



## U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

# Summary of yearly whooping crane range nesting and production

## *Aerial Surveys June 2007*

### Whooping Crane Production Wood Buffalo National Park, Canada

Brian Johns and Lea Craig-Moore of the Canadian Wildlife Service (CWS) located 62 nests on breeding pair surveys in May in Wood Buffalo National Park, Canada. The 62 nests found were the same number found in 2006.



*Whooping crane habitat, Wood Buffalo National Park, Canada, June 2007.*

FWS Region 2 Pilot Jim Bredy, Brian Johns and Tom Stehn conducted whooping crane production surveys June 13-18 in a Partenavia twin-engine aircraft. Surveys were timed soon after most of the chicks had hatched to try to maximize the number of chicks observed. Three additional nests were located on the June surveys. The surveys located a record 65 nests and 84 chicks, including 28 sets of twins. This compared with 76 chicks including 24 sets of twins in 2006.



*Region 2 Partenavia, enroute stop at Jackson Hole, WY, June 2007.*

Fifty-six of the 65 nests (86.2%) produced one or more chicks, a very high percentage. One pair was still sitting on eggs at the end of the June surveys, but the eggs were overdue and not expected to hatch. Of the

nine pairs that failed to hatch an egg, two of those pairs had their eggs predated in May and one bird was sitting on a nest with no eggs. Thus, of the pairs that potentially could have had chicks in June, 56 of the 62 actually did. The record chick production in 2007 resulted from both high productivity and a large number of nests.

An estimated four known adult pairs failed to nest but were sighted, comparable to the 10 pairs that failed to nest in 2006. There are a minimum of 69 breeding pairs in the population. The number of adult pairs was close to the 67 adult pairs identified present at Aransas during the 2006-07 winter.

Habitat conditions in Wood Buffalo were good with water levels thought to be slightly above average. The weather during the June production surveys was exceptionally warm with no days of cold, wet weather. If such weather continues, it should favor survival of the young chicks. A record 250+ whooping cranes are expected to reach Texas in fall, 2007.

This survey was made possible by the cooperative funding of the Canadian Wildlife Service; USFWS Whooping Crane program, USFWS Region 2 Refuges, USFWS Region 2 Endangered Species, and USFWS Washington Office of Migratory Birds.

### Basic facts about the whooping crane.

Whooping cranes, listed as Endangered in 1970 in the U.S. and in 1978 in Canada, occur only in North America. The whooping crane (*Grus americana*) is the tallest bird in North America at nearly 5-feet. The common name presumably originated from the loud, single-note vocalization given repeatedly by the birds when they are alarmed. Adult plumage is white with black primaries, black markings on the face and red on the crown.

The whooping crane breeds, migrates, winters and forages in coastal and inland marshes, lakes, ponds, wet meadows, rivers, and agricultural fields. It is much more dependent on aquatic foods and habitats than the sandhill crane.

Whooping cranes occur only in North America. There are approximately 481 individuals that exist in the wild at three

locations and in ten captivity sites. The May, 2007 total wild population was estimated at 337. This includes: 236 individuals in the only self-sustaining population that nests in Wood Buffalo National Park and adjacent areas in Canada and winters in coastal marshes at Aransas, Texas; 44 captive-raised individuals released to establish a non-migratory population in central Florida; and 57 individuals introduced starting in 2001 that migrate between Wisconsin and Florida. The captive population contains 144 birds with annual production from the Calgary Zoo, International Crane Foundation, Patuxent Wildlife Research Center, the San Antonio Zoo and the Species Survival Center in New Orleans.

All of the whooping cranes are derived from just the 15 whooping cranes wintering in Texas in 1941. Population declines resulted from habitat destruction, shooting, and displacement by man. Current threats include limited genetics, loss and degradation of migration and coastal habitat, collisions with power lines, and threat of chemical spills. The population remains in danger of extinction.

The third revision of the Whooping Crane Recovery Plan was completed in May, 2007. The principal strategy of the Whooping Crane Recovery Plan is to augment and increase the one self-sustaining population by reducing threats, and through the establishment of two additional and discrete populations.

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*High altitude photo of Klewi marshes, Wood Buffalo National Park, Canada.*