



Sandhill Crane Viewing Map

Sherburne National Wildlife Refuge

Sandhill cranes stage in and around the refuge during October. Peak numbers usually occur the 3rd or 4th weeks of the month. Parking areas on CR 70 & 25th St, or pulling off along CR 3, offer good viewing at dawn and dusk when cranes are leaving, or returning to, their roost sites on the refuge. During the day, cranes will be found foraging in harvested corn or soybean fields or in pastures or wet meadows. When watching cranes, pull off the road, but stay in your car to avoid disturbing the birds - they WILL flyaway! Please do not trespass on fields which are private property. Be safe and have fun watching the cranes!

Sherburne Refuge lands are shown in green. All other areas are private property.

Refuge Headquarters

Greater Sandhill Crane (*Grus Canadensis Tabida*)

1. Cranes are among the oldest living birds on the planet.
2. Fossil records place cranes in Nebraska more than nine million years ago!
3. There are at least five subspecies of Sandhill Cranes, possibly six depending on who you ask. Migratory subspecies include the lesser, greater, and according to some, the Canadian Sandhill Crane. Non-migratory subspecies are the Florida, Mississippi and Cuban sandhill crane.
4. The different sub-species of Sandhill Crane vary greatly in size and weight. Lesser Sandhills, who breed at more northern latitudes such as the arctic, are the smallest, weighing on average about 6-7 pounds and standing 3-3.5 feet tall. At the other end of the extreme, temperate-nesting Greater Sandhills are the largest sub-species and average 4.5-5 feet tall and 10-14 pounds.
5. The subspecies we find here at Sherburne NWR is the largest of the Sandhills, the Greater Sandhill Crane.
6. As fall advances, these rusty feathers molt and the birds return to their grayish appearance. In some regions, however, iron-rich mud is absent and the birds appear grey all year, but not here at Sherburne.
7. The forehead and crown are actually not red feathers but rather covered with reddish skin. Face, chin, upper throat, and nape are white to pale gray.
8. Sandhill Cranes occur at their highest breeding density in habitats that contain open sedge meadows in wetlands that are adjacent to short vegetation in uplands.
9. Cranes readily eat cultivated foods such as [corn](#), [wheat](#) and [sorghum](#). Waste corn is useful to cranes preparing for migration, providing them with nutrients for the long journey. In the spring, the diet is more highly comprised of small mammals, insects, snails, reptiles, and amphibians. This provides a high calcium and protein rich diet for healthy eggs and chicks.
10. The state of MN is almost straight down the middle with two populations: the midcontinent population, which migrates down into Texas, Mexico, and Louisiana and the eastern population which migrates down along the coast of Florida, Alabama, and Georgia.
11. Sherburne NWR complex is currently working with researchers to determine where that dividing line is at in MN currently. This is done using radio telemetry to track the migration of birds that breed in the unknown area that crosses the central part of MN. This research is essential in creating bag limits and hunting seasons because the separate populations have very different overall populations.
12. The eastern population of greater sandhill cranes, found at Sherburne, is healthy and estimated by professional biologists to be more than 100,000 birds. While the huntable midcontinent population exceeds 400,000!
13. Sherburne NWR alone has approximately 36 breeding pairs on the refuge each year, which is determined by a unison call survey done in collaboration with SCSU.
14. More importantly, the Refuge serves as a large staging area in the fall where birds from all over the state come to flock up before they make their migration south towards Florida. At the peak, numbers reach up to 9000 birds!