



Now that all five chicks have hatched, conservationists have high hopes that a breeding flock of these birds can be reared in captivity. Future offspring will be used to bolster the wild population.

In addition to the 5 new cranes, there are 7 other whoopers in captivity.

The effort at Patuxent follows 6 years of intensive research and is the first attempt to develop a large breeding flock from which whooping cranes can be reintroduced into the wild.

Another bonus event for whoopers happened recently at the San Antonio, Tex., Zoo, where a pair of whooping cranes, Rosie and Crip, produced two eggs. If all goes well, there will be an additional increase in the world's captive whooping crane population shortly after the Fourth of July. Both parent birds are from the migrant population and were captured because of injuries suffered in the wild.

Crip, the male, is a former mate of Josephine, who died when hurricane Betsy swept through the New Orleans Zoo in September 1965. Rosie was found in Texas with a broken wing in 1956 and recovered at the San Antonio Zoo.

At last count there were only 43 whoopers alive in the wild. Dr. Erickson said the slow rate of increase is due mainly to the fact that each adult pair normally rears but one chick from the usual clutch of two eggs. Additional mortality further reduces the young as well as some of the older birds, thus the actual rate of increase is about one per year, despite some ten nesting pairs.

"Man and his works are the principal threat to the survival of this bird," said Dr. Erickson. "He has adversely altered the crane's environment, making its struggle for existence more difficult. Some are even shot."

The bird is now protected by international laws, and hunters are cautioned not to shoot any large bird unless it is an identifiable game bird during an established season in an area open to hunting.

Historically there was never a very large population of whoopers, but they ranged over much of the continent from the Arctic to central Mexico and from the Rockies to the Atlantic. Today the remaining wild flock winters at the Aransas National Wildlife Refuge on the Texas Gulf Coast and then migrates to Canada to nest and rear its young.

The whooper is a bird of stately beauty. When mature, it is white except for wing tips, which are black. Adults stand 5 feet tall with a crimson crown. Wings are spread fully 7 feet when in flight, and the birds fly at great heights for long distances during migration.

Note to Editors: 8 X 10 black and white photos of baby and adult whoopers are available from Office of Conservation Education, Bureau of Sport Fisheries and Wildlife, Interior Building, Washington, D. C. 20240

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