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ANOTHER COMMON CRANE IN NEBRASKA WITH A SUMMARY
OF NORTH AMERICAN RECORDS

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On 30 March 1996 around 1000 h CST, Bob Janssen and Jim Williams of Minnetonka, Minnesota discovered a Common Crane (*Grus grus*) feeding in corn stubble with a flock of Sandhill Cranes (*Grus canadensis*) in Section 34 T9R10 Hall County, Nebraska. The Common Crane associated with the Sandhill Cranes, which were at peak numbers in the Platte River valley. Later that day, several observers, including myself, witnessed the bird in Section 32, about 500 yards away, where it mingled with a few hundred Sandhill Cranes. The difficulty in seeing this bird was illustrated by the fact that during a 2-hour period, it was visible for less than 10 minutes despite the fact that about 15 observers maintained constant vigilance on the spot where the crane loafed, but was obscured by the Sandhill Cranes. It was seen only when it raised its head above the Sandhill Cranes.

The following morning (31 March 1996), Thomas Labeledz and I located the Common Crane in Section 27 at 0845 h CST. It was feeding in corn stubble with a few hundred Sandhill Cranes. I was able to photograph the bird from a vehicle at a distance of about 300 yards using a 400 mm lens (Figure 1). The light was excellent and we were able to see its red iris and red patch on the back of its head through a spotting scope. We decided that it was an adult based on plumage characteristics. After about 20 minutes, the bird flew south about 1 mile and landed in corn stubble in Section 34 with about 1000 Sandhill Cranes. Other people observed the bird that day as well. Scattered sightings of the Common Crane were reported through 8 April 1996, but they were not confirmed by photographs or other documentation. Its nocturnal roost site was never located which was not surprising, since there were about 60,000 Sandhill Cranes roosting in the Platte River about 5 miles north of this location, and it would have been extremely difficult

to pick out the lone Common Crane in among the masses of Sandhill Cranes.



Figure 1. A Common Crane (on left with white head patch) in corn stubble in Section 27 T9R10 Hall County on 31 March 1996.

This sighting is the fourth record for Nebraska and the tenth for North America (Table 1). The ranges of Sandhill Cranes and

Table 1. Summary of Common Crane records for North America.

Date	Location	Authority	Photo	Comments
11-20 Dec. 1957	Cavendish, Alberta	Wishart and Sharp (1959)	Yes	1 bird; age unknown
20 Mar. 1958	Lethbridge, Alberta	Wishart and Sharp (1959)	Yes	1 bird; age unknown
24 Apr.-10 May 1958	Fairbanks, Alaska	Kessel and Kelly (1958)	Yes	1 sub-adult
19 Sept. 1958	Athabasca, Alberta	Wishart and Sharp (1959)	Yes	1 bird: age unknown
Mar. 1963	Bitter Lakes NWR, New Mexico	Hubbard (1978)	No	1 bird: age unknown, considered probable
10 Jan.-3 Feb. 1979	Brownfield, Texas	Tacha et al. (1981)	No	Age unknown; not accepted by Texas Ornithol. Society Records Committee
26-31 Mar. 1972	Lincoln Co., Nebraska	Tremaine (1972)	Yes	1 adult?
31 Mar.-1 Apr. 1972	Phelps Co., Nebraska	Tremaine (1972)	Yes	1 adult?
16-25 Mar. 1974	Buffalo Co., Nebraska	Cochran (1974)	Yes	1 bird; age unknown
30-31 Mar. 1996	Hall Co., Nebraska	This report	Yes	1 adult

Common Cranes overlap in eastern Siberia. It is likely that the Common Crane we observed originated in eastern Asia and mixed with Sandhill Cranes, following them south to winter in North America. Previous sightings from Alberta and Alaska occurred during successive migration periods (fall 1957, spring 1958, fall 1958) and may have been the same individual. Birders in Nebraska should

look very closely at cranes next spring due to the remote possibility of finding another rather uncommon Common Crane.

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