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WHOOPING CRANE SIGHTINGS, AUGUST 1997-January 1998
Compiled from Information Provided by
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Cooperation throughout the Whooping Crane flyway continues to be excellent, and special thanks go out to each participant. Between 1977 and 1988, 132 juvenile birds were color-marked on the breeding grounds, and 40 were accounted for during the winter of 1997-98. Fourteen color-marked Whooping Cranes were observed during the fall migration. All sightings of color-marked birds are maintained at the Grand Island office. The importance of observers looking closely for the colored leg bands cannot be overemphasized.

Based on observations of the breeding grounds during the summer of 1997, about 192 Whooping Cranes were expected to arrive at the Aransas National Wildlife Refuge in Texas during the fall. The first arrival was confirmed on 21 October. A record 181 Whooping Cranes are believed to have reached Aransas, including 29 young birds, also a record number. On 22 January 1998, a juvenile Whooping Crane was confirmed to be wintering with Sandhill Cranes near San Bernard National Wildlife Refuge, Brazoria County, Texas. Thus, a total of 182 Whooping Cranes (152 adults/subadults and 30 young) were wintering at Aransas and in Brazoria County, Texas. Two sets of twins were observed in Saskatchewan, Canada during the fall migration, but only one set arrived at Aransas, the first to reach there since the winter of 1964-65. As of 29 January 1998, eight adult/subadult cranes, of the number anticipated, had not arrived at Aransas. The only confirmed mortality was a subadult found dead under a powerline in Saskatchewan on 13 October 1997.

The first dates for confirmed observations of migrating Whooping Cranes were 11 August in Canada and 14 September in the United States. The last sighting date was 7 December in Texas. Confirmed sightings were reported from Saskatchewan (46); North Dakota (14); South Dakota (13); Nebraska (6); Kansas (11); Oklahoma (3); and Texas (1). The 13 confirmed sightings reported in South Dakota set a fall migration record for the state. The combined total of 94 confirmed sightings in Canada and the United States established a new fall migration record.

The weather during September through mid-October was mild. The only major storm during the fall migration occurred on 24-25 October when heavy snow fell over parts of North and South Dakota, Nebraska, and Kansas. Aided by low-pressure systems, which reached the Texas coast on 1 and 5 November, 122 birds arrived at Aransas between 31 October and 6 November. Temperatures during November and December were normal or above normal with no major storms.

In addition to the confirmed and probable sightings in Nebraska shown in the following table, there were several unconfirmed sightings, including 2 adults flying over the west edge of Grand Island, Hall Co. on 27 October, 20-25 adults flying near Johnson Lake in Dawson Co. on 26-27 October, and the following sightings in Custer Co.: 1 adult flying 1 mi. east of Callaway on 14 October, 2 adults flying over Comstock on 23 October, and 1 adult flying 6 mi. east and 2 mi. north of Broken Bow on 30 October.

Legal descriptions of locations by township and range, and information for other states can be obtained from the NBR Editor or from Mr. Wally Jobman at the address given under the title.

Sighting Dates
8/97-1/98

No. Cranes
adults/young

Location

Confirmed Sightings:

10/21-23	5	Brown Co., 3 mi. west, 3 mi. south of Ainsworth.
10/23	2	Garfield Co., 6 mi. northwest of Burwell, Calamus Reservoir.
10/22-31	4 / 2	Blaine Co., Middle Loup River, 0.75 mi. downstream from Milburn Diversion Dam, 2 mi. northwest of Milburn.
10/23-24	2	Lincoln Co., Lake Maloney, 6 mi. south, 2 west of North Platte.
10/24-31	5 / 2	Buffalo Co., 9 mi west of Pleasanton.
10/30-31	2	Custer Co., 0.5 mi. north of Milburn.

Probable Sightings:

10/21	1	Cherry Co., 6 mi. north of Valentine.
10/25-26	2 / 1	Custer Co., 9 mi. south of Comstock.
10/29-30	2	Custer Co. near Victoria Springs.