

2006. This year 10 juveniles were slated for the DAR program while 17 other juvenile birds participate in the ongoing ultralight-led migration program.

Crane disdain for human innovation proved itself again on November 6, 2007. Six juvenile whoopers in the DAR program broke ranks with their adult-led flock and headed south for Illinois. After numerous several-day stopovers in upstate Illinois, the recalcitrant six-some landed in the American Bottoms of Monroe County Illinois.

On the bed of ancient Kidd Lake Marsh, APH Inc., a private conservation club, and Kidd Lake Marsh State Natural Area together provide superb habitat in a 650-acre wetlands restoration. The six whoopers luxuriated there from December 7th to the 11th. U. S. FWS personnel then captured the birds and reunited them with their flock.

In the spring the birds will accompany the adults of the flock and return to Wisconsin. As they fly the birds call to each other, keeping the flock together and on course. To hear those calls, conservationist Aldo Leopold said, is "to hear the trumpet in the orchestra of evolution." Once back on the breeding grounds, the young cranes also will learn the complex choreography of crane dancing as birds pair bond before mating. And, perhaps, when they have matured and lead their own young on migration, they will remember and return to rich wetland habitats in Monroe County.

Perhaps some day we will hear the bugling calls of whooping cranes along restored wetlands in Illinois' Mississippi River flyway.

WHOOPING CRANES TODAY

The original natural flock of wild whooping cranes which winter on the Texas coast and breed in Woods Buffalo NP in the Northwest Territories has grown from 16 to about 200 birds.

The non-migratory flock, which was established in Florida beginning in 1993, has 45 birds. No more birds are being released into this flock due to a high rate of mortality, but several pairs of cranes in this flock continue to breed.

The Wisconsin to Florida migratory flock continues to grow and is now comprised of 64 birds. Both ultralight-led and direct release juveniles have successfully made the journey and returned, and a few of the birds have already attempted breeding at Necedah NWR in Wisconsin, where they were raised and learned to migrate. (A few have had successful nestings.)

In addition, about one hundred whooping cranes are held in flocks used for captive breeding or at zoos in various places. The total whooping crane population is now about 400 birds, and it is still the most endangered of all crane species on earth.



Pen and Carl DauBach are citizen scientists who monitor birds at Kidd Lake Marsh and other areas and are members of CLIFFTOP (Conserving Lands in Farm, Forest, Lakes or Prairie), a citizen's organization which works to protect land in Monroe and Randolph Counties.

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