

# DEPARTMENT of the INTERIOR

news release

FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE

For Release October 26, 1979

Joy Davis 202/343-5634

## ENDANGERED WHOOPING CRANE KILLED BY EAGLE DURING MIGRATION

A reminder that the ways of nature can overrule the laws of man came near Rangely, Colorado, earlier this month when a six-month old endangered whooping crane making its first migration was apparently attacked in flight and killed by an eagle.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service reported that an initial examination of the young whooper, migrating south from Grays Lake National Wildlife Refuge in Idaho, indicated the bird died as a result of talon wounds inflicted by a large raptor.

The eagle attack was witnessed by a party of nine hunters, who said the whooping crane rose from a small pond with two smaller birds, probably sandhill cranes. When they attained altitude, the whooper was struck by a large, dark bird, presumed to be a golden eagle, a species also protected by federal law.

The hunting party recovered the carcass, and on seeing that it was banded and had a radio transmitter attached, turned it over to the local Colorado Division of Wildlife Office. X-rays of the carcass at Denver indicated the only injury to the bird was what appeared to be talon wounds and other wounds attributable to its approximately 1,000-foot fall to the ground.

The young whooper was hatched at Grays Lake by foster sandhill crane parents as part of a program to establish a second migratory population to safeguard against accidental extermination of the species. This year, five of the eight young whoopers who survived until migration were fitted with radio transmitters in order to learn more about the species' habits and behavior.

While researchers regret the loss of the juvenile crane, specific knowledge of the eagle kill is useful. At Grays Lake this year, 8 of the 16 adopted hatchlings were lost, some probably to coyotes. More specific knowledge of losses can contribute to the cranes' recovery as a species.

more

A Fish and Wildlife spokesman commented that, to his knowledge, this was the first observed kill of a whooping crane by an eagle, although there is documented evidence of occasional eagle attacks on sandhill cranes. Eagles have been known on rare occasions to kill geese and other birds in flight.

The flock of sandhill cranes and adopted whoopers is migrating from Grays Lake to Bosque Del Apache National Wildlife Refuge in New Mexico, stopping for several weeks en route to feed and rest in Colorado's San Luis Valley where the Monte Vista and Alamosa National Wildlife Refuge are located.

Fewer than 100 whooping cranes remain in the wild. The foster parent flock was started by the Fish and Wildlife Service in 1975, and the experimental flock this year had reached a population of approximately 17 whooping cranes prior to last week's kill.

Although the golden eagle is not an endangered species, it is protected from killing, molesting, or disturbing under the Bald Eagle Protection Act, which was later amended to include the golden eagle.

x

x

x