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THREE WHOOPING CRANES ON NESTING GROUNDS; TWENTY MORE SEEN EN ROUTE

Three whooping cranes, one of them already on the nest, were sighted May 16 by Ed Wellein, pilot-biologist for the Fish and Wildlife Service, Director John L. Farley said today.

The pilot-biologist, who is engaged in the current summer waterfowl breeding ground survey, states that the birds were seen about 50 miles west of Ft. Smith, which is on the border between Alberta and Northwest Territory. Mr. Wellein declared that one of the birds was occupying a nest which was spotted last year.

The location of the whooping crane breeding grounds was unknown until last year when field biologists of the Fish and Wildlife Service, the Canadian Wildlife Service and the National Audubon Society located breeding cranes in the wilderness of the Wood Buffalo Park-Great Slave Lake area of Canada.

Eight of the 27 whoopers began their northern flight from their wintering grounds on the Aransas National Wildlife Refuge in Texas sometime between March 23 and April 6, probably closer to the first date. The other 19 left the refuge sometime after April 6.

On May 4 a flock of 20 whoopers was observed over Delta, Manitoba, not far from Winnipeg, the Canadian Wildlife Service reports. They were flying low, about 150 yards above the ground, making good headway against a 30-mile-an-hour wind. The cranes were observed by Miss Helen Hayes, a graduate student in ornithology at Cornell University who has spent several seasons in Manitoba on waterfowl observations. She reported that the birds passed directly overhead and that they were in sight for four minutes.

As far as is known there are only 27 whooping cranes still in existence. Twenty-one cranes went north a year ago and 20 adults and eight young came back in the fall. One adult was missing. During the winter another adult disappeared. The brood of eight in 1955 is the largest number of progeny noted since the first official count was made in 1938-1939. In 1941-1942 there were only 15 whoopers. In 1949-1950 there were 34 of these giant birds.

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