

# Sandhill Cranes and the Future

By **T. A. Harper**, Wildlife Branch, Regina

There are two sides to every argument and the Sandhill Crane problem is no exception. Most of us will admit that the Sandhill Cranes are not found in large numbers throughout the prairie provinces during migration. Anyone who has travelled in the provinces during the fall realizes that the cranes prefer certain resting areas such as the north end of Last Mountain Lake and concentrate in a few of these areas in large numbers.

To those of us who receive enjoyment from the sights and sounds of wildlife, the sight of six to ten thousand cranes is an experience never to be forgotten. Similarly the farmer who sees several thousand cranes scattering and trampling his carefully swathed grain is not likely to soon forget the incident. To the farmer such a sight means a direct loss of income while the rest of us sit back with our wallets secure and say "such magnificence should be preserved."

How serious is the other side of the argument? A recent example—approximately 100 farmers from the Govan-Nokomis and Imperial district held a meeting at Imperial, Saskatchewan, on October 13, 1959, to discuss crop depredations by waterfowl with Federal and Provincial Officials. The main purpose of this meeting was to point out to government officials that the Sandhill Crane population had built up to the point where it was causing unnecessary damage to both swathed and standing crops in the areas. Those farmers wanted to know what could be done about it.

The use of scarecrows and other scaring devices such as exploders, etc., were outlined to the farmers who in most cases were already using one or more of these devices. The exploders, a rather new device, seem to hold considerable promise as an efficient scaring device without causing harm to the birds. More of these will no doubt be brought into use in the future.

The use of lure crops is another program which can be effective in keeping the birds off privately-

owned farmland. Unfortunately the one lure crop operated by the Wildlife Branch of the Department of Natural Resources is not enough during extreme years.

The Wildlife Insurance program that is available in Saskatchewan (the only known insurance plan for loss by wildlife) does help, but it is not the complete answer. Hunters contribute substantially to the insurance scheme but indemnities are frequently insufficient to cover total loss even if the farmer was able to outguess the vagaries of the cranes' decision to flock into his fields and took out crop insurance ahead of time. It is worthy of mention that hunters are contributing to a crop insurance program that protects crops against damage by a protected species.

During poor harvest years, such as we have experienced this fall, it is apparent that none of these devices are sufficiently adequate to prevent severe loss to crops. Other methods to assist the farmer must be sought.

We realize the extent to which Sandhill Cranes may destroy crops when we learn that some farmers have claimed up to 160 acres of grain lost to cranes. Farmers at the Imperial meeting reported a total of 790 acres destroyed this fall. Fortunately for the cranes and those officials who met with the farmers, many farmers in the Imperial area had their crops completely hailed out this year. Much of this grain, although not worth salvaging, made excellent feed for cranes and other waterfowl and to some extent tended to relieve the seriousness of the situation, though farmers claimed that their cattle would not pasture on the fields after cranes had frequented them.

I don't think any of us would like to see the Sandhill Crane population reduced in number as is the case with the Whooping Crane. But we must be practical-minded enough to realize that individual farmers cannot be expected to sit back and watch the culmination of their year's labour destroyed by any wildlife species. In poor harvest years such as 1959 with thousands of cranes resting in the



*Photo by F. W. Lahrman*

SANDHILLS feeding in the grain fields.

Last Mountain Lake area, it was considered necessary by wildlife authorities to permit hunters to assist the farmers in protecting crops where cranes were causing damage. An area in the province was designated wherein individual farmers were not required to obtain a special permit to protect their crops against damage. This was not a new practice; it has been conducted in the past but only when the situation was extremely serious.

Such a policy permitting the shooting of Sandhill Cranes is distasteful to many and this feeling was so expressed in a resolution recently passed at the Moose Jaw meeting of the Saskatchewan Natural History Society. It is commendable that there is an organization of this kind to keep the public aware of what is

happening to the wildlife of the province. But at the same time we must be careful to maintain a wide, yet practical viewpoint—one that allows all aspects to be clearly envisaged.

Perhaps there are some ways in which the Sandhill Cranes can be protected from destruction without depriving individuals of their livelihood. If so this is where our energies and resources should be directed. Would refuges or lure crops established in key positions be the answer? Would a program of purchasing entire fields of unharvested grain in serious depredation areas do the trick? New scaring devices or techniques may help. Whatever the answer, if it is to be effective, it will require **effort** and money!

How much are the Sandhill Cranes worth to you?

## TV Tower Casualty List

By **F. W. Lahrman**, Saskatchewan Museum of Natural History

On September 22, 1959, I visited the Moose Jaw TV tower which is located approximately four miles south and four miles west of Caron, Sask., to see if any birds had been killed by flying into the tower or guy wires. This 480-foot tower is situated on a height of land at 2400 feet which slopes down approximately 500 feet to the surrounding plain to the north and east. I had noticed a "wave" of warblers and

sparrows that morning and since towers are known hazards for migrating birds, decided that the tower might be worth checking.

I found in all 33 birds of 13 species strewn about the ground and south-east of the tower; while most were found within 50 yards of the base of the tower, some were over 100 yards away. A list of the birds which were found follows:

American Coot (1), Red-eyed