especially hazardous to migrating water birds are the toxic tailings ponds (“lakes”) that now scar the landscape. More insidious is the fact that the oil sands are in the heart of the Athabasca River Basin, which drains northward into the Peace–Athabasca Delta that forms part of Wood Buffalo National Park. There is justifiable concern that

toxic hydrocarbons and metals could be polluting the Athabasca River and its tributaries and be carried to the delta and beyond.

Two figures, in particular, contained in the GFWC report, Map 1 – “Alberta’s bitumen sands region in relation to the typical migration path of the Whooping Crane,” and Map 3 – “Whooping Crane landing points and flight paths in northeastern Alberta for 1981, 1982, and 1983” [based on data from E. Kuyt (1992) Aerial radio-tracking of Whooping Cranes migrating between Wood Buffalo National Park and Aransas National Wildlife Refuge, 1981-84. Canadian Wildlife Service Occasional Paper No. 74] illustrate the vast scale of the oil sands project and the peril it poses to Whooping Cranes. — D. Henderson

EDMONTON, AB (JULY 11, 2011) — The world’s last wild migrating endangered Whooping Cranes – 270 birds – are threatened by oil sands developments in northern Alberta, according to a recent report by Global Forest Watch Canada (GFWC), “*Migration of whooping cranes (Grus americana) through Alberta’s bitumen sands region.*”

The not-for-profit research organization says that Whooping Cranes have regularly flown over and landed within Alberta’s oil sands region. This migration includes areas leased to and developed by oil sands companies, and includes the surface mineable area containing facilities, mine pits and more than 170 km² of toxic tailings ponds. Annual overall bird mortality at these toxic tailings ponds in northeastern Alberta has been recently scientifically estimated at a minimum of 458 to 5,029 birds.

The only remaining self-sustaining wild population of Whooping Cranes in the world breeds in Wood Buffalo National Park, located in the Northwest Territories and northern Alberta, and consists of only 270 birds as of 2008.

“The Whooping Crane is an archetypal symbol of North American conservation,” says Peter Lee, author and executive director of Global Forest Watch Canada. “The magnificent bird is endangered in both Canada and the United States, and exists only in North America. Still, there is little evidence that the Governments of Alberta and Canada have adequately considered Whooping Cranes in the approval of industrial developments in Alberta’s oil sands region.”

“The rapid pace and large scale of Alberta’s oil sands industrial developments within the flight path of migrating Whooping Cranes raises the concern that damage may already be done. Considering the endangered status of Whooping Crane and its central place in North American conservation, it is imperative that adequate information about the conservation needs of Whooping Cranes are dealt with explicitly in land use plans, environmental impact assessments and approvals for industrial developments. This is not the case so far.”

“The Kearl Lake and Jocelyn North Mine oil sands projects are two recent examples of major project approvals where Whooping Cranes were given only cursory, inadequate treatment in the environmental impacts assessments and joint panel decisions,” Lee states.

The threat to the survival and recovery of the Canadian wild Whooping Crane population results from several factors present in the oil sands region. Exposure to tailings ponds represents a risk of oiling and ingestion of toxins. This exposure may result in direct mortality or reduced fitness for birds that continue migration. Exposure to air emissions, food web contaminants, and declining water quality as well as exposure to the expanding power line infrastructure also represent risks.

Proper management of the endangered species is hampered by a lack of sufficient credible scientific monitoring of the bird's migration, landing, and mortality. Canada’s Committee on the Status of Endangered Wildlife in Canada designated Whooping Cranes as endangered in 2000, and the species is currently listed as Endan-

gered on Schedule 1 of Canada's *Species at Risk Act*. The species is protected in Canada under the *Migratory Birds Convention Act*, *National Parks Act*, *Canada Wildlife Act*, and *Species at Risk Act*, as well as by provincial and territorial wildlife acts. In Alberta, the Whooping Crane is currently ranked 'At Risk,' meaning the species is in danger of local extinction. The *Alberta Wildlife Act* lists the Whooping Crane as endangered. It is protected in the United States by the *Migratory Bird Treaty Act* and the *Endangered Species Act*.

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Getting Alberta's Tar Sands Oil to Migrate South

Oil companies in northern Alberta are wringing oil from the tar sands faster than ever; oil refineries in Texas are operating below capacity. The solution is obvious: build a \$7 billion underground pipeline from Alberta to the Texas Gulf Coast to transport oil sands crude for processing at those thirsty Texas refineries. Originating in Hardisty, Alberta, the proposed Keystone XL pipeline will pass through southwest Saskatchewan, eastern Montana, South Dakota, Nebraska, Kansas, and Oklahoma, before bifurcating in Texas to Port Arthur and Houston. Among the environmentally sensitive areas the pipeline will cross are the Sand Hills of Nebraska and the Ogallala Aquifer. Leaks are inevitable. The following is excerpted from a press release issued by the Society for Conservation Biology (http://www.conbio.org/Activities/Policy/docs/Amended_Keystone_XL_Would_Threaten_Highly_Endangered_Whooping_Cranes.pdf). — D. Henderson

Keystone XL Pipeline Would Threaten Highly Endangered Whooping Cranes

WASHINGTON D.C. (August 24, 2011) — As climate scientists, farmers, conservation groups and concerned citizens continue two weeks of protests at the White House in opposition to permitting a large new pipeline to carry partially refined tar from Alberta to the Gulf Coast, the world's largest international conservation science society reminded the Obama Administration of the hazards the pipeline poses to the environment, particularly the highly endangered Whooping Crane.

“In addition to its well-known climate change impact, the Keystone XL pipeline would threaten the Whooping Crane — one of the most highly endangered birds in the world — from one end of its migration route and habitat to the other,” said Dominick DellaSala, an ecologist and president of the North American Section of the Society for Conservation Biology.

Last year, the Society for Conservation Biology (SCB) sent detailed comments to the State Department and other federal agencies explaining that the proposed pipeline and those it would connect to follows the migration of the endangered Whooping Crane for nearly its entire route. The risk of highly toxic oil spills and the dramatic expansion of tailing ponds could jeopardize the survival of the bird that the Fish and Wildlife Service calls one of the most famous symbols of America's dedication to saving its wild national heritage.

While the Canadian Government is committed to the 1,700-mile pipeline, its fate is in the hands of the U.S. State Department, which must decide by the end of this year to approve or reject a request for a permit for the pipeline to cross into U.S. territory.

“The Secretary of State has no duty to issue a permit, but she does have a duty under several laws including the National Environmental Policy Act and the Endangered Species Act to consider alternatives and to choose safer alternatives,” said SCB Policy Director John M. Fitzgerald. “Furthermore, the Keystone XL decision pro-

vides the President the opportunity to direct Secretary Salazar to restore the rule that no U.S. agency will jeopardize any species that the U.S. lists as endangered, even if agency action results in harmful effects in another country.”

Jim Barrett, a Ph.D. economist and clean energy expert who co-chairs the SCB Investment Task Force, said the Keystone XL pipeline lacks a compelling economic component for creating jobs and is at odds with the President’s commitment to a clean energy future.

“As the Administration turns its focus to jobs and the economy, the Keystone XL project offers little prospect for either,” Barrett said. “With minimal impact on oil prices and a small number of short-term jobs created, the pipeline project will yield meager economic benefit in return for the substantial environmental costs it will impose on current and future generations.”

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In Memoriam

The Conservation Community Loses a Champion

Thomas E. Lewis died on June 23, 2011 in a plane crash on Elgin Air Force Base in Florida. He was 50. Also killed in the crash of the Beechcraft C24R Sierra was retired Air Force colonel David A. Miles. Thom was the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service biologist for St. Vincent National Wildlife Refuge from 1992 to 2008 where he oversaw the endangered Red Wolf program. Thom was also a constant advocate for conservation of the herpetofauna on the island refuge, particularly the Gopher Tortoise and Eastern Diamondback Rattlesnake. In the recently published *A Pocket Guide to the Snakes of St. Vincent National Wildlife Refuge*, the dedication reads: “Dedicated to Thomas E. Lewis, who watched over the island and kept it wild.” Early in his career in the 1980s, Thom, a native of Mary-

land, was a crane caretaker at Patuxent, and he worked on a Whooping Crane disturbance study at Aransas before joining the USFWS. [Last year, Thom co-authored an article for *The Unison Call*, “First documented wintering Sandhill Crane (*Grus canadensis*) in Delaware,” vol. 21, no. 1]. More recently, he was a wildlife pilot for the USFWS, primarily involved with migratory bird programs.

Thom is survived by JoAnne, his wife of over 20 years. He and JoAnne were strong supporters of the Florida Wild Mammal Association wildlife rescue facility and fostered injured and orphaned wildlife in their home. Perhaps Thom's greatest legacy is the more than 20 Red Wolf cubs (and descendants) transferred from the pack that he loved and protected to repatriation programs at other areas across the nation. The Red Wolf made history as the first U.S. species to be successfully reintroduced after extinction in the wild, and Thom’s work on St. Vincent Island was pivotal to this victory. At his farewell luncheon with St. Vincent volunteers and staff in 2008 he said, “It’s not without a heavy heart that I leave. I’ve grown to love the refuge and the volunteers. On my last day of work, I tracked the wolves on the island and I had at least five of them grouped together. I thought what a fitting way this was to spend my last day. I howled to them and four of the five howled back. So I howled again and I told them to be good and stay on the island.”

Sources: Tom Stehn (pers. comm.), an announcement from the Center for North American Herpetology, and K. Tammen & L. Swoboda (<http://www.apalachtimes.com/articles/lewis-9573-plane-thomas.html>)

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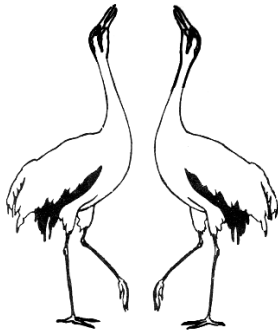
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