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## Whooping Crane Sightings during Spring Migration, March-May 1995

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WHOOPING CRANE SIGHTINGS DURING SPRING MIGRATION, MARCH-MAY, 1995  
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Dates and locations of confirmed and probable sightings in Nebraska

are presented in the following table. The first number under "No. of Cranes" refers to adults and the second number to young birds. The legal descriptions of locations by township and range are omitted, but may be obtained from the NBR Editor or from Wally Jobman at the address under the title. There were six unconfirmed sightings in Nebraska between March 9 and May 10 from Boyd, Buffalo, Hamilton, Hall, and Holt Counties.

<u>Sighting Date</u>	<u>No. of Cranes</u>	<u>Location</u>
<u>Confirmed Sightings:</u>		
2/10/95	0 + 1	Lincoln Co., $\frac{1}{2}$ mi. west of North Platte.
4/5/95	4 + 0	Kearney Co., Gleason Waterfowl Production Area, 4 mi. west, 4 mi. south of Minden.
4/14/95	2 + 0	Buffalo Co., Platte River, 5 mi. south, 1 mi. west of Gibbon.
4/17-21/95	2 + 0	Phelps Co., 4 mi. north, $8\frac{1}{2}$ mi. east of Holdrege, Funk WPA.
4/25/95	4 + 1	Lincoln Co., 9 mi. south, 4 mi. west of Arnold.
4/30-5/2/85	3 + 0	Furnas Co., 6 mi. east of Beaver City.
5/8-14/95	1 + 0	Hall Co., Platte River, 5 mi. west, $\frac{1}{2}$ mi. north of Doniphan.
<u>Probable Sightings:</u>		
4/20/95	1 + 0	Custer Co., flying 10 mi. southwest of Callaway.
4/21/95	1 + 0	Holt Co., flying 5 mi. east of Inman.
5/16/95	1 + 0	Hall Co., 2 mi. south of Alda bridge.
5/28/95	1 + 0	Keya Paha/Brown Cos., Niobrara River, 1 mi. downstream from Norden bridge.

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A peak population of 132 (125 adult/subadult and 7 juvenile) Whooping Cranes was reported at Aransas National Wildlife Refuge during the winter of 1994-95. An additional juvenile wintered with Sandhill Cranes in west-central Oklahoma. No birds were lost during the winter. The 133 cranes beginning the spring migration represent a net decrease of 2 birds from the 135 present in spring, 1994. A

census flight on March 23, 1995 revealed that all 132 cranes from Aransas were present. By April 6, about 60 cranes had begun to migrate, and by April 18 only 10 cranes were present at Aransas. All but two cranes had migrated by May 15 and, at last report, these two birds were still at Aransas.

The juvenile that had wintered in Oklahoma, migrated with Sandhill Cranes and on February 1 was observed at Optima National Wildlife Refuge in the Oklahoma panhandle. It apparently migrated with Sandhill Cranes to North Platte, Nebraska, where it was confirmed on February 10. This was the first Whooping Crane ever confirmed in Nebraska during February. Cold, snowy weather sent the bird back south to Optima, where it was observed on February 17. It then decided to visit southeastern Colorado, where it was last seen March 10 - April 2 north of Lamar.

The weather was a big factor during the spring migration because of snow/rain and persistent north winds, particularly in the Northern Great Plains during April. Heavy snow (1-3 feet), accompanied by strong north winds, produced blizzard conditions in parts of Nebraska and South Dakota on April 10-11 and 17-18. The most unusual sighting was the confirmation of 8 Whooping Cranes flying north of Denver on April 20, the furthest west that birds from the Wood Buffalo flock have ever been reported in Colorado.

The first dates recorded for confirmed observations of migrating Whooping Cranes were April 5 in the United States (Nebraska) and April 16 in Canada. The last sighting date was May 8 in both the U.S. (Nebraska) and Canada (Saskatchewan). Sightings were reported from Oklahoma (2); Kansas (2); Colorado (2); Nebraska (7); South Dakota (7); North Dakota (1); and Saskatchewan, Canada (8).