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DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
INFORMATION SERVICE

FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE

For Release To PM's, APRIL 19, 1956

IF YOU SEE A WHOOPING CRANE NOTIFY STATE
OR FEDERAL CONSERVATION OFFICERS

The northward flight of the whooping crane has started and the fate of the species is again in the balance.

Interested citizens who see these birds in flight or at rest can help make the journey successful by giving the whooper "the courtesy of the road" and by notifying the nearest Federal or State conservation official of the whereabouts of the bird. Such notification, according to John L. Farley, Director of the Fish and Wildlife Service, will give authorities a better chance to protect the bird along the route.

The whooping crane, in migrating from its only known winter sanctuary at and near Aransas National Wildlife Refuge in Texas to its summer grounds near Great Slave Lake in Canada, 2,500 miles away, travels in a relatively--direct course. The birds travel in families, in pairs, or singly, never in one single flock. A regular resting area is along the Platte River in Nebraska.

The birds are large enough to be seen and recognized--five feet tall with a seven-foot wing spread, white except for a red crown and black wing tips. They are low flying; thus easy targets for the unscrupulous--if there are any along the route.

Two factors favor the whoopers' survival. The people of the United States and Canada are definitely and overwhelmingly "on his side" and want to see the species saved. Also no large white bird may be legally shot at this time of year, so bagging a whooper by "mistake" is impossible.

There are eight young whoopers--just eight--in the world today as far as is known. The promise of survival of the race will be better if all eight make it to their summer haven along with the 19 adults.

Three of these youngsters--one set of twins and one "only child" are on the wing now under the escort of their parents. There is one single adult of unknown gender heading north now. That's the makeup of the first contingent of eight whoopers to have left the refuge. The other 19 were still at the wintering ground on April 6 but some or all of them may now be on their way.

Last year only 21 whoopers headed northward. In the fall 20 adults and eight young made the journey back to Aransas, but during the winter one of the adults disappeared. The 1955 brood of eight is the largest number of progeny noted since the first official count in 1938-1939. At that time there were only 18 birds in all. A high point was reached in 1949-50 with 34 whooping cranes, young and old, in the group. The low point was in 1941-1942 when only 15 birds were counted.

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