

## Introduction to Crane Notes

Because the Saskatchewan plains lie along the flyway of the Whooping Crane, readers of the *Blue Jay* are especially interested in these birds and their preservation. Magazine policy has been to give the Whooping Cranes as much publicity as possible. This policy has been followed partly because of the intrinsic interest of any observations of these birds and partly because of our wish to do everything possible to save them from extinction. The problem of saving the Whooping Crane presents a real challenge to all who cherish our wildlife legacy, for the Whooping Crane of North America is apparently the only species of the fourteen full species of cranes described for the world that is now threatened with extinction.

At the annual meeting of the Saskatchewan Natural History Society in October, 1956, a resolution was passed supporting a management programme designed to increase the numbers of the Whooping Crane. This proposal later became the subject of a discussion in the editorial pages of the *Regina Leader-Post* where differing points of view were expressed by the Editor of the *Blue Jay* and John Livingston, of the Audubon Society of Canada. In this exchange of opinions, one important principle was established. No management scheme should be attempted without a thorough investigation of its possibilities and limitations. All available information on the habits of the Cranes should be studied, and the advice of the best aviculturists sought.

The Whooping Crane has actually been the subject of an intensive research programme since 1945 when a special study was inaugurated under the joint auspices of the Audubon Society and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. Results were reported to the public by the Audubon Society in two books by Robert P. Allen: *The Whooping Crane* (1952) and *A Report on the Whooping Crane's Northern Breeding Grounds* (1956).

Research projects involving the Whooping Crane are necessarily

limited by the fact that the Crane population is so extremely small. For that reason, people interested in the habits of the Whooping Crane and particularly in the possibility of a management scheme for raising captive cranes, have tried to find parallels among other species of cranes. Terry Jones, who has been breeding the rare Hawaiian Goose or Ne Ne in England and who urges the need for a similar scheme for propagating the Whooping Crane, tells of some European successes in raising captive cranes (*Game breeders, Pheasant fanciers and Aviculturists' Gazette*, Vol. VI, - Jan. 1957). He points out that "every species of crane has laid eggs in captivity in Europe with two exceptions, and both are so rare that only an odd bird or two has ever been kept (Black-necked Crane, Whooping Crane)" and believes that "only the Asiatic White Crane has failed to hatch young in captivity."

In North America, there are only two full species of cranes. Because the Sandhills are so much more numerous, they provide an obvious point of departure for experimental work. Only 24 Whoopers are known to be wintering this year at the Aransas Wildlife Refuge, whereas the Sandhills congregate in thousands in such refuges as the Bitter Lakes National Wildlife Refuge, New Mexico, and the Muleshoe National Wildlife Refuge in Texas. Miss Bess Smith, a flyway observer from Oklahoma, wrote recently to the *Blue Jay* to tell of the thrill it had given her to visit the Muleshoe Refuge in November when "cranes were there by the hundreds and you could stop the car by the side of the road and watch them feeding in the maize fields." A leaflet from the Refuge says that some 30,000 Sandhills winter there. Lawrence H. Walkinshaw (*Wilson Bulletin*, Dec., 1956) counted 24,038 Sandhill Cranes on one day (March 21, 1954) along the North Platte in Nebraska. What can the Sandhills, which still exist in these numbers, tell us of the Whooping Crane? The work of people like Dayton O. Hyde who have appreciated the possibilities of such an investigation is tremendously and urgently important.