

# DEPARTMENT of the INTERIOR

FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE

news release

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## AMERICAN CRANES LEAVE FOR JAPAN

"George" and "Martha," a pair of sandhill cranes presented last month by President Ford to Emperor Hirohito of Japan leave Washington for Tokyo on December 14.

The pair of cranes was given as a gift to the Japanese people.

In Japan the crane is highly revered. The Japanese crane has been declared a national monument by the Japanese government and is considered a symbol of love and marital fidelity. Cranes have been the subject of Japanese art that dates back at least 1,500 years.

The Japanese crane is considered an endangered species and is receiving careful management attention by the Japanese government. The species now numbers about 263 birds, having come back from a low of about 20 early in the century. Although it originally occupied the more southern islands of Japan, the species now is present only on the southeastern coastline of Hokkaido, the northernmost island.

George and Martha are greater sandhill cranes, a species common in Oregon, Idaho, and the Great Lakes region. The sandhill crane and whooping crane are the only species of crane found in the wild in the Western Hemisphere. Of the six subspecies of sandhill crane, the greater sandhill crane is the largest. It is the subspecies at Grays Lake National Wildlife Refuge in southeastern Idaho into whose nests 14 whooping crane eggs from Canada were placed last May to establish a new, wild, breeding population. The greater sandhill crane pairs now serve as foster parents to at least five young whooping cranes.

George and Martha are yearlings, male and female, reared from eggs laid by two captive pairs of greater sandhill cranes at the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's Patuxent Wildlife Research Center near Laurel, Maryland. It is likely that in suitable facilities in Japan they will eventually breed. Greater sandhill cranes are handsome birds and the pair will be a unique addition to any bird exhibit for enjoyment of the people of Japan. They may live 50 years or more.

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