

Critter Class Sandhill Cranes



[Animal Diversity Web](#)

September 27, 2011

MVK:

We are going to have a class tonight and it is on

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WCzEI9QwuCc&feature=related>

Comment:

WOW Sandhill Cranes the near relative of the nearly extinct whooping cranes.

Comment:

oh my, the bird sand hil crane looks like a giant ostrich with wings, but a bit more dainty:;) too funny, but another good dancing pair!!

Comment:

Whooping cranes have a more sophisticated dance: <http://youtu.be/tvYjG8UTXQ0>

Comment:

Where do Sandhill cranes live? I haven't seen them.

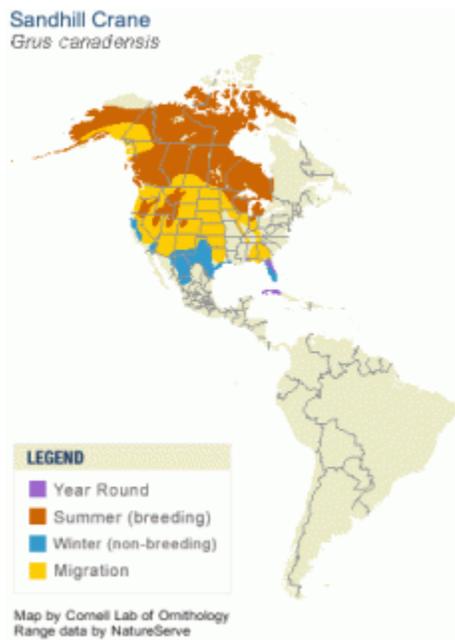
MVK:

The Sandhill Crane (*Grus canadensis*) is a large crane of North America and extreme northeastern Siberia. The common name of this bird references habitat like that at the Platte River, on the edge of Nebraska's Sandhills in the American Midwest. This is the most important stopover area for the Lesser Sandhill Crane (*Grus canadensis canadensis*), with up to 450,000 of these birds migrating through annually.

Per Wikipedia



[Adult and juvenile crane](#)



[Cornell Lab of Ornithology](#)

Comment:

In August I was in WI on vacation and went to the International Crane Foundation in Baraboo, WI. It was amazing to see all 15 species of cranes. They are working to increase the population of the whooping crane in the US and also work with international org's to help save the wetlands and areas where the cranes live. <http://www.savingcranes.org/> // also so sorry about Hope, I didn't know much about the bears however it's so sad about what happened.

MVK:

The Sandhill Crane does not breed until it is two to seven years old. It can live up to the age of 20. Mated pairs stay together year round, and migrate south as a group with their offspring.

Per Cornell Lab or Ornithology

MVK:

Six subspecies have been recognized in recent times:

- Lesser Sandhill Crane, *Grus canadensis canadensis*
 - Cuban Sandhill Crane, *Grus canadensis nesiotus* – ESA: Endangered
 - Florida Sandhill Crane, *Grus canadensis pratensis* – ESA: Endangered
 - Mississippi Sandhill Crane, *Grus canadensis pulla* – ESA: Endangered
 - Canadian Sandhill Crane, *Grus canadensis rowani*
 - Greater Sandhill Crane, *Grus canadensis tabida*
- Per Wikipedia

MVK:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SEPEgneyqtc&feature=related>

Comment:

We here in northwest Indiana have the pleasure of seeing these beautiful Sandhill Cranes in the Spring and then again in the Fall. There are fields of them and they can be seen flying in from all different directions in Jasper County. It is truly an amazing sight!

Comment:

Loved the Crane video! Amazing birds! I enjoyed watching the female being coy, and pretending not to notice his silly antics :)

Comment:

One of the most interesting things to watch is how a couple of flocks will circle in one spot for awhile way up high and then merge together as one unit in a V formation. Many people mistake them for geese, but they fly much higher and their call is unmistakable. We are in NW GA and I can't wait to see them during migration. They fly so high many times it is nearly impossible to see them, but you can always hear them.

MVK:

Sandhill cranes mate for life. When they form a pair bond, it can last for years until one of the cranes dies. After a mate passes away, the surviving crane will seek out a new mate.

In the early spring, as sandhill cranes are migrating to their breeding grounds, single cranes will start pairing up. A sandhill crane pair performs unison calling to create a bond. When the pair reaches the northern breeding grounds, they mate and build a nest.

During mating, sandhill cranes perform dancing displays. Although the dancing is most common in the breeding season, the cranes can dance all year long. Sometimes the dance involves wing flapping, bowing, jumps and simply playing around. They might also throw a stick or some plants into the air. It's quite a sight!

Per NWF

MVK:

Cranes build a ground nest out of plant materials. They often have two eggs. The pair will take care of the nest together with the male standing guard.

It takes about a month for the eggs to hatch and over two months for the chicks to be independent. In the fall, the juvenile sandhill cranes migrate south with their parents.

After two years, the juvenile sandhill cranes reach sexual maturity and begin the search to find their own mates

MVK:

Two subspecies of Sandhill Crane are on the Endangered Species List. The Mississippi and the Cuban Sandhill Crane are listed as Endangered.

MVK:

One of the most beautiful natural phenomena in the United States is the annual congregation of the Sandhill cranes. For about a month each March, over 500,000 Sandhill cranes converge on the Platte River basin in Nebraska to rest and eat before they finish their migration to their northern breeding grounds. The cranes eat corn from the grain fields and then sleep on the sandbars. Time on the Platte River also gives single sandhill cranes the chance to find mates. If you are interested in birdwatching, a trip to the Platte River to see the sandhill cranes is a once in a lifetime experience.

Description: Sandhill cranes are large birds. Their legs and necks are long and thin. Sandhill cranes are pretty hard to miss!

Sandhill cranes have mostly grayish feathers-- the shade of gray can vary widely. The forehead has a bright red patch that is one of the most noticeable features of the bird. The cheeks are white.

Although the feathers are gray, sometimes they can have a reddish-brown appearance. The reason for the change in color is that sandhill cranes preen themselves by rubbing mud on their feathers. The mud can be brown or red. The red mud comes from iron rich environments.

Size: Sandhill cranes are about 3-4 feet tall. The wingspan can be over 5 feet wide.

Diet: Sandhill cranes are opportunistic feeders. They will change their diet based on what is available. They most often eat plants and grains, but also dine on invertebrates or even small mammals, amphibians and reptiles.

Typical Lifespan: Sandhill cranes can live for 20 years or more. Sandhill cranes in the wild have a greater chance of dying young.

Habitat: Sandhill cranes spend most of their lives in freshwater wetlands, including marshes, wet grasslands and river basins.

Range: Three subpopulations of sandhill cranes are migratory. The Lesser, Greater and Canadian sandhill cranes spend winters in the south and summers at their breeding grounds.

Sandhill cranes winter in Texas, California, Arizona, New Mexico and Mexico. In the early spring, the cranes begin the migration to their breeding grounds. Throughout the spring, the cranes can be seen resting and feeding along rivers and wetlands throughout the Great Plains and Pacific Northwest. The largest congregation of sandhill cranes occurs from February to early April along the Platte River in Nebraska.

During the late spring, summer and early fall, sandhill cranes can be seen at their breeding grounds. Some breed in Minnesota, Wisconsin and Michigan. Others breed in Oregon, Idaho and Alaska.

Three subpopulations of sandhill cranes are non-migratory. The Mississippi sandhill crane is found on the southeast Mississippi coast. Florida sandhill cranes occur in many inland wetlands of Florida. The Cuban sandhill crane lives exclusively in savannas, wetlands and grasslands in Cuba. Mississippi and Cuban sandhill cranes are critically endangered. per NWF

Comment:

So, if there are Lesser Sandhills, are there Greater Sandhills? What is the size difference?

Comment:

Assuming the "nicer" plumage is the male? Quite a difference between the male and female.

Comment:

Looks like the male is larger than the female. Right?

Comment:

The movie about saving the cranes was interesting. <http://youtu.be/xO8sqL7Hoi0>

Comment:

Seems like a lot of the cranes are on the endangered list! Wonder if this is due to environmental issues or predators?

Comment:

Sandhill cranes are LOUD!! haha I was visiting my aunt and uncle in Florida a few years ago. My first morning there I was planning on sleeping in a little to rest up for a day at Disney World--unfortunately for me I was woken up around 6am by the most horrible noise--scared the daylights out of me! It took me a few minutes to realize the sound was coming from outside in the backyard and not in the house

MVK:

Deb - environmental issues - loss of habitat one of the main ones.

Comment:

GE, MVK! What do they eat? Fish? Beautiful and elegant birds and I love their red crest. Sharing the sadness for Hope with all of you. Our love for the wildlife is huge and we embrace the sadness and joy that come from being part of our wonderful Nature. Crying is healing, then we smile seeing the crane's dancing. Hugs. ♥♥♥

MVK:

Diet: Sandhill cranes are opportunistic feeders. They will change their diet based on what is available. They most often eat plants and grains, but also dine on invertebrates or even small mammals, amphibians and reptiles.

MVK:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?NR=1&v=abIydmRGCjw>

Comment:

Don't they have kind of a honking, goose-like call when they fly? I think I've seen some going over here.

MVK:

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oOctNGaJy_4&feature=related

Comment:

Leisa, you are right about them flying so high you can hardly see them. It amazes me they can fly so high. You can hear them and it is weird having a hard time finding them in the sky.

MVK:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vpnhtQwq0Ug&feature=related>

Comment:

MVK, that film of the baby was adorable. I have seen herons and egrets but I don't think I have ever seen a crane! Going to have to keep my eyes open!

Comment:

MVK - we have 6 - yes 6 breeding pairs in England - secret projects are ongoing to breed them here. Talk about endangered!!

Comment:

MVK: Do you know why birds turn their eggs?

MVK:

Yes - to keep the heat uniform and to prevent the embryo and sac from sticking to the side of the egg.

Comment:

So they like cold areas, but do they migrate? Should I scroll back?

MVK:

Oh yes they do!

MVK:

Yes you see cranes in much of the Asian art work.

Comment:

I think the Japanese feel the cranes are a symbol of longevity.

Comment:

On the NatGeo video, if people are curious, the cranes go to 'playas', the shallow lakes. Sounds like a nice symbiotic relationship with the farmers - the cranes clean up the field after the harvest, no stray seeds to sprout!

Comment:

Hello MVK! I found a 'crain cam' of the Rowe Sanctuary in Nebraska where the sandhill cranes stop every year. <http://www.rowsanctuary.org/crane%20cam.htm> (Doesn't look like anything is happening right now, though.)

Comment:

In Japan and China, cranes have great importance. They represent long life, immortality, good fortune, happiness, and vigilance.

Comment:

Pulaski in IN has THOUSANDS of sandhill cranes stopping over in November. They eat corn which is planted for them.