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BOOK REVIEWS

A Chorus of Cranes: The Cranes of North America and the World. Paul A. Johnsgard (with photographs by Thomas D. Mangelsen, and drawings and maps by Paul A. Johnsgard). 2015. University Press of Colorado, Boulder, Colorado, USA. 226 pages + xviii. \$29.95 (paperback), \$23.95 (Ebook). ISBN: 978-1-60732-436-2.

Once again, naturalist and author Paul A. Johnsgard invites us to dance and chorus with cranes, and to appreciate their beauty and links to another species, *Homo sapiens*. *A Chorus of Cranes* is about natural history but also is a plea for conservation, which is a common foreword, prologue, preface, and/or epilogue of many wildlife books. It is vintage Paul Johnsgard text from preface to epilogue, words that emerge after a long wade through countless papers and reports, and a prolonged career of observation and reflection in the field. He has beckoned us before to cherish cranes and the natural world in his earlier works such as *The Platte: Channels in Time* (Johnsgard 1984a); *Cranes of the World* (Johnsgard 1984b); *Those of the Gray Wind* (Johnsgard 1986); *Crane Music* (Johnsgard 1991); *The Sandhill and Whooping Cranes* (Johnsgard 2011); and over 60 other books and numerous papers.

As an update to Johnsgard's earlier work *Crane Music*, *A Chorus of Cranes* focusses on North America's Sandhill Crane (*Grus canadensis*) and Whooping Crane (*G. americana*) and briefly summarizes the world's other crane species; 126 pages are devoted to sandhills and whoopers and only 34 pages for the other 13 crane species. The author's prose is more than advanced in the endearing photography by Thomas D. Mangelsen, including Sandhill Crane chicks walking among lupines (*Lupinus* sp.) and nibbling on shooting star (*Dodecatheon pulchellum*), migrating sandhill wings over Alaska, wintering and feeding Whooping Cranes along coastal Texas, and roosting Sandhill Cranes on Johnsgard's beloved Platte River, Nebraska. However, two-page photo spreads of Wolves (*Canis lupus*), Moose (*Alces alces*), Snow Geese (*Chen caerulescens*), and Ross's Geese (*Chen rossii*) seem out of place in a book on cranes, and there is only one photograph of an Old World crane species (i.e., flying Grey Crowned Cranes [*Balearica regulorum*] over Tanzania).

The book's large format, 22.5 × 30 cm, has a pleasant feel, and is easy to page through. Color photos and black-and-white sketches appear at almost every turn of a page, giving the reader a real sense of cranes and their habitats in North America. There are four chapters including a short epilogue. Ample references and online sources in the appendices should further inform any crane devotee. Although Johnsgard's fine drawings of cranes are a real plus, his sketches of maps do not allow the reader to follow his often laboring but accurate descriptions of Sandhill Crane migration routes. Moreover, cramming 13 monochrome heads of Old World cranes and

their distribution onto a one-page range map of one-half of the world with often indiscernible national boundaries may hurt foreign sales of the book.

The unifying first chapter, *Crane Magic*, nicely discusses crane commonalities such as the captivating unison call, and dissects dancing, painting, bowing, and other behaviors. Chronicling the relation between humans and cranes in myth and lore from Neolithic times, through the early Greeks, to Asian veneration of cranes, and ties to Christian morality, the author reminds us of their link to us and wonders why we are allowing many of the crane species to slide away as critically endangered, endangered, threatened or vulnerable species. To emphasize the *we-were-here-first* antiquity of cranes, perhaps the oldest of birds, Paul Johnsgard takes a colorful swipe at paleo-primatology: "...a few million years ago the cranes of eastern Africa were perhaps startled when some hairy-backed creatures from the nearby forests wandered out onto the expanding savannas and awkwardly began to harvest the very seeds and insects that they themselves [cranes] had so efficiently been consuming for millions of years."

The chapter on sandhills and whoopers is splendid. The photographs will bond you to cranes and force you to read the text, and the text will help you understand the stunning photographs and drive you to crane conservation. The Whooping Crane section is gripping and rich in history as the author resurrects and encapsulates the often dramatic tale of crane decline, breeding ground discovery, habitat acquisition, relentless land management conflicts, political spats, captive breeding trials and tribulations, and then victory over extinction. More sub-headings would aid the descriptions of greater, lesser and Canadian sandhill populations and their migration, and provide a place for otherwise scattered topics such as the conservation and hunting of cranes.

The topic of hunting cranes emerges repeatedly throughout the book. It is not harvesting but rather "legal killing", the author claims, as he argues stridently that we should not be killing up to 40,000 sandhills per year given the low recruitment rates of cranes and other human regards for the species. For Whooping Cranes, deliberate or accidental shooting during the hazardous migration period has slowed recovery and the reader can sense the author's recoil.

At 85, Paul Johnsgard has spent over 60 years studying and writing about the natural history of cranes, other birds and animals, and the ecosystems upon which they depend. His brief epilogue is a lament about cranes and the overall human condition. I, however, finished the book upbeat about North American cranes, the 500,000 sandhills of the gray wind. The migratory Whooping Crane population that stood at 20 individuals in the 1940s now tops 300, and Johnsgard fittingly writes: "We owe this good fortune to the work of a great number of dedicated field biologists, aviculturists, and scientists, plus individuals and organizations who have

helped to underwrite the purchase of critical habitats or to fund research needed to maintain a viable population of Whooping Cranes. Very few people are lucky enough to feel as if they have helped save a species from extinction; these are among the select few.”

Having worked in African national parks, where the Black Crowned Crane (*Balearica pavonina*) and Grey Crowned Crane no longer occur, I was initially chagrined that little was said about Old World cranes. However, I highly recommend *A Chorus of Cranes* not only for its comprehensive content on Sandhill Cranes and Whooping Cranes but because of the example set forth by Americans and Canadians in the study and conservation of North American cranes is worthy of review by crane conservationists throughout the world.—*John G. Sidle, Peace Corps Volunteer, Secretariat of the Pacific Regional Environment Programme, P.O. Box 240, Apia, Samoa; topi@bbc.net.*

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