



Species Profile

Environmental Conservation Online System

<http://www.fws.gov>

Whooping crane (*Grus americana*)

Kingdom: Animalia **Class:** Aves **Order:** Gruiformes **Family:** Gruidae

Listing Status: Endangered and Experimental Population, Non-Essential

Quick links: [Federal Register \(#status\)](#) [Action Plans \(#actionPlans\)](#) [Recovery \(#recovery\)](#) [Critical Habitat \(#crithab\)](#) [Conservation Plans \(#conservationPlans\)](#) [Petitions \(#petitions\)](#) [Life History \(#lifeHistory\)](#) [Other Resources \(#other\)](#)



/docs/species_images/doc3703.jpg

General Information

The whooping crane occurs only in North America and is North America's tallest bird, with males approaching 1.5 m (5 ft) when standing erect. The whooping crane adult plumage is snowy white except for black primaries, black or grayish alula (specialized feathers attached to the upper leading end of the wing), sparse black bristly feathers on the carmine crown and malar region (side of the head from the bill to the angle of the jaw), and a dark gray-black wedge-shaped patch on the nape. The common name "whooping crane" probably originated from the loud, single-note vocalization given repeatedly by the birds when they are alarmed. Whooping cranes are a long-lived species; current estimates suggest a maximum longevity in the wild of at least 30 years. Whooping cranes currently exist in the wild at 3 locations and in captivity at 12 sites. The July 2010 total wild population was estimated at 383. There is only one self-sustaining wild population, the Aransas-Wood Buffalo National Park population, which nests in Wood Buffalo National Park and adjacent areas in Canada, and winters in coastal marshes in Texas at Aransas. In addition, there is a small captive-raised, non-migratory population in central Florida, and a small migratory population of individuals introduced beginning in 2001 that migrate between Wisconsin and Florida in an eastern migratory population. The last remaining wild bird in the reintroduced Rocky Mountain Population died in the spring of 2002. The captive population contained 152 birds in July, 2010, with annual production from the Calgary Zoo, International Crane Foundation, Patuxent Wildlife Research Center, Audubon Species Survival Center, and the San Antonio Zoo. The total population of wild and captive whooping cranes in July, 2010, was 535.

Population detail

The FWS is currently monitoring the following populations of the Whooping crane

.....

States/US Territories in which this population is known to or is believed to occur: [Alabama](#) (</speciesProfile/profile/countiesByState.action?entityId=7342&state=Alabama>) , [Arkansas](#) (</speciesProfile/profile/countiesByState.action?entityId=7342&state=Arkansas>) , [Georgia](#) (</speciesProfile/profile/countiesByState.action?entityId=7342&state=Georgia>) , [Illinois](#) (</speciesProfile/profile/countiesByState.action?entityId=7342&state=Illinois>) , [Indiana](#) (</speciesProfile/profile/countiesByState.action?entityId=7342&state=Indiana>) , [Iowa](#) (</speciesProfile/profile/countiesByState.action?entityId=7342&state=Iowa>) , [Kentucky](#) (</speciesProfile/profile/countiesByState.action?entityId=7342&state=Kentucky>) , [Louisiana](#) (</speciesProfile/profile/countiesByState.action?entityId=7342&state=Louisiana>) , [Michigan](#) (</speciesProfile/profile/countiesByState.action?entityId=7342&state=Michigan>) , [Minnesota](#) (</speciesProfile/profile/countiesByState.action?entityId=7342&state=Minnesota>) , [Mississippi](#) (</speciesProfile/profile/countiesByState.action?entityId=7342&state=Mississippi>) , [Missouri](#) (</speciesProfile/profile/countiesByState.action?entityId=7342&state=Missouri>) , [North Carolina](#) (</speciesProfile/profile/countiesByState.action?entityId=7342&state=North Carolina>) , [Ohio](#) (</speciesProfile/profile/countiesByState.action?entityId=7342&state=Ohio>) , [South Carolina](#) (</speciesProfile/profile/countiesByState.action?entityId=7342&state=South Carolina>) , [Tennessee](#) (</speciesProfile/profile/countiesByState.action?entityId=7342&state=Tennessee>) , [Virginia](#) (</speciesProfile/profile/countiesByState.action?entityId=7342&state=Virginia>) , [West Virginia](#) (</speciesProfile/profile/countiesByState.action?entityId=7342&state=West Virginia>) , [Wisconsin](#) (</speciesProfile/profile/countiesByState.action?entityId=7342&state=Wisconsin>)

US Counties in which this population is known to or is believed to occur: [View All](#) (</speciesProfile/profile/countiesBySpecies.action?entityId=7342>)

For more information: http://ecos.fws.gov/docs/life_histories/B003.html
(http://ecos.fws.gov/docs/life_histories/B003.html)

- **Population location:** U.S.A. (CO, ID, FL, NM, UT, and the western half of Wyoming)

Listing status: **Experimental Population, Non-Essential**

States/US Territories in which this population is known to or is believed to occur: [Colorado](#) (</speciesProfile/profile/countiesByState.action?entityId=4679&state=Colorado>) , [Florida](#) (</speciesProfile/profile/countiesByState.action?entityId=4679&state=Florida>) , [New Mexico](#) (</speciesProfile/profile/countiesByState.action?entityId=4679&state=New Mexico>) , [Oklahoma](#) (</speciesProfile/profile/countiesByState.action?entityId=4679&state=Oklahoma>) , [Texas](#) (</speciesProfile/profile/countiesByState.action?entityId=4679&state=Texas>)

US Counties in which this population is known to or is believed to occur: [View All](#) (</speciesProfile/profile/countiesBySpecies.action?entityId=4679>)

For more information: http://ecos.fws.gov/docs/life_histories/B003.html
(http://ecos.fws.gov/docs/life_histories/B003.html)

Current Listing Status Summary

Status	Date Listed	Lead Region	Where Listed
Endangered	03/11/1967	Southwest Region (Region 2) (http://www.fws.gov/southwest/)	except where EXPN
Experimental Population, Non-Essential	02/03/2011	Southeast Region (Region 4) (http://www.fws.gov/southeast/)	U.S.A (Southwestern Louisiana)

Status	Date Listed	Lead Region	Where Listed
Experimental Population, Non-Essential	06/26/2001	Southwest Region (Region 2) (http://www.fws.gov/southwest/)	U.S.A.(AL, AR, GA, IL, IN, IA, KY, LA, MI, MN, MS, MO, NC, OH, SC, TN, VA, WI, WV)
Experimental Population, Non-Essential	01/22/1993	Southeast Region (Region 4) (http://www.fws.gov/southeast/)	U.S.A. (CO, ID, FL, NM, UT, and the western half of Wyoming)

» Federal Register Documents

Most Recent Federal Register Documents (Showing 5 of 18: [view all](#))

(</speciesProfile/profile/displayAllDocuments?fedreg.action;jsessionid=9DF475181F14DCCA23994D23232012A1?scode=B003>)

Date	Citation Page	Title
02/03/2011	76 FR 6066 6082	Establishment of a Nonessential Experimental Population of Endangered Whooping Cranes in Southwestern Louisiana (http://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/pkg/FR-2011-02-03/pdf/2011-2367.pdf)
08/19/2010	75 FR 51223 51237	Establishment of a Nonessential Experimental Population of Endangered Whooping Cranes in Southwestern Louisiana (http://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/search/citation.result.FR.action?federalRegister.volume=2010&federalRegister.page=51223&publication=FR)
03/29/2010	75 FR 15454 15456	5-Year Status Reviews of 14 Southwestern Species (http://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/search/citation.result.FR.action?federalRegister.volume=2010&federalRegister.page=15454&publication=FR)
05/29/2007	72 FR 29544	Notice of Availability of the Revised Recovery Plan for the Whooping Crane (<i>Grus americana</i>) (http://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/search/citation.result.FR.action?federalRegister.volume=2007&federalRegister.page=29544&publication=FR)
01/11/2005	70 FR 1902 1903	Notice of Availability of the Draft Revised Recovery Plan for the Whooping Crane (<i>Grus americana</i>) (http://ecos.fws.gov/docs/federal_register/fr4371.pdf)

Most Recent Special Rule Publications (Showing 3 of 3)

Date	Citation Page	Title
06/26/2001	66 FR 33903 33917	Endangered and Threatened Wildlife and Plants; Establishment of a Nonessential Experimental Population of Whooping Cranes in the Eastern United States (http://ecos.fws.gov/docs/federal_register/fr3773.pdf)
07/21/1997	62 FR 38932 38939	ETWP; Final Rule to Designate the Whooping Crane of the Rocky Mountains as Experimental Nonessential and to Remove Whooping Crane Critical Habitat Designations From Four Locations (http://ecos.fws.gov/docs/federal_register/fr3106.pdf)
02/06/1996	61 FR 4394 4401	ETWP; Proposal to Designate the Whooping Cranes of the Rocky Mountains as Experimental Nonessential and to Remove Whooping Crane Critical Habitat Designations From Four Locations

» Action Plans

Action Plans (Showing 1 of 1)

Date	Title
08/07/2009	Whooping crane spotlight species action plan (/docs/action_plans/doc3055.pdf)

» Recovery

[Recovery Plan Information Search \(/roar/pub/ConfigureRecActionReport.do?path=ROAR+Custom+Queries.Public+Actions+AdHoc\)](/roar/pub/ConfigureRecActionReport.do?path=ROAR+Custom+Queries.Public+Actions+AdHoc)

- [Information Search FAQs \(http://www.fws.gov/endangered/esa-library/pdf/ROAR_FAQs%2008-05-09_FINAL.pdf\)](http://www.fws.gov/endangered/esa-library/pdf/ROAR_FAQs%2008-05-09_FINAL.pdf)

Current Recovery Plan(s)

Date	Title	Plan Action Status	Plan Status
05/29/2007	Whooping Crane Recovery Plan, Final Third Revision (http://ecos.fws.gov/docs/recovery_plan/070604_v4.pdf)	View Implementation Progress (/roar/pub/planImplementationStatus.action?documentId=1001911&entityId=67)	Final Revision 3

Other Recovery Documents (Showing 3 of 3)

Date	Citation Page	Title	Document Type
03/29/2010	75 FR 15454 15456	5-Year Status Reviews of 14 Southwestern Species (http://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/search/citation.result.FR.action?federalRegister.volume=2010&federalRegister.page=15454&publication=FR)	• Notice 5-year Review, Initiation
05/29/2007	72 FR 29544	Notice of Availability of the Revised Recovery Plan for the Whooping Crane (<i>Grus americana</i>) (http://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/search/citation.result.FR.action?federalRegister.volume=2007&federalRegister.page=29544&publication=FR)	• Notice Final Recovery Plan Availability
01/11/2005	70 FR 1902 1903	Notice of Availability of the Draft Revised Recovery Plan for the Whooping Crane (<i>Grus americana</i>) (http://ecos.fws.gov/docs/federal_register/fr4371.pdf)	• Notice Draft Recovery Plan Availability

Five Year Review

Date	Title
02/13/2012	Whooping Crane 5 Year Review (/docs/five_year_review/doc3977.pdf)

» Critical Habitat

Current Critical Habitat Documents (Showing 3 of 3)

Date	Citation Page	Title	Document Type	Status
08/17/1978	43 FR 36588 36590	Proposed Critical Habitat for the Whooping Crane (http://ecos.fws.gov/docs/federal_register/fr237.pdf)	Proposed Rule	Not Required
05/15/1978	43 FR 20000 20040	Determination of Critical Habitat for the		Final

Date	Citation Page	Title	Document Type	Status
12/16/1975	40 FR 58308 58312	Proposed Determination of Critical Habitat for Snail Darter, American Crocodile, Whooping Crane, California Condor, Indiana Bat, and Florida Manatee: 40 FR 58308 58312 (Percina (Imostoma) sp., Crocodylus acutus, Grus americana, Gymnogyps californicus, Myotis sodalis, Trichechus manatus)	Proposed Rule	Not Required

To learn more about critical habitat please see <http://criticalhabitat.fws.gov> (<http://criticalhabitat.fws.gov>)

» Conservation Plans

Habitat Conservation Plans (HCP) ([learn more \(/docs/conservation_plans/HCP_Incidental_Take.pdf\)](#))

(Showing 1 of 1)

HCP Plan Summaries
Oncor HCP (http://ecos.fws.gov/conserv_plans/PlanReport?plan_id=3776&region=2&type=HCP&rtype=1)

Safe Harbor Agreements (SHA): ([learn more \(/docs/conservation_plans/SafeHarbor.pdf\)](#)) (Showing 1 of 1)

SHA Plan Summaries
Coastal Prairie Coalition (GLCI) Grazing Lands Conservation Initiative (http://ecos.fws.gov/conserv_plans/PlanReport?plan_id=4129&region=2&type=SHA&rtype=1)

» Petitions

No petition findings have been published for the Whooping crane.

» Life History

Habitat Requirements

The whooping crane breeds, migrates, winters, and forages in a variety of wetland and other habitats, including coastal marshes and estuaries, inland marshes, lakes, ponds, wet meadows and rivers, and agricultural fields. Whooping cranes breed and nest in wetland habitat in Wood-Buffalo National Park, Canada. Bulrush is the dominant vegetation type in the potholes used for nesting, although cattail, sedge, musk-grass, and other aquatic plants are common. Nest sites are primarily located in shallow diatom ponds that contain bulrush. During migration, whooping cranes use a variety of habitats; however wetland mosaics appear to be the most suitable. For feeding, whooping cranes primarily use shallow, seasonally and semi permanently flooded palustrine wetlands for roosting, and various cropland and emergent wetlands. In Nebraska, whooping cranes also often use riverine habitats. Wintering habitat in the Aransas National Wildlife Refuge, Texas, includes salt marshes and tidal flats on the mainland and barrier islands, dominated by salt grass, saltwort, smooth cordgrass, glasswort, and sea ox-eye.

Food Habits

Whooping cranes are omnivorous, probing the soil subsurface with their bills and taking foods from the soil surface or vegetation. Young chicks are fed by their parents. Summer foods include large nymphal or larval forms of insects, frogs, rodents, small birds, minnows, and berries. Foods utilized during migration are poorly documented but include frogs, fish, plant tubers, crayfish, insects, and agricultural grains. The largest amount of time is spent feeding in harvested grain fields. In the winter, whooping cranes forage for blue crabs, clams and the plant wolfberry in the brackish bays, marshes, and salt flats on the edge of the Texas mainland and on barrier islands. Occasionally, cranes fly to upland sites when attracted by fresh water to drink or by foods such as acorns, snails, crayfish and insects, and then return to the marshes to roost. Uplands are particularly attractive when partially flooded by rainfall, burned to reduce plant cover or when food is less available in the salt flats and marshes.

Movement / Home Range

The whooping crane is a bi-annual migrant, traveling between its summer habitat in central Canada, and its wintering grounds on the Texas coast, across the Great Plains of the U.S. in the spring and fall of each year. The migratory corridor runs in an approximately straight line from the Canadian Prairie Provinces of Alberta and Saskatchewan through the Great Plains states of eastern Montana, North Dakota, South Dakota, Nebraska, Kansas, Oklahoma, and Texas. The complete corridor is approximately 2,400 miles (3,862 km) long by 220 miles (354 km) wide, a zone that encompasses 95% of known sightings of whooping cranes. Autumn migration normally begins in mid-September, with most birds arriving on the Texas wintering grounds between late October and mid-November. Whooping cranes migrate south as singles, pairs, in family groups, or as small flocks of 3 to 5 birds. They are diurnal migrants and stop daily to feed and rest. Local weather conditions influence distance and direction of travel, but whooping cranes generally are capable of reaching the autumn staging grounds in the north central portion of the Saskatchewan agricultural area on the second day of migration, where they remain for 2 – 4 weeks. The remainder of the migration from Saskatchewan to the wintering grounds is usually rapid, probably weather-induced, and may be completed in a week. Whooping cranes occupy winter areas for almost half a year. Although close association with other whooping cranes is tolerated at times on the wintering grounds, pairs and family groups typically occupy and defend relatively discrete territories. As spring approaches, “dancing” behavior (running, leaping and bowing, unison calling, and flying) increases in frequency, and is indicative of pre-migratory restlessness. Spring migration departure dates are normally between March 25 and April 15, with the last birds usually leaving by May 1.

Reproductive Strategy

Whooping cranes are monogamous, forming pairs and laying eggs as early as 3 years of age, although the average age of first egg production is 5 years. They show considerable fidelity to their breeding territories, and normally nest in the same general vicinity each year. These nesting territories, termed "composite nesting areas", vary considerably in size, ranging from about 1.3 to 47.1 km² (0.8 to 29 mi²) but averaging 4.1 km² (2.5 mi²). Adjoining pairs usually nest at least 1 km (0.6 mi) apart. From the initiation of egg laying, until chicks are a few months of age, the activities of pairs and family groups are restricted to the breeding territory. Eggs are normally laid in late April to mid-May, and hatching occurs about 1 month later. The incubation period is from 29

hypothesis, where parents add marginal offspring to their clutch/brood as a hedge against early failure of core brood members. Whooping crane parents share incubation and brood-rearing duties. Except for brief intervals, one member of the pair remains on the nest at all times.

Other

The endangered whooping crane is a flagship species for the North American wildlife conservation movement, symbolizing the struggle for survival that characterizes endangered species worldwide. The Aransas-Wood Buffalo flock has come back from a low of only 15 birds in 1941 to reach 270 individuals in 2008, with annual growth averaging 4.6%. A record 74 nesting pairs were located in May, 2010. In the United States, the whooping crane was listed as endangered in 1970 by the U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service. In Canada, the crane was designated as threatened in 1978 by the Committee on the Status of Endangered Wildlife in Canada and listed as endangered under the Canadian Species at Risk Act in 2003. The International Recovery Plan was last updated in 2007. Historically, population declines were caused by shooting and destruction of nesting habitat in the prairies from agricultural development. The species was listed because of low population numbers, slow reproductive potential (sexual maturity is delayed and pairs average less than one chick annually), cyclic nesting and wintering habitat suitability, a hazardous 4,000 km migration route that is traversed twice annually, and many human pressures on the wintering grounds. Current threats to wild cranes include collisions with manmade objects such as power lines and fences, shooting, chemical spills along the Intracoastal Waterway that bisects its winter habitat, predators, disease, habitat destruction, severe weather, and a loss of two thirds of the original genetic material. Threats to the captive flock include disease, accidents, and in-breeding.

» Other Resources

[NatureServe Explorer Species Reports \(javascript:\)](#) -- NatureServe Explorer is a source for authoritative conservation information on more than 50,000 plants, animals and ecological communities of the U.S and Canada. NatureServe Explorer provides in-depth information on rare and endangered species, but includes common plants and animals too. NatureServe Explorer is a product of NatureServe in collaboration with the Natural Heritage Network.

[ITIS Reports \(javascript:\)](#) -- ITIS (the Integrated Taxonomic Information System) is a source for authoritative taxonomic information on plants, animals, fungi, and microbes of North America and the world.

Last updated: June 13, 2014

[FWS Endangered Home \(http://www.fws.gov/endangered/\)](http://www.fws.gov/endangered/) | [ECOS Home \(/ecos/indexPublic.do\)](#) | [Contact Us \(/ecos/helpdesk.do?version=@application.version@\)](#)