

# WHOOPING CRANE SIGHTINGS PRAIRIE PROVINCES 1977 AND 1978

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Voluntary reports of Whooping Cranes seen in the Prairie Provinces were solicited enthusiastically by Charles L. Broley of Winnipeg, Manitoba about the end of WWII.<sup>1</sup> Broley systematically alerted journalists, broadcasters, school teachers, sportsmen, policemen, businessmen, government officials and others, essentially anyone who would listen, to the need for information on the distribution of Whooping Cranes. The search was on by naturalists at that time for the breeding locations in Canada of Whooping Cranes that wintered near Rockport, Texas. Beginning in the spring of 1945 those reports from volunteers and others were collected, collated and interpreted by Fred Bard of Regina. Bard, later Director of the Saskatchewan Museum of Natural History (SMNH), continued receiving reports and after his retirement the staff of the museum carried on until the summer of 1977. About this time the responsibility was reconsidered, then assumed by Canadian Wildlife Service (CWS) and assigned to staff at Prairie Migratory Bird Research Centre (PMBRC), Saskatoon. The voluntary reports were still seen as useful preliminary data in migratory bird conservation and most usefully carried out as close as possible to that errand. Methods used and results to date are reported here.

Reports on birds believed to be Whooping Cranes were received at PMBRC. Reports by mail were either on forms distributed by CWS to wildlife management agencies in the Prairie Provinces or in letters. Information received by telephone was recorded at PMBRC. On receipt, all records were assigned a number.

When validity and relationship to other records was determined a unique number for future reference was assigned. All records thus received were bound and catalogued in the Canadian Wildlife Service library, Saskatoon.

Whooping Crane reports from technical or professional employees of a wildlife management agency were accepted without question. Similarly, sight records that were accepted by a museum or wildlife management agency were not questioned by Canadian Wildlife Service. Agencies contributing information were as follows: Alberta Department of Parks Recreation and Wildlife (APRW), Manitoba Department Mines Natural Resources and Environment (MRRTS), Saskatchewan Departments of Tourism and Renewable Resources (STRR) and Northern Saskatchewan (SNS), United States Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) and Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP). If the sighting was not accepted as valid when received, an investigation was attempted by interview, mail or visiting the site. The data gathering system was essentially the same as that used in the past by Bard and others.

The decision to investigate on site was based on likely yield of information per unit of effort. If biological characteristics described by the observer fitted Whooping Cranes, if the birds were not flying, if the observation was made within a day, then an investigation was made by (or requested of) a qualified wildlife management officer. If investigation could not be made, or was in-

TABLE 1. Accepted Whooping Crane sightings Prairie Provinces, 1977-78.

Location	Number <sup>1</sup>	Date	Observer remarks, CWS record
1. Willmar, SK 49°, 102°; 5-4-W2	2	24/04/78	T. Leggatt, accepted by STRR; 78-04-03
2. Creelman, SK 49°, 103°; 10-11-W2	3	16/09/77	D. Danaluk, STRR "birds had been present for 3 weeks"; 77-09-04
3. Tribune, SK 49°, 103°; 4-14-W2	2:1	24/10/77	S. Barber, STRR; 77-10-16
4. Talmage, SK 49, 103°; 9-12-W2	3	05/10/77	D. Harvey, STRR seen again 6, 11, 14/10; 77-10-05
5. Skiff, AB 49°, 111°; 5-13-W4	1	15/09/77	A.G. Loughrey, CWS, seen again 16/09; 77-09-03.
6. Eyebrow, SK 50°, 106°; 23-2-W3	1	02/09/77	H. Hedger, STRR, lone "adult" present until 03/09 p.m.; 77-09-01
7. Paysen Lake, SK 50°, 106°; 20-6-W3	2	23/08/78	D. McGregor, accepted by SMNH; 78'08'01
8. Mortlach, SK 50°, 106°; 18-1-W3	2	18/10/78	D. Flack, seen again 19, 20/10 accepted by SMNH; 78-10-07
9. Antelope, SK 50°, 108°; 14-18-W3	5	10/10/78	F. Bard, accepted by SMNH; 78-10-02
10. Gypsumville, MB 51°, 98°; 32-8-W1	2U	16/04/78	C. Rhur, MRRTS; 78-04-01
11. Kandahar, SK 51°, 104°; 32-17, 18-W2	2	25/09/78	R. Blyth, E.J. Brady, confirmed by STRR, present daily until 12/10; 78-09-02
12. Lockwood, SK 51°, 104°; 31-20-W2	1	31/10/77	L. Fargo accepted by STRR possibly extension of record 77-08-05; 77-10-17
13. Watrous, SK 51°, 105°; 31-26-W2	1	07/07/77	R. Hanson, USFWS; 77-07-01
14. Govan, SK 51°, 105°; 28-23-W2	4:1	15/10/77	R. Kreba and others, confirmed STRR, CWS, 15, 16, 17/10, juvenile with red band right leg; 77-10-12
15. Simpson, SK 51°, 105°; 27-24-W2 104°; 28-22-W2 ; 28-23-W2 ; 28-24-W2 ; 29-22-W2 ; 31-21-W2	1	24/08/77	K. Roney, accepted by SMNH, confirmed by CWS and others, seen again 20, 21, 24, 27/09, 02/10 possibly same bird as 77-07-01; 77-08-05
16. Zelma, SK 51°, 105°; 32-28-W2	2	06/10/78	E. Dieno and others, confirmed by STRR, seen again 7, 9, 12, 17 21/10; 78-10-03
17. Pike Lake, SK 51°, 106°; 32-6-W3	2:1	26/09/77	E. & W. Howe, accepted by CWS, seen again 27/09; 77-09-06
18. Pike Lake, SK 51°, 106°; 34-6-W3	1	22/08/77	R. K. Brace, CWS, seen again 29, 30/08; 77-08-04
19. Hawarden, SK 51°, 106°; 28-5-W3	5	07/10/77	C. Olson, STRR and others seen again 08/10; 77-10-08
20. Hawarden, SK 51°, 106°; 28-5, 6-W3	3	21/10/77	E. McMurchey & son confirmed by STRR present again 22, 24, 25/10; 77-10-14
21. Tessier, SK 51°, 107°; 32-10-W3	5	18/09/77	G. Gordon, STRR and others; 77-09-05
22. D'arcy, SK 51°, 108°; 29-19-W3	2	06/10/78	K. Johnson, accepted by STRR; 78-10-01
23. Humboldt, SK 52°, 105°; 39-22-W2	1	15/09/77	D. Kelly, STRR; 77-09-02
24. Peterson, SK 52°, 105°; 38-26-W2	6	12/10/78	F. Bendig, J. Kirzinger, confirmed by STRR, present since end of Sept and until 28/10; 78-10-04



25. Cudworth,SK 52°,105°;40-24-W2	1	11/10/77	D. Kelly, STRR seen again 13/10; 77-10-10
26. Dana,SK 52°,105°;38-26-W2	2	22/10/77	D. Kelly, R. Clary, STRR; 77-10-15
27. Batoche,SK 52°,106°;43-1-W3	2	07/08/77	Mrs. B. Berg, accepted by STRR; 77-08-01
28. Blaine Lake,SK 52°,106°;40-6-W3	2	11/08/77	K. Steuart, accepted by SMNH; 77-08-32
29. Aberdeen,SK 52°,106°;39-2-W3	3	03/10/77	B. Rafuse, "flying"; accepted by CWS; 77-10-01
30. Aberdeen,SK 52°,106°;36-2-W3	3(5)	08/10/77	Mrs. Mason, 5 confirmed by CWS 17/10, reported 3 present "about 2 weeks, 2 more last 2-3 days" possibly extension of record 77-10-03; 77-10-09
31. St. Denis,SK 52°,106°;37-1-W3	3(4)	05/10/77	P. Fretz and others, accepted by CWS; 4th Whooping Crane reported present 06,07/10 CWS checked. None present 10/10; 77-10-03
32. Blaine Lake,SK 52°,107°;45-7,8-W3	6:1	17/10/77	R.C.M.P. and others accepted by SMNH seen again 17,19/10/ 77-10-13
33. Hafford,SK 52°,107°;42-9-W3	2	06/10/77	P. Swifton confirmed by CWS on 07/10; 77-10-06
34. North Battleford,SK 52°,108°;44-15-W3	2	07/10/77	K. Smith, STRR; 77-10-07
35. Neilburg,SK 52°,109°;46-26-W3	4:1	04/10/77	H. DeVogel, confirmed by STRR, seen again 6,7,8/12, through 24/10, juvenile red band left leg, white band right leg; 77-10-02
36. Salvador,SK 52°,109°;38-25-W3	2(4)	26/09/78	K. Smith, STRR. One crane red band left leg, right leg aluminum, both seen about one week prior, joined about 30/09 by 2 more, all present until 04/10; 78-09-03
37. Muddy Lake,SK 52°,109°;38,39-22-W3	2	30/09/78	A. Schmidt, STRR, not seen 01/10, possibly same birds as record 78-09-03; 78-09-05
38. Reward,SK 52°,109°;38-25-W3	2	12/10/78	J. Stuart and others, Stuart re- ported confirmed by STRR; 78-10-05
39. Overflowing R.,MB 53°,101°;48-25-W1	1	late 04 early 05	R. Robertson, MRRTS; 77-05-01
40. Cumberland House,SK 52°,102°;57-2-W2	1	20/04/78	R. Nabess, accepted by SNS; 78-04-02
41. Weirdale,SK 53°,105°;50-22-W2	2	21/08/77	R. Brunt, STRR, also seen 22/08; 77-08-03
42. Witchekan Lake,SK 53°,107°;51-11-W3	1	22/09/78	G. Cadieu, confirmed by STRR; 78-09-01
43. Edam,SK 53°,108°;50-20-W3	4	30/09/78	K. Cowan, STRR, present about one week prior; 78-09-04
44. Dorintosh,SK 54°,108°;62-18-W3	2:1	13/10/77	K. Murray, STRR; 77-10-11
45. Meadow Lake,SK 54°,108°;60-16-W3	5	26/04/78	R. Tumbach, H. McKenzie, STRR; 78-04-04
46. Pierceland,SK 54°,109°;62-25-W3	2:1	15/10/77	L. Payton, and others confirmed by STRR, seen again 06/10 p.m.; 77-10-04
47. Bonnyville,AB 54°,110°;61-7-W4	1	12/10/78	R. Sabourin, accepted by CWS; 78-10-06

<sup>1</sup>N = "adults" reported, groups with juveniles indicated by ratio,  
unknown age reported shown as number followed by U.

TABLE 2. Unconfirmed sightings Whooping Cranes Prairie Provinces, 1977-78.

Location	Number <sup>1</sup>	Date	Observer remarks, CWS record
48. Kenosee Lake,SK 49°,102°;10-3-W2	2	01/09/77	R. Behr, "flying"; 77014
49. Torquay,SK 49°,103°;2-13-W2	14U	25/04/78	A. Lavalee, interviewed by STRR; 78012
50. Hitchcock,SK 49°,103°;4-9-W2	3U	13/04/78	W. Eagles, investigated by STRR; 78004
51. Osage,SK 49°,103°;11-13-W2	1	28/09/77	K. Paslawski and others, received stale; 78007
52. Goodwater,SK 49°,103°;4-13-W2	2:1	16/10/77	Anonymous, received stale; 77049
53. Ponteix,SK 49°,107°;10-11-W3	1	04/11/78	H. Dickson, received stale; 78042
54. Maple Creek,SK 49°,109°;11-26-W3	12	17/10/77	D. Neely, received stale; 77051
55. Broadview,SK 50°,102°;16-5-W2	4	30/08/77	D. Francis, "flying"; 77013
56. Broadview,SK 50°,102°;16-5-W2	1	11/10/77	D. Wright, R. Richter, "went flying south"; 77045
57. Bangor,SK 50°,102°;22-2-W2	9:1	21/09/78	Mrs. J. Hilton, interviewed by CWS; 78026
58. Odessa,SK 50°,103°;16-13-W2	3U	09/04/78	G. Curtis, interviewed by STRR; 78001
59. Parkbeg,SK 50°,106°;18-31-W3	2	29/08/77	I. Girling, "only stayed about an hour"; 77012
60. Morse,SK 50°,107°;17-8-W3	1	08/09/77	J. Burroughs, investigated by STRR, CWS, 3 occasions; 77018
61. Lucky Lake,SK 50°,107°;23-10-W3	6	17/10/77	K. Scott, received stale; 77053
62. Hays,AB 50°,111°;13-13-W4	1	16/10/78	M. McColl, received stale; 78043
63. Ethelbert,MB 51°,100°;29-21-W1	5U	11/04/78	M. Dohan and others interviewed by MRRTS; 78003
64. Margo,SK 51°,103°;33-10-W2	10	07/05/78	V. & C. Lowey, investigated by STRR; 78019
65. Wadena,SK 51°,103°;33-13-W2	3	04/09/77	Mrs. H. D. Meyers, "flying"; 77016
66. Semans,SK 51°,104°;28-21-W2	1	06/10/77	R. Eddy, received stale; 77039
67. Plunkett,SK 51°,105°;35-24-W2	5	25/04/78	T. Grisdale, "flying"; 78013
68. Venn,SK 51°,105°;31-24-W2	1	25/09/78	L. Farago and others, received stale; 78032
69. Nokomis,SK 51°,105°;28-23-W2	7:1	17/10/78	R. Eddy, investigated by CWS; 78034
70. Hawarden,SK 51°,106°;28-3-W3	1	30/09/77	G. Kenege, received stale; 77030
71. Glidden,SK 51°,108°;27-21-W3	4:3	29/09/77	A. Oswald and friend, investigated by STRR; 77029
72. Loverna,SK 51°,109°;30-28-W3	11:3	03/10/77	H. Pyttlik, "flying" investigated by CWS; 77032
73. Alsask,SK 51°,109°;28-29-W3	7 7	06/10/77	E. Bernier, investigated by CWS; 77038
74. Smiley,SK 51°,109°;31-25-W3	2U	14/04/78	H. Ternes, interviewed by STRR same birds reported present several days prior; 78006
75. Chelan,SK 52°,103°;42-11-W2	2	30/04/78	Mrs. Saunders, interviewed by STRR; 78016
76. Anaheim,SK 52°,104°;38-20-W2	4	20/04/78	A. Hoffman, received stale, "fly- ing"; 78009



77. Cudworth,SK 52°,105°;41-24-W2	1	16/09/77	E. Lepp, received stale; 77022
78. Lake Lenore,SK 52°,105°;41-22-W2	2	23/09/77	B. Pfeiffer, received stale; 77025
79. Bruno,SK 52°,105°;38-25-W2	12	25/04/78	B. Seidel, "flying"; 78014
80. Prud'homme,SK 52°,105°;38-28-W2	7:1	23/10/77	J. Seilski, received stale; 77059
81. Saskatoon,SK 52°,106°;36-6-W3	3	30/10/77	J. Larson "flying"; 77059
82. Aberdeen,SK 52°,106°;39-2-W3	7U	21/07/78	Mrs. H. Jones and others; 78023
83. Speers,SK 52°,107°;45-12-W3	4	05/05/78	C. Strautman and others, inter- viewed by STRR; 78018
84. Meath Park,SK 53°,105°;52-22-W2	4	05/09/77	L. Desrocher, investigated by STRR, 2 field trips; 77017
85. Turtleford,SK 53°,108°;50-20-W3	4	23/09/78	H. Ringrose, interviewed by CWS photographed, present for 4-5 days; 78029
86. Green Lake,SK 54°,107°;61-12-W3	3	01/08/78	B. Sanregret, interviewd by APRW; 78024
87. Dorintosh,SK 54°,108°;62-19-W3	2:1	12/10/77	J. Twidale and J. Chwelos, seen again 13/10, received stale; 77046
88. Meadow Lake,SK 54°,108°;60-19-W3	8	04/05/78	G. Head, interviewed by STRR; 78017
89. Meadow Lake,SK 54°,108°;59-18-W3	7	21/10/78	J. Dodds, "flying", interviewed STRR; 78039
90. Flatbush,AB 54°,114°;2-66-W5	4U	22/06/78	S. Whitelock, interviewed by APRW; 78021
91. Flatbush,AB 54°,113°;65-26-W4	2	??/06/78	S. Whitelock, interviewed by APRW; 78022

<sup>1</sup>Number = "adults" reported, groups with juveniles indicated by ratio, unknown age reported shown as number followed by U.

conclusive, the sighting was treated as unconfirmed. Reports were discredited if the biological characteristics of the bird described did not fit Whooping Cranes, other details of the sighting were incomplete, and the report could not be investigated.

When accepted, records were classified as new for the season, repeats, or an extension. Subsequent sighting of same number on different dates, additional numbers or the same numbers reported in adjacent locations were treated as extensions. The next legal township (36 mi<sup>2</sup> block, effectively about 25 km radius) was considered adjacent. Topographic maps scale 1:250,000 were used to check described locations, legal land description and identify latitude and longitude of the sighting. Verbal description of location usually includ-

ed a nearby town. If not, a town shown on a highway map was included in the record. The records were then tabulated by their estimated validity and location of sighting.

Sight records, in the form of raw data or summaries were forwarded periodically to contributing volunteers, museums, RCMP and wildlife management agencies in the Prairie Provinces, and selected officials in USFWS. Sightings of birds reported to Canadian Wildlife Service as Whooping Cranes resulted in 47 records which were accepted (Table 1) and 44 which could not be confirmed (Table 2). Twenty-three reports were discredited on the basis of incorrect or insufficient biological and/or site detail.

Locations of accepted and unconfirmed sightings in 1977 and 1978 follow a southeast to northwest dis-



Figure 1. Whooping Crane Records — 1977-1978

tribution in Saskatchewan with aggregates near Weyburn, Saskatoon and Meadow Lake (Figure 1). Whatever the clusters may represent in terms of Whooping Crane migration ecology and behaviour, they reflect high likelihood of reported human encounters. This is important management information as it indicates where and when events occur, that may affect Whooping Cranes, at least to the extent they are reported.

The data presented here are limited. For example, only 14 family groups were reported out of 91 records. The earliest of those family groups was 26 September for an accepted record and 21 September unconfirmed. I would readily hypothesize that family groups are not seen in Saskatchewan until the third week of September. In 1978 none were reported at all. Chronology of migration provides important management information. Cumulative analysis of these data will provide insight for managers asking the questions of what to do, where, when and why? For those reasons as well as

satisfying the willingness to share a free and rare human experience, sightings of Whooping Cranes in the Prairie Provinces should continue to be reported.

Reports should continue to be made as they have in the past, i.e., to the nearest official of a wildlife agency or a wildlife-related agency such as a provincial museum or local RCMP. The responsibility for summarizing the records has been assumed by CWS but we certainly can't do all the work of investigating and interpreting the records.

I want to thank all the volunteers who forwarded information on birds thought to be Whooping Cranes. I also thank J. B. Gollop for helping by personal acquaintance of volunteers and practical approach to tabulation and storage of the records. I owe special thanks to Brian Johns for checking tabulations against records and compilation of the map.

<sup>1</sup>McCOY, J. J. 1966. The hunt for the Whooping Crane: A natural history detective story. Lothrop, Lee & Shepard, New York. 223 pp. illus.