



Whooping Crane

Grus americana



“When you watch an adult Whooper stride close by you, his head high and proud, his bearing arrogant and imposing, you feel the presence of a strength and of a stubborn will to survive. We have a strong conviction that the Whooping Crane will keep his part of the bargain and will fight for survival every inch of the way. **What are we going to do to help?**”

Robert P. Allen, 1950

Did You Know?

WHOOPING CRANES...

- are the tallest N. American bird. Males height reaches up to 5 ft.
- have a wingspan of up to 7 ft.
- are all white except for black feathers on the tips of their wings; and have dark olive-gray bills, which lighten in color during breeding season.
- are cinnamon brown when immature and take on a mottled appearance as their white feather bases begin to extend.
- live approximately 22-24 years in the wild.
- are omnivorous. Summer forage includes frogs, fish, rodents, small birds, and berries. Winter feeding centers on blue crabs and clams.
- form life-long, monogamous pairs, though they will re-pair after the death of mate.
- make a spring migration to Wood Buffalo National Park in Saskatchewan, Canada. They occupy approximately the same area within the breeding territory each year.
- share parental duties, such as egg incubation and brood-rearing, between mates.
- begin an autumn migration in September and reach their Texas Gulf Coast destination by late October or early November.
- today about 400 whooping cranes survive in three populations in the wild, and about 150 individuals in captivity.



coast to central Mexico. They occupied territory from New Jersey in the east to Utah in the west. During the 19th and 20th centuries, major nesting areas were found in the northern Midwestern states. Wintering grounds included the entire Gulf Coast between Louisiana and the Rio Grande delta in northeastern Mexico. During the 1800s, there was both a western migration route between Louisiana and the Canadian breeding areas and an eastern route that took birds through the Appalachians to the Atlantic Coast before reaching their nesting grounds near Hudson Bay, Canada.

By the mid-19th century, many decades had passed since the whooping crane had been seen on the Atlantic seaboard. The population was estimated to be around 1,300 birds in the 1860s, which declined to approximately 600 individuals by 1870. Between 1890 and 1910 a rapid decline occurred in Midwest migration numbers and on the Louisiana wintering grounds.

By 1941, only 22 birds, in two breeding populations, remained. Six birds remained in a non-migratory colony in southwestern Louisiana. However, no documented reproduction occurred in this colony after 1939, and the population ceased to exist in 1950. The other breeding colony nested in the Aransas National Wildlife Refuge, Texas and by 1941, reached an all-time population low of 16 individuals. The main cause of this devastating population decline was habitat loss due to wetland drainage, conversion of grassland to agricultural fields and hunting.

Many people had lost hope that this species could persist in the wild.



Decline of a Species...

In 1941, the entire population of whooping cranes consisted of 21 birds. Many believed the species would become extinct. It did not. The recovery of the whooping crane has become a conservation success story. The species is no longer near extinction but the recovery story spans the better part of a century and will continue long into the future.

The historical range of the whooping crane reached from the Arctic

However, a small group of scientists and conservationists made it their mission to save the whooping crane and over the last 60 years, the recovery effort has brought this species back from the brink of extinction.

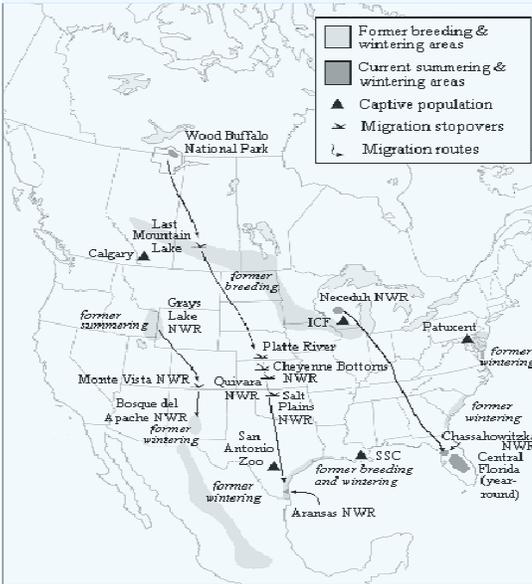


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Past and Present Whooping Crane Breeding and Wintering Grounds



History Of Louisiana Whooping Cranes...

- 1890's. Records indicate "large numbers" of both whooping cranes and sandhill cranes on wet prairies year-round and whooping cranes also used coastal locations in winter.
- 1890's-1920. Conversion of prairies to mechanized agriculture leads to both whooping and sandhill crane numbers declining in the prairie region.
- 1918. 12 whooping cranes shot north of Sweet Lake. Last official record of whooping cranes on the Louisiana prairies.
- 1930's. Trappers report whooping crane nesting activity and young in the freshwater marshes north of White Lake.
- May 1939. Biologist John J. Lynch (U.S. Bureau of Biological Survey (pre USFWS)) sights 13 whooping cranes north of White Lake. Two of the cranes are "young-of-the-year." This record confirms a resident colony of breeding whooping cranes in Louisiana. This is the last record of the species breeding in the wild in the United States prior to experimental and captive-raised whooping cranes hatching several eggs and fledging chicks starting in 2000 and 2002, respectively.
- Late 1930's-early 1940's. Last records of wintering whooping cranes on southwest Louisiana's chenier ridges and in brackish and saltwater marshes near the coast.
- August 1940. Hurricane and flood from associated rainfall scatters the resident White Lake whooping cranes. Only 6 cranes return.
- November 1941. One of the "lost" cranes of White Lake is found in Evangeline Parish after the storm. She is captured and donated to the Audubon Park Zoo in New Orleans. The bird is named "Josephine;" for many years, she was the only breeding female whooping crane in captivity.
- 1941-1945. White Lake whooping crane flock loses 1 bird each year...only 2 cranes remain in 1945.
- 1947. Only 1 whooping crane remains at White Lake.
- March 1950. John J Lynch and others chase and capture the lone White Lake crane, which is transported to Aransas National Wildlife Refuge, Texas.



Whooping Crane Status Timeline

Listed as Threatened with Extinction	1967
Listed as Endangered	1970
U.S. Recovery Plan approved	1980
International Recovery Plan approved	2007

** Based on Louisiana whooping crane chronology compiled by Dr. Gay Gomez, McNeese State University**