# UNITED STATES
# DEPARTMENT of the INTERIOR

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AMERICAN-CANADIAN PROPOSAL OFFERED FOR SAVING WHOOPING CRANES

A new proposal to increase the population of the endangered whooping crane was announced simultaneously today by the Department of the Interior in Washington, and the Canadian Wildlife Service of the Department of Northern Affairs and National Resources at Ottawa.

The proposal calls for taking a limited number of eggs from whooping crane nests each year for hatching and rearing birds in captivity. Captive whoopers then would be used to build up a productive flock from which young cranes could be released into the wild.

The joint announcement said the proposal has been submitted for review and comment to several conservation groups which have an active and continuing interest in whooping cranes.

Under the proposal, eggs would be taken only in wet years because studies have shown the mortality of immature birds is highest when water is abundant in the Canadian nesting areas. A maximum of six eggs would be taken from only three nests in any one year. Conditions this year, however, would not permit the taking of eggs for the experiment.

The survival rate of naturally hatched whoopers has been poor during the past 25 years. About 100 young birds have returned to wintering grounds at Aransas National Wildlife Refuge in Texas during that period, but the total adult wild population, now 32, has increased by only 10 in the past quarter century.

Whooping cranes in captivity have a long productive life expectancy and can be induced to lay several clutches of eggs each year. A pair of wild whoopers hatch no more than two eggs a year and usually only one of the young cranes will survive to reach the wintering grounds in Texas.

The Department of the Interior's Bureau of Sport Fisheries and Wildlife recently succeeded in using a bantam hen to hatch a whooping crane egg. The Audubon Park Zoo in New Orleans has seven whoopers in captivity, four of them hatched and reared at the Zoo.

Knowledge gained from these experiences, plus the Bureau's success in hatching and rearing the closely related sandhill crane, make it appear that the new Canadian-American proposal regarding whooping cranes could contribute importantly to the perpetuation of the species.

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