

DEPARTMENT of the INTERIOR

news release

FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE

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WHOOPING CRANE POPULATION GROWS TO 59

The world's population of wild whooping cranes has increased to 59, two more than last year, the Interior Department's Fish and Wildlife Service reported today. This is a record high since efforts to rescue the endangered bird from the brink of extinction began in 1941.

An aerial survey at the Aransas National Wildlife Refuge in Texas, where the rare birds winter after spending summer in the Canadian wilds, revealed 54 adult and 5 young whoopers on the refuge grounds and adjacent Matagorda Island. All appear in good condition, according to refuge personnel.

This tops last year's record of 57 which consisted of 51 adult and 6 young. Wild whoopers numbered just 15 in 1941, exceeded 30 in 1947 and topped 40 in 1964.

The present 59 total may grow in coming days, but no birds have ever arrived at Aransas after Christmas. This year marks the first time that one of the young cranes has arrived after November.

In addition to the wild whoopers, 21 of these majestic cranes, North America's tallest birds, are held in captivity--17 at the Service's Patuxent Wildlife Research Center near Laurel, Md., 3 at Audubon Park Zoo in New Orleans, and 1 at San Antonio Zoo.

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