

RECENT CLUTCH SIZE DATA FOR WHOOPING CRANES, INCLUDING A THREE-EGG CLUTCH

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Bent in reporting clutch size in Whooping Cranes states: "The Whooping Crane lays ordinarily two eggs, occasionally only one and very rarely three . . ." ¹ Novakowski, providing data for the Sass River portion of the Whooping Crane breeding range, found 37 clutches, one of which had a single egg, the other 36 two eggs each. ³

During surveys over the Whooping Crane nesting area in northern Wood Buffalo National Park from 1966 to 1975 I collected data on clutch size and found them to be in agreement with Bent's generalization. Of 125 clutches I saw during that period, 104 (83.2%) contained two eggs, 12 (9.6%) had only a single egg and the contents of eight nests (6.4%) could not be determined due to the incubating bird's refusal to move off the nest. The remaining clutch (nest number 10/75) contained two eggs on 9 May 1975. A pair of Whooping Cranes was seen here on 5 May and 7 May but we were not able to find their nest until 9 May.

It has been our custom not to approach nesting whoopers *after* we have determined that the full clutch (usually two eggs) has been completed and until such time as egg collecting is contemplated. Hence the eggs were not observed between 9 May and 28 May, the day of egg pick-up. When our helicopter landed at the nest on that day, I found three eggs in the nest, the first three-egg clutch recorded from the Northwest Territories (see photo).

Although the nest was not visited between 9 and 28 May, under no condition should the three-egg clutch be interpreted as the result of "egg-



By Lorne Scott

dumping". My studies have shown that Whooping Cranes in the NWT breeding range are occupying well-defined nesting territories and after the initiation of nest building, the paired cranes do not tolerate other white-plumaged whoopers in their territory, at least until the young have reached flying stage and then only when the resident family is on the opposite side of its territory. ²

It appears only a single previous three-egg clutch is on record, a nest found in 1922 near Muddy Lake, Saskatchewan. One of the eggs in that clutch proved to be infertile but at least one of the other two hatched. ¹

I have 10 successive years' nesting data for many of the Whooping Crane pairs nesting in Wood Buffalo National Park but the pair occupying the territory where nest 10/75 was found, has nested there only infrequently and with indifferent success. In 1969 neither of the eggs hatched but in 1970 the pair produced two eggs and a single chick was later seen with the parents. In 1973 a single egg was produced and the chick observed on a later survey.



Ernie Kuyt and the Whooping Crane eggs

E. G. Bizeau

To our great disappointment, none of the 3 eggs from nest 10/75 hatched and no identifiable embryos were detected when the eggs' contents were examined.

Measurements of eggs are given below.

	10/75A	10/75B*	10/75C*
Length (mm)	105.0	101.5	103.2
Width (mm)	66.0	60.0	66.0
Weight in g (shell plus contents)	206.0	185.0	210.0
Weight in g (shell only)	26.1	—	—

*Data provided by R. Drewien, Idaho Cooperative Wildlife Research Unit.

¹BENT, A. C. 1927. *Life histories of North American marsh birds*. U.S. Nat. Mus. Bull. 135. pp. 219-231.

²KUYT, E. 1975. *Nest site fidelity, productivity and breeding habitat of whooping cranes, Wood Buffalo National Park, Northwest Territories, Canada*. In Crane research round the world. International Crane Foundation. (in press)

³NOVAKOWSKI, N. S. 1966. *Whooping crane population dynamics on the nesting grounds, Wood Buffalo National Park, Northwest Territories, Canada*. C.W.S. Rept. Ser. No. 1. 20 pp.



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LOCAL BIRD NAMES. Lark Bunting: *Buffalo bird* (Man.); *prairie bobolink* (Its coloration, plumage changes, flight, and song are reminiscent of those of the bobolink. Sask.); *white-winged blackbird* (general). From *Folk-Names of Canadian Birds*, W. L. McAtee. Bull. 149. Nat. Mus. Canada. 1959.