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VIDEO SURVEILLANCE OF NESTING WHOOPING CRANES

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VIDEO SURVEILLANCE OF NESTING WHOOPING CRANES

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Abstract: The primary objective of the whooping crane (*Grus americana*) recovery plan is to establish and maintain 3 self-sustaining wild populations, 1 being a non-migratory Florida population. From 1993 to 2005, we released 289 captive cranes in central Florida, with 31 surviving as of 1 June 2008. From 1995 to 2008 we monitored 68 nests of the Florida population; from those, only 32 chicks hatched and 9 fledged. It often was not apparent why nests failed, and it was not practical to conduct labor-intensive observations at nests; therefore, we collected behavioral data using 12-volt VHS video surveillance cameras at 13 nests from 2000 to 2008. We positioned cameras and time-lapse video recorders 200-500 m from each nest. We programmed 1-3 days/tape of recording to occur from 1 hour before sunrise to 1 hour after sunset. Seven of 13 nests were successful in hatching chicks, while the remainder failed during the incubation period. Relevant events recorded on the videotapes included: incubation durations, frequency of adults switching off during incubation, frequency of standing and egg turning, duration eggs were not incubated while adults were away, and possible causes of nest failure. Summary statistics relating to these behaviors and also to their possible implications regarding nest survival will be discussed. Video surveillance was a valuable tool for the efficient gathering of behavioral data at whooping crane nests.

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Key words: *Grus americana*, nesting, surveillance, video, whooping crane.
