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WHOOPING CRANE SURVEY REVEALS TWENTY-ONE BIRDS

The whooping crane, North America's largest migratory bird, which is seriously threatened with extinction, now shows a wintering population of only 21, according to a report received today by Secretary of the Interior Douglas McKay from Fish and Wildlife Service officials at Aransas National Wildlife Refuge on the Texas Gulf Coast. Most of these unusual birds spend the winter months at Aransas.

Due to the rapid decline of the whooping crane's numbers in recent years, three separate aerial surveys were made on and near the refuge during the 1952-53 wintering season. In each case a count of 21 birds was made. The last of the surveys, made on March 5, brought the following breakdown of observations:

Aransas Refuge and Immediate Vicinity. Five adult cranes in a group at the Intracoastal Canal near Cape Carlos. One pair of cranes at the upper end of Mullet Bay. One family of three birds at San Antonio Bay near Mustang Lake. One pair at a small island between Rattlesnake Point and Ayres Island. One crane at Roddy Island.

Nearby Matagorda Island. One group of three cranes and one group of two cranes on a point across Mesquite Bay from Ayres and Roddy Islands. One family of three cranes between the above point and Panther Point.

In addition to these 21 birds, two crippled whooping cranes are being cared for at the Audubon Park Zoo in New Orleans.

Since last winter's count of 23 cranes, two birds have succumbed to gunfire. Although fully protected by Federal law, one crane was killed in Saskatchewan and one in Kansas during the birds' southward migrations last fall.

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