

# HISTORY OF WHOOPING CRANES IN LOUISIANA

- **1890s** - Records indicate “large numbers” of both whooping cranes and sandhill cranes on wet prairies year-round; whooping cranes also used coastal locations in winter.
- **1918** - 12 whooping cranes shot north of Sweet Lake. Last official record of whooping cranes on the Louisiana prairies.
- **Late 1930s - early 1940s** - Last records of wintering whooping cranes on southwest Louisiana’s chenier ridges and in brackish and saltwater marshes near the coast.
- **May 1939** - Biologist John J. Lynch sights 13 whooping cranes north of White Lake. Two of the cranes are “young-of-the-year.” This record confirms a resident flock of breeding whooping cranes in Louisiana. This is the last record of the species breeding in the wild in the United States prior to experimental and captive-raised whooping cranes hatching chicks in the wild.
- **August 1940** - Hurricane and flooding from associated rainfall scatters the resident White Lake whooping cranes. Only six cranes return.
- **1941-1945** - White Lake whooping crane flock loses one bird each year...only two cranes remain in 1945.
- **1947** - Only one whooping crane remains at White Lake.
- **March 1950** - The lone White Lake crane is captured and relocated to Aransas NWR, TX. This is the last official record of whooping cranes in Louisiana.
- **February 2011** - The Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries (LDWF) releases the first cohort of whooping cranes into Louisiana. A new cohort of cranes has been released each winter since that date.
- **April 2016** - Two chicks hatch. This marks the first chicks in Louisiana to hatch in the wild since 1939.

Based on Louisiana whooping crane chronology compiled by Dr. Gay Gomez, McNeese State University



Photo by Danielle Desourdis Reese

## FACTS ABOUT WHOOPING CRANES

- Tallest North American bird, reaches height of 5 feet.
- Wingspan of 7-8 feet.
- Solid white, except for red patch on head and black facial markings and wing tips. Black wing tips only visible during flight or when wings are spread.
- Cinnamon brown when immature, takes on a mottled appearance as white feathers begin to emerge.
- Live approximately 20-30 years in the wild.
- Omnivorous - diet includes insects, snails, frogs, fish, rodents, small birds, berries, blue crabs, and crawfish.
- Form life-long, monogamous pairs, though they will re-pair after the death of a mate.
- Share parental duties, such as egg incubation and chick-rearing, between mates.

If you are lucky enough to encounter whooping cranes please observe them at a distance and do not approach them. Also please contact us to report your sightings at the website listed below or by calling 337-536-7006. Thank you.

If you witness suspicious activity involving whooping cranes, please call LDWF’s Enforcement Division

**1-800-442-2511**

For more information about the return of whooping cranes to Louisiana, or to report a sighting, please visit the department’s website at:

[www.wlf.la.gov/subhome/whooping-crane](http://www.wlf.la.gov/subhome/whooping-crane)



Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries - Whooping Cranes



# WHOOPING CRANES RETURN TO LOUISIANA



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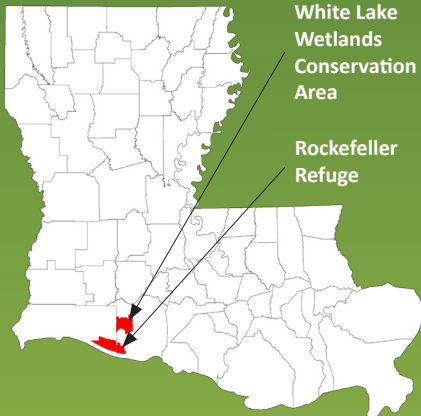
It's something to dance about!



## THE PAST... LOUISIANA WAS ONCE HOME

Historically, whooping cranes occurred in Louisiana in both a resident, non-migratory flock as well as migratory birds that wintered in the state. Conversion of prairies and wetlands to mechanized agriculture and unregulated hunting led to the decline of this species both nationally and at the state level. By 1945, only two cranes remained in Louisiana. In March of 1950, the lone Louisiana crane referred to as “Mac” was captured at White Lake and transported to Aransas National Wildlife Refuge on the central Texas coast.

For 60 years whooping cranes were absent from the Louisiana landscape until their reintroduction began at the White Lake Wetlands Conservation Area (WLWCA) located in Vermilion Parish and Rockefeller Wildlife Refuge located in Cameron Parish.



## THE PRESENT... RETURNING HOME

February 2011 marked the beginning of the LDWF whooping crane reintroduction program with the release of 10 juvenile cranes.

The goal of the Louisiana project is to establish a self-sustaining whooping crane population on and around WLWCA. A self-sustaining population requires approximately 120 individuals and 30 productive pairs with those levels maintained for 10 years without additional restocking. Whooping cranes that are reintroduced to Louisiana will be non-migratory. This means the birds will be residents of Louisiana year-round.

The Louisiana whooping crane population is designated as a Non-Essential Experimental Population (NEP). This designation is made possible by provisions contained within section 10(j) of the Endangered Species Act, as amended. This designation protects the reintroduced cranes as appropriate to conserve the species, while still allowing their presence to be compatible with routine human activities in the reintroduction area. Despite being an NEP species, it is illegal to shoot whooping cranes. Whooping cranes are protected under applicable state laws for non-game species and the federal Migratory Bird Treaty Act, which protects all migratory birds similarly as sandhill cranes, herons, egrets and songbirds.



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## THE FUTURE... YOU CAN HELP!

LDWF and project partners will continue to reintroduce a new cohort of birds each year. Research and monitoring of released birds will be ongoing and is an important component of this project. The continued progress towards our goal depends on you.

Success of this project is made possible through private and corporate donations. If you would like to support the Louisiana whooping crane project, by making a tax-deductible donation, please contact Missy Fox at the Louisiana Wildlife and Fisheries Foundation:

- 225-765-5100
- mfox@lawff.org
- PO Box 80378 Baton Rouge, LA 70898-0378

Visit the foundation’s website at: [www.lawff.org](http://www.lawff.org)



LOUISIANA | WILDLIFE & FISHERIES | FOUNDATION



*“When you watch an adult whooper stride close by you, his head high and proud, his bearing arrogant and imposing, you feel the presence of a strength and of a stubborn will to survive. We have a strong conviction that the whooping crane will keep his part of the bargain and will fight for survival every inch of the way. What are we going to do to help?”*  
Robert P. Allen, 1950

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