

Whooping cranes facing brighter future

EDITOR'S NOTE — Look up, because that's where things are looking up. The whooping crane is back in business. It's true, but it's strong. The only question that remains: Can the whooper do for himself what man has been doing for him?

By JAMES PHILLIPS
Associated Press Writer

WASHINGTON (AP) — The majestic white birds rise from forested bays of the north and west, spiraling higher and higher above the spruce and larch forest before turning south to ride the wind the length of the continent.

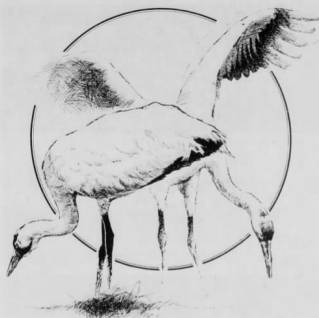
From the ground the whooping cranes resemble black-tipped cranes moving across the sky. Their clatter calls fill the heavens with a wondrous symphony.

The flight takes them from northern Canada across the Great Plains to Texas' Gulf Coast, a 2,400-mile journey marking the changing of the seasons.

But this autumn's migration differs markedly from those of past years. More endangered whoopers are flying south than at any time in recent history.

The whooping crane, once believed doomed to extinction, has stepped back from the abyss.

From a record low of 14 whoopers in 1981, at least 14 survive today, 49 adults and one young that comprise the primary flock nesting in the Northwest Territories. Five immature birds and at least five fledglings forming a new flock in Idaho, and 26 captive cranes



So dramatic has been the whooper's recovery in the past decade that Dr. Ray C. Erickson of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service says, "The whooper's future looks very encouraging."

But the optimism is tempered by caution. The comeback is in large measure attributable to man's coast, from the Arctic to Mexico. The population explosion stemmed from the broad marsh and savannas created by the retreating glacier. The wetlands provided ideal habitat for the spindly-legged bird. It spends most of its time wading in shallow water in search of food — small crustaceans, reptiles and fish.

But the wetlands gradually were drained for timber, and the whooper's numbers sank. The coming of the white man accelerated their demise.

Hungry settlers swarming across the continent destroyed the remaining habitat. Mar-

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shes were drained and grasslands were plowed wide.

In addition, hunters killed the whooper for plumage. Egg collectors plundered nests.

The whooper's attraction is understandable. He is striking in appearance. Snow white plumage garnished with a splash of crimson across the forehead and cheeks. Adult males stand four feet high — tallest bird in North America.

The last survivors held out by nesting in a remote and inaccessible region of the Northwest Territories. They wintered along Texas' Gulf Coast where sparsely settled tidal marshes stretched for miles.

The wintering grounds ultimately were protected by the establishment of Aransas National Wildlife Refuge. The nesting grounds fell within the boundaries of Canada's Wood Buffalo National Park.

Biologists hoped increasing protection would enable the species naturally rebuild its numbers. But the recovery process was slow.

The 1976 winter census found only 14 whoopers on the Texas coast. Twenty-five years later there were 44.

The size increase prompted authorities to extreme measures. In 1967 biologists began bagging the nesting grounds to shield whooper eggs. The eggs were taken to the Patuxent Wildlife Research Center in Maryland and hatched in incubators. The chicks were being reared in a fenced-in area.

Critics who wanted preservation efforts focused on the wild population castigated the birds, accuse captive cranes

simply represented a new form of slavery.

In 1975 wildlife biologists set a plan to establish a second wild flock by launching the foster parent program. Whooper eggs were placed in sandhill crane nests at Grand Lake National Wildlife Refuge in Idaho.

The sandhills proved excellent parents, raising the adopted young and guiding them south for the winter at Bosque del Apache National Wildlife Refuge in New Mexico, a migration tradition was begun.

To date, five whoopers have completed the Idaho-New Mexico journey. At least five more are expected to make the flight this fall.

Fatal car blast shocks neighbors

ST. LOUIS (AP) — Friends and neighbors of Robert Curran Jackson center to shock and amazement following the explosion of his car, which killed him.

Police said that two or three sticks of dynamite were apparently wired to the ignition of Jackson's car. The blast early Tuesday night tore the Ford Thunderbird apart, and investigators had to use a driver's license and bits of a tire to establish Jackson's identity.

"He had always been a gentleman," said Theresia Rasch, manager of the apartment complex where Jackson had lived alone for eight years. "He was congenial and always had a hello for everyone he saw."

Jackson was a safety instructor for United Parcel Service. The morning he died, he was scheduled to drive to Union, Mo. for an employee training session. In 12 years with the company, Jackson had traveled extensively in Missouri. Gerald Gavoda, Missouri, Gerald Gavoda, United Parcel Service, said that the firm had received no threats against Jackson, and no labor troubles.

Curran was the eighth commander since AUSA had established in 1967. He died Tuesday, he would retire on April 10, 1978.

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