

22 Whooping Cranes Return to Arkansas

Twenty-two whooping cranes returned to their wintering grounds in Texas, the National Audubon Society has reported. The present count, which was determined by an aerial survey conducted by the Fish and Wildlife Service, is one less than last year's total of 23 cranes. Only two young of the year have been indentified, though further surveys may reveal that some of the others are young.

All that remains of the original wild population, these stately white birds migrate from their breeding range in the far north to the Aransas Wildlife Refuge on the Texas coast.

At least two cranes fell to guns of law-violating gunners, as they made their annual flight toward Texas this fall, the co-operating conservation agencies reported.

One of the cranes was shot south of Regina, Saskatchewan. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service sent a plane from La Crosse, Wisconsin, hoping that the injured bird could be flown to San Antonio, Texas, where it would receive expert attention at the San Antonio Zoo. Despite forced feeding of barley and milk and doses of penicillin, the crane died en route to Texas.

A day or two after the Saskatchewan incident, school children near Olathe, Kansas, found an injured whooping crane in a field and brought it to their school. The bird had been seriously wounded by illegal gunfire and died not long after being found.

John H. Baker, president of the National Audubon Society, said, "Each year it becomes more apparent that illegal hunting is the major factor in the reduction of the numbers of whooping cranes and in increasing the threat of their extinction."

The continental whooping crane population now stands at 24, which figure includes two crippled captives at the Audubon Park Zoo in New Orleans. These are the birds that attempted unsuccessfully to raise young at the Arkansas Refuge. So far they have not nested at the zoo, though officials reported that the birds performed some courtship dances.



Mural, Whooping Cranes
F. W. Lahrman, Provincial Museum.

He Fed Whooping Cranes

On reading in the press the story of the wounded Whooping Crane being taken to the United States, Mr. W. W. Cunningham, Telkua, B.C., wrote the following interesting letter to Mr. Bard, at the Provincial Museum.

"Over 60 years ago in the northern part of North Dakota and southern Manitoba, east of the Turtle Mountains where I was a boy, it was practically open prairie and lots of sloughs, mostly full of water and these birds were not plentiful like the Blue or Sandhill Cranes but still there were quite a few of them—at least not uncommon, and I was lucky enough to get one when it was quite young, I also had two Blues which I raised, and I think their nesting habits are the same as I have seen them in their nests and seen the young when they were hatched. But it is the feeding question that I would like to bring to your attention; I know they eat frogs and worms, etc., but I do not think it is enough, for the ones I raised did not do well until I started feeding them fresh meat. I used to keep several traps set for gophers and I used a hatchet on a block of wood to cut the gophers up in small pieces, bones and all. Each Crane would eat from 3 to 4 gophers in a day — no more frogs or worms and did they ever grow! They also liked a good piece of cheese. I wintered these birds on wheat and meat and they did well. I never penned them up, only on cold days, and when I saddled my horse and called them they would follow me for miles—I had them until the next fall when the call was too great they went south.

"I trust this will be of interest to you."