

Species Fact Sheets

Order: Gruiformes
Scientific Name: *Grus americana*

Family: Gruidae
Common Name: Whooping Crane

AZA Management: Green Yellow Red None



NATURAL HISTORY:

Geographic Range: Europe Asia North America Neotropical
 Africa Australia Other Two migratory populations summer in central Wisconsin and Northwestern Canada and winter in southeastern United States and the Gulf Coast of Texas respectively. Non-migratory populations live in central Florida and along the coasts of Louisiana.

Habitat: Forest Desert Grassland Coastal
 Riverine Montane Other Prairie Wetlands

Circadian Cycle: Diurnal Crepuscular Nocturnal Other During breeding season, using lights to extend

Species Fact Sheets

photoperiod aids in stimulating breeding behaviors and extend breeding season.

	To 70° F	<input type="checkbox"/>	To 60° F	<input type="checkbox"/>	To 50° F	<input type="checkbox"/>	To 40° F	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Cold Tolerance:	To 30° F	<input type="checkbox"/>	To 20° F	<input type="checkbox"/>	Other	Winter hardy, but should be provided shelter (full house) in cold climates. May have difficulty traversing through deep snow. Lock in temperature -40F.			

	To 30° F	<input type="checkbox"/>	To 50° F	<input type="checkbox"/>	To 70° F	<input type="checkbox"/>	To 90° F	<input type="checkbox"/>
Heat Tolerance:	To 110° F	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Other	Heat tolerant, should be provided shelter, shade, or water source for cooling.				

	Frugivore	<input type="checkbox"/>	Carnivore	<input type="checkbox"/>	Piscivore	<input type="checkbox"/>	Insectivore	<input type="checkbox"/>
Diet:	Nectivore	<input type="checkbox"/>	Omnivore	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Folivore	<input type="checkbox"/>	Other (Add Below)	<input type="checkbox"/>

Captive Dietary Needs:

In captivity, a nutritionally complete pelleted diet (Ziegler or Mazuri) is recommended. Supplemental food may include corn, peanuts, small fish (smelt), insects and grapes.

Life Expectancy in the Wild:	Males: 22-24 years	Females: 22-24 years
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Life Expectancy in Captivity:	Males: 40 years	Females: 40 years
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BREEDING INFORMATION:

Age at Sexual Maturity:	Males: 2-4 years	Females: 2-4 years
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Courtship Displays:	Complex vocalizations; courtship ‘dances’ involving head bobs, bows, jumping with wings out, grass/stick tossing; other synchronized activities
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Nest Site Description:	Nests typically found in wetlands and are comprised of grasses, sedge stalks, and other small vegetation. May be built on dry ground if water not available. Both male & female participate in nest building. Nest platforms may measure 2-5 ft in diameter
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Clutch Size, Egg Description:	Two light brown to olive colored eggs with brown spots, eggs typically laid 2-4 days apart.
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Incubation Period:	28-31 days
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Fledgling Period:	70-90 days, but can take longer
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Parental Care:	Both parents care for the egg(s) and chick(s). In wild, young will often separate at spring migration prior to breeding season. In captivity, offspring should be removed 4-6 months prior to next breeding season to avoid adult aggression.
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Species Fact Sheets

Chick Development: Precocial; cinnamon colored down. Colts grow quickly, reaching adult height by late summer prior to migration. Juvenile plumage consists of a mix of cinnamon and white body feathers, with the characteristic black primaries of the adults. Adult plumage and markings attained by end of 2nd summer.

CAPTIVE HABITAT INFORMATION:

Social Structure in the Wild: Monogamous pairs defend territories and raise offspring during the breeding season. During nonbreeding season, cranes will migrate in small groupings, but may have loose territories for this season as well. Not as gregarious during migration as Sandhill cranes.

Social Structure in Captivity: Monogamous pair or a pair with offspring.

Minimum Group Size: 1 Monogamous Pair

Maximum Group Size: 1 Pair plus 1-2 offspring. Offspring should be removed 4-6 months prior to next breeding season

Compatible in Mixed Species Exhibits:

Varies

Comments:

Other taxa, mainly hoofstock, have been housed with cranes, but is not recommended. Cranes are generally housed separately for safety and breeding purposes. Cranes can be aggressive toward other species.

Optimal Habitat Size: 5000 sq ft+ with a 150 sq ft shelter per pair. Pens should be fairly level and provide a mix of upland and wetland habitat. Shallow ponds may promote breeding activity. Enclosure should allow cranes to maintain distance from keepers and avoid tight corners.

Management Challenges: This species underwent a severe genetic bottleneck; as a result, there is a fair amount of inbreeding within the captive population. Breeding is highly managed to minimize inbreeding both in captivity and reintroduction programs.

Whooping cranes are highly sensitive to disturbance and should be housed in relatively remote areas especially if breeding is desired. Breeding efforts should be supplemented through an artificial insemination program by trained staff.

Juvenile cranes are easily imprinted. Cross fostering and traditional hand rearing are not recommended rearing methods for this species as it impedes successful pairing with conspecifics.

Species Fact Sheets

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS:

Whooping Cranes originally became endangered due to overhunting and habitat loss. Present threats include drought, oil spills, deterioration of wetland habitat brought on by reduced fresh water, low genetic diversity, collisions with power lines, predation, nest site disturbances, and illegal shooting. Reintroduction efforts have supplemented wild populations, resulting in an increase in genetic diversity and larger populations for both migratory and non-migratory flocks.

REFERENCES:

Birdlife International 2017 fact sheet.

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Services: <https://www.fws.gov/northflorida/whoopingcrane/whoopingcrane-fact-2001.htm>

International Crane Foundation, <https://www.savingcranes.org/species-field-guide/whooping-crane/>

All About Birds, https://www.allaboutbirds.org/guide/Whooping_Crane/lifehistory

Ellis, David H., Gee, George F, & Mirande, Claire M. editors Cranes: Their Biology, Husbandry, and Conservation

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