



Learning on the Edge

Spotlight on a Species

Fact sheets discussing species found on the Nueces Delta Preserve

Sandhill Crane



Fast Facts:

Scientific name:

Grus canadensis

Common name: *Sandhill crane*

Habitat: *Throughout North America*

Fun fact: *Sandhill cranes may be the oldest surviving bird; scientists found a similar skull that is 10 million years old.*

The state of Texas is the winter home to two species of cranes. The more famous of our cranes is the endangered whooping crane, which winters at the Aransas National Wildlife Refuge. Its more numerous cousin, the sandhill crane, can be seen by the thousands on early winter mornings at the Nueces Delta Preserve. Cranes are diurnal flyers, meaning they are most active during the day. Many other long distance migrations (songbirds, hummingbirds) occur at night.

There are 6 subspecies of sandhill crane. Three of these species migrate, and travel to or over Texas during their winter migration. Small resident populations exist in Mississippi, Florida and Cuba. During the spring cranes can be found from the high Arctic and eastern Siberia throughout Canada and the northern United States.

Sandhill cranes feed on plant material, grain and invertebrates (snails, worms, freshwater clams). It is legal to hunt them during certain times of the year, though special permits are needed. The total population of sandhill cranes worldwide is estimated to be about 650,000 birds. (For comparison, fewer than 300 whooping cranes survive.) During their northbound migration almost 500,000 of these birds can be found along a 75 mile stretch of the Platte River in Nebraska.

Sources for Further Reading:

<http://www.savingcranes.org/sandhillcrane.html>

<http://outdoornebraska.ne.gov/wildlife/guides/migration/sandhill.asp>

http://www.tpwd.state.tx.us/huntwild/hunt/season/waterfowl/crane_limits/

<http://www.nature.org/newsfeatures/specialfeatures/animals/birds/sandhill-crane.xml>

<http://bestyummyrecipes.wordpress.com/2010/11/19/sandhill-crane-nuggets/>