

UNUSUAL CONCENTRATIONS OF SANDHILL CRANES DURING THE BREEDING SEASON

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On 14 and 15 June 1989, Blair McMahon and I observed large numbers of adult Sandhill Cranes feeding in a recent-germinated grain field on the west side of PTH #276 near Waterhen (51° 47'N, 99° 35'W). Starting in mid-afternoon on 14 June, cranes were noticed flying in from all directions. By 8:30 p.m., 86-90 cranes had assembled on the field. At 11:55 p.m. all but a handful of birds had flown away. The area was also checked on 15 June when at least 112 adult cranes were observed in the field at 6:30 p.m. Sandhill Cranes typically aggregate in early morning and late afternoon feeding flocks during spring, fall and winter, but I could not find reference to adults concentrated into feeding areas during the breeding season.¹ It may be that these

birds were non-breeders spending the breeding season in the Westlake area. Non-breeding concentrations of Canada Geese are known to use traditional feeding areas, but this phenomenon has not been reported for Sandhill Cranes.

The observations seemed out of the ordinary given that young cranes should have been with their parents at that time of the year. Dry conditions and massive local fires likely contributed to poor 1989 Sandhill Crane productivity in Manitoba's Interlake, Westlake and boreal forest areas.

¹ STEPHEN, W.J.D. 1967. Bionomics of the Sandhill Crane. Can. Wildl. Serv. Rept. No. 2. 48 pp.



Sandhill Crane

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