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RECORD 47 WHOOPERS NOW ON ARANSAS (TEXAS WINTERING AREA)

The world's population of wild whooping cranes has already increased this year--with the possibility of more birds to arrive. The Interior Department's Bureau of Sport Fisheries and Wildlife reports 47 of the rare birds are now on Aransas National Wildlife Refuge in Texas.

The 47 at large are a record high for the wild flock, which fell to an all-time low of 14 in 1938. The previous record high on Aransas was 44 birds in 1965.

In the fall of 1966 only 43 birds returned to Aransas. All 43 flew north to the whoopers' Canadian nesting grounds last spring.

In addition to the 47 wild birds, 12 whoopers are in captivity for a total of 59 already counted, and more expected from Canada.

Only 38 of the 47 whoopers that have returned to date, are older birds. This is five short of the number of adults that went north last spring. U.S. Sport Fisheries and Wildlife biologists hope some of these five may still reach the refuge, and they could have young with them.

The real gain was in production of young. The nine youngsters now on the refuge are not all the young birds produced this year. During the spring nesting season, U.S. and Canadian wildlife biologists took six whooper eggs from nests in the wild and flew them to the United States for hatching. Four young whoopers resulting from these six eggs are now part of a captive flock at the Bureau's Endangered Wildlife Research Station near Laurel, Md.

In addition to the 13 known fledglings "produced" by the wild flock, one lanky youngster, appropriately dubbed "Tex," was hatched at the San Antonio Zoo--the offspring of Crip and Rosie. There are a total of seven large whoopers in captivity--two adults in San Antonio, and four in the New Orleans Audubon Park Zoo, and the juvenile Canus at the Endangered Wildlife Research Station.

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