DEPARTMENT of the INTERIOR

news release

FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE

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WHOOPER CHICK HATCHING
SIGNALS "DAWN" OF NEW ERA

"Dawn," a baby whooping crane, pipped through its shell shortly before dawn on May 28, spent the next 24 hours enlarging the opening, and finally emerged from its egg on the morning of May 29 at about 7:30 a.m., Keith M. Schreiner, head of Federal endangered species programs, announced.

This is the first whooping crane chick to be both bred and hatched in captivity by the Interior Department's U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. The symbolic name Dawn was chosen by scientists involved in this program.

Dawn's hatching is an important step toward the ultimate goal of augmenting the wild whooping crane population. It is the first whooping crane ever produced from captive-raised birds. It culminates an eight year effort by Dr. Ray Erickson and his research team at the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's Patuxent Wildlife Research Center at Laurel, Maryland.

Dawn's sex will remain unknown until its voice changes and it gives a characteristic call as it approaches sexual maturity in two or three years.

Dawn's parents were hatched in incubators at the Patuxent Wildlife Research Center from eggs taken from wild whooping crane nests in Canada in 1968. They were raised in captivity to form the first generation of captive breeding birds. Dawn is the first whooping crane of the second generation and its birth was preceded by a careful research program at the facility.

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Sandhill cranes, close relatives of the whoopers, were raised for several years so the techniques of keeping, breeding, and raising cranes could be developed and applied to whoopers.

A whooping crane flock was gradually built up at Patuxent by taking whooper eggs from wild nests on the remote Wood Buffalo National Park in Canada's Northwest Territories.

In 1973, birds picked up in 1968 and 1969 were paired and moved to spacious outdoor pens within the endangered species research facility. Preliminary courtship was observed in 1974 but no breeding took place. To further stimulate the breeding pairs this year, their pens were artificially lighted to approximate light conditions on the nesting grounds in Canada, and one of the pairs produced three eggs.

After the first egg was discovered on April 18, the female was artificially inseminated because the scientists had not observed their pair actually mating. The second and third eggs laid on April 28 and 30 were both fertile, but the second failed to develop normally and died. The third egg produced Dawn.

Dawn will be fed a specially prepared diet of corn meal, soybean meal, fish meal, meat and bone meal, plus vitamins and mineral supplements. It will be kept in an indoor facility for the next four to six weeks to enhance its chances for successful development.

Dawn will be placed in the company of young turkey chicks in the next day or so and spend two to three weeks with them. This is done for two reasons. The young turkeys will teach Dawn how to eat, and they will also "socialize" Dawn to a group setting, providing comfort and companionship during a critical development period.

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