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MAMMALIAN NEST PREDATION IN MISSISSIPPI SANDHILL CRANES

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Abstract: Low recruitment is the largest challenge facing the recovery of the critically endangered Mississippi sandhill crane (MSC, *Grus canadensis pulla*). Lack of information on nest predation and the impacts of specific nest predator species hinder effective management to lower nest predation rates. I have completed my first year of a 2-year research project on mammalian predation at the MSC National Wildlife Refuge in Gautier, Mississippi. I aim to identify common nest predators, determine if nest predation rates are higher in certain nesting habitats than others, and if different mammalian predators are more common in certain nesting habitats than others. I also aim to establish if there is a correlation between the most abundant predators in scent surveys and the most common nest predators. Scent station surveys are used to determine common mammalian predators throughout the refuge. I ran 7 transects of scent stations for a total of 10 days throughout winter and early spring when mammalian movement was likely to be highest, using fatty acid tablets as the attractant. The most abundant predator recorded was the coyote (*Canis latrans*), followed by the red fox (*Vulpes vulpes*) and raccoon (*Procyon lotor*). Nest cameras are used to detect nest predation events and identify specific predators. Infrared heat and motion sensor digital cameras (Reconyx Rapidfire, Holmen, WI) were installed at 22 of the 32 nests so far this season. Increasing the knowledge on the presence and behavior of mammalian predators on the refuge and in relation to the nesting sandhill cranes will help develop more effective management to increase recruitment.

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Key words: *Grus canadensis pulla*, Mississippi sandhill crane, nest predation.
