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## Whooping Crane Sightings, August-December 1996

Steven Anschutz

*U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Steve\_Anschutz@fws.gov*

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WHOOPING CRANE SIGHTINGS, AUGUST-DECEMBER 1996  
Compiled from information provided by  
Steven Anschutz, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service  
203 West Second St., Grand Island, NE 68801

Based on observations of the breeding grounds during the summer of 1996, about 170 Whooping Cranes were expected to arrive at the Aransas National Wildlife Refuge in Texas during the fall. The first arrival (two birds) was confirmed on 23 October. A total of 158 birds (143 adults/subadults and 15 young) were wintering at Aransas 1996-97. As of 16 January 1997, six adults and eight subadults, of the number anticipated, had not arrived at the refuge.

The first recorded dates for confirmed observations of migrating Whooping Cranes were 2 August in Canada and 22 September in the United States. The last sighting date was 4 December in Texas. Sightings were reported from Saskatchewan, Canada (38); North Dakota (6); South Dakota (2); Nebraska (6); Colorado (1); Kansas (15); Missouri (1); Oklahoma (9); and Texas (3).

The weather during September through mid-October was mild. The first Whooping Crane arrival at Aransas was associated with a cold front, which reached the Texas coast on 22 October. A storm system causing blizzard-like conditions in parts of the Dakotas on 26 October, brought 40-60 mph south winds to Kansas and Nebraska. A frontal passage brought 40-60 mph northwest winds to the central Great Plains on 29 October. On 1 November, there were 58 Whooping Cranes confirmed to be present in Nebraska, Kansas, and Oklahoma. The migration progressed rapidly, and about 136 cranes arrived at Aransas between 30 October and 12 November.

Several unusual sightings were reported during the fall migration. A juvenile Whooping Crane was migrating with Sandhill Cranes in eastern Colorado on 27 October, and a lone juvenile was confirmed in northeastern Kansas on 31 October. Another juvenile

was flying alone in Nebraska on 1 November. A single, adult-plumaged bird was confirmed near Springfield, Missouri on 31 October, the first confirmed sighting in that state since 1958. There have been no subsequent reports of any of these birds.

In addition to the following confirmed and probable sightings in Nebraska, an unconfirmed sighting of one bird was reported on 12 October from Dawson Co., .25 miles west of the Overton bridge, Platte River. Legal descriptions of locations by township and range, and information for other states can be obtained from the NBR Editor or from Wally Jobman at the address given under the title.

WPA = Waterfowl Production Area.

<u>Sighting Dates</u>	<u>No. Cranes</u>	<u>Location</u>
<u>Fall 1996</u>	<u>adults/young</u>	
<u>Confirmed Sightings:</u>		
10/18-20	1	Holt Co., 9 mi. south, 5.5 mi. west of Ewing.
10/29-11/3	4	Sherman Co., Middle Loup River, .5 mi. downstream from Hwy 68 bridge, near Rockville.
11/1	/ 1	Buffalo Co., flying 5 mi. south, 2 west of Gibbon.
11/1	4 / 2	Nance Co., 2 mi. south of Belgrade.
11/2-4	2	Custer Co., 5 mi. west, 2 mi. north of Merna.
11/3	2	Buffalo Co., flying near I-80 and Hwy 44 jct. south of Kearney.
<u>Probable Sightings:</u>		
10/28	4	Howard Co., flying 4 mi. east of Boelus.
11/1	1	Phelps Co., flying over Funk WPA.