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# MEMBERS VIEWPOINTS

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## WHOOPING CRANE TOURS

In the beginning of September 1977, four big white crane-like birds accompanied by one slightly smaller brown coloured one landed near a small lake on a farm a few miles north of Neilburg. Word of this "happy event" spread fast through the community. The result was not pleasant for the Whooping Cranes. As soon as they left their resting place to feed in the stubble, they were surrounded by cars and trucks with cameras sticking out of the windows, and had to fly back to the same place at the lake.

Whooping Cranes are not like lions in Africa's National Parks who can eat, sleep (mostly) or do whatever they do surrounded by vehicles. Cranes will never stop on this same place again. The lake is dried up and surrounded by oil wells.

There are fewer and fewer places where Whooping Cranes can stop unmolested on their long migration flight.

Years later, Whooping Cranes north of Battleford were so badly hounded by an American crew, that the land owners finally complained. Those people were free-lance photographers. Land owners have been mostly very co-operative. Some even posted their land for the duration of the cranes' stay. Only one did not want them on his swathed grain for fear that they would attract large flocks of Sandhill Cranes.

The first and only time I have been exposed to commercial crane watching was

one winter in the little town of Rock Port (East Texas, near Corpus Christie). I arrived there by bus and the motel in which I was staying was right on Aransas Bay, a shallow arm of the Gulf of Mexico. There was a tour boat named "The Whooping Crane." It took you, for a substantial amount of money, on a daily tour to see the world famous Whooping Cranes on their wintering ground.

The captain and tour leader was quite a character. Sometimes he sounded like a carnival barker to me.

We saw several pairs of Whooping Cranes, a lot of other shore birds and quite a few white pelicans. The cranes were less wary than on Saskatchewan grain fields. I think this was because they were on their own territory, close to water and the boat had to stay in a dredged channel, not too close to shore.

Halfway on the trip, through my binoculars I spotted a measly little coyote looking at some pelicans on the water. I mentioned it to the guy standing next to me. Word spread like wildfire through the "birdwatchers." The captain stopped the boat and announced through the loudspeaker, "Folks, this way if you want to see a real wolf."

I met a dedicated young couple of American naturalists. They showed me a lot, including the headquarters of Aransas Wildlife Refuge. No commercial Whooping Crane watching there, instead

a high observation tower from which you could look over the immense tidal flats of the Gulf of Mexico.

I spent two summers on canoe trips in Wood Buffalo Park, even flew with the wardens on buffalo counts over a part of the park. We never even got near to the breeding grounds on the Sass river. No Whooping Crane tours there.

It seems to me that they are most vulnerable during the two or three weeks stop-over period on Saskatchewan's grain fields. There they are exposed to commercial Whooping Crane Tours. No matter how well conducted, there must always be a certain amount of "sneaking up" to get better photos.

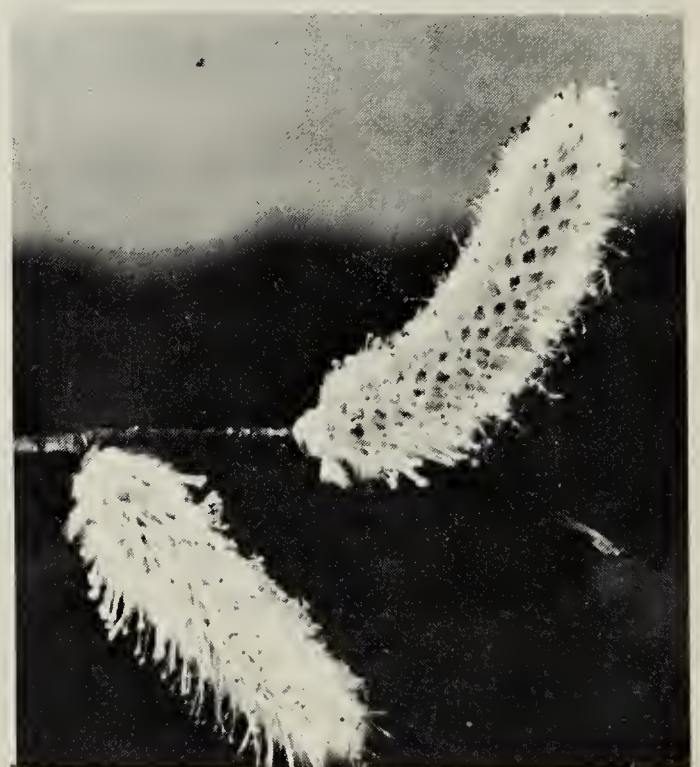
Millions of dollars are spent trying to keep the Whooping Cranes with us on this planet. I think that it is, to say the least, "strange" that the SNHS is obtaining revenue from this still very much endangered species. That is my viewpoint. — *Hans de Vogel*, Neilburg, the middle west rural part of Saskatchewan.

**NOTE:** A pamphlet published for the Whooping Crane Network by National Audubon Society called "*Is it a Whooping Crane?*" contains the following: "**WARNING:** Whooping cranes are easily disturbed, therefore please exercise caution in making observations. It usually is not helpful to publicize their exact location: overzealous photographers and observers can cause the birds to leave an area prematurely."

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## A TAXONOMIC REMINDER FOR RECOGNIZING SASKATCHEWAN PLANTS

John Hudson's guide for botanists which gives key characters by which closely resembling Saskatchewan species can be separated is still available from the society. It comes with checklists for four sections of the province. The current price is \$8.00 from the **Blue Jay Bookshop, P.O. Box 1121, Regina, Saskatchewan. S4P 3B4**



*Willow catkins*

*R.E. Gehlert*