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FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE

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EIGHT YOUNG WHOOPING CRANES AID SURVIVAL FIGHT

The whooping cranes have won another round in their battle for survival.

Twenty adults with eight of their young have winged proudly into the Aransas refuge and vicinity, safe from their perilous journey across the face of two nations. And those eight young birds, the hope of the race, make up the largest crop of youngsters since the Aransas refuge was established on the Gulf of Mexico nearly 20 years ago.

Officials of the Fish and Wildlife Service which with Canada's Wildlife Service has a stewardship over the whooping cranes, are hopeful that the long, long lane is turning--hopeful that every person with a gun, right down to the last huntsman, has now adopted a policy of waving "bon voyage" at the birds on their trips north and south--hopeful that the muzzles of all guns will continue to be pointed downward when the big birds are in flight.

And, as if to vindicate the judgment and the militant attitude of the Department of the Interior and thousands of birdlovers throughout the Nation, and to show their appreciation for the friendship of the Canadian government, 11 of these 28 cranes are wading and feeding placidly on Matagorda Island, adjacent to the refuge.

Fish and Wildlife officials are well pleased with the successful flight of the eight young birds. The older birds, each a huge white spectacle with a seven-foot spread across the black tips of their wings, are easily recognized but the youngsters, nondescript in color and relatively unimpressive in appearance, could easily have become the victims of curiosity hunters.

There were 21 birds at Aransas when the final winter count was made last January. Twenty adults have returned and it may be assumed that these are 20 of the group which have wintered there for so many years. The whereabouts of the 21st crane is still a mystery. Since the birds make their flights in small groups it is entirely possible that the missing bird may still arrive. Also there is the possibility that included in the birds which have shown up at the refuge up to date may be a couple of stray and lonesome whoopers which have at last made contact with the main colony. The Fish and Wildlife Service will make a final count in midwinter, when it can be assumed that all those birds planning on wintering in the area will be there.

The number of whooping cranes at Aransas has fluctuated considerably since the official count was first made in 1938-1939, when 18 of the birds were noted.

The high point was reached in 1949-50 when the number had increased to 34. The low point was in the winter of 1941-1942 when the count dropped to 15.

During the past 16 years, the number of young observed on the wintering ground has ranged from 0 to 6 and averaged four. This year, with eight young birds safe on the refuge, Fish and Wildlife Service officials are taking hope that the whooper population is finally beginning to increase.

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