



CRANE RIVER CHRONICLES

IAIN NICOLSON  Audubon
CENTER AT ROWE SANCTUARY

Winter 2010

The Stage Is Set

By Bill Taddicken, Director

Visitors to Rowe Sanctuary in the coming weeks are about to reap the benefits of all the work made possible by Rowe Sanctuary's supporters this past year. The largest gathering of cranes in the world is just about ready to begin. The cranes are by far the star of the show, but the several million geese and ducks in the area each spring also play a leading role on one of the grandest stages ever created, the Platte River. Mix all of this with nature's cast of eagles, river otters, bobcats, shorebirds, coyotes, beaver, deer and the backdrop of Nebraska sunsets over the river and you have the makings of one of nature's greatest performances, "Spring Migration".

Rowe Sanctuary staff, volunteers and partners prepare for the performance all year long ensuring the future of the Platte River and the cranes. Managing habitat on the 1,900 acres owned by Rowe is a constant effort. Maintaining prairies and meadows with fire and grazing and battling invasive plants takes a lot of effort. Creating habitat for nesting terns and plovers, as well as for a myriad of grassland birds takes time and money. Each year nearly five miles of river channel are mechanically cleared for crane roosts and waterfowl to utilize each winter and spring. All of these practices are essential to maintaining a viable stage on which "Spring Migration" can

take place.

Because people are such an important part of protecting nature, our education programs reach out to thousands each year. School children, families and adults from all over the globe have a chance to experience nature and learn to appreciate what the Platte River offers. Hopefully this appreciation turns into a conservation ethic that will protect our natural places for the future.

Now, once again, the stage is set, the players are ready, and opening night is not far behind. Nature's performance of "Spring Migration" is about to begin. A quote from Paul Johnsgard outlines the importance of your support. *"All wonderful and rare things in this world carry a significant price tag; otherwise they would be neither rare nor highly valued. The price tag on our cranes is simply this; we must be willing to protect from destruction the wonderful river that crosses Nebraska like a beautiful quicksilver necklace, the Platte River."*

I invite you out this spring to share in the wonderful experience you are making possible. The cranes have been coming back to the river every spring for thousands of years. We hope you can join us again this spring too.

Bill Taddicken



Photo by Don Brockmeier

Online Newsletter - To receive an email reminder when the online newsletter is posted to the web site, contact kskaggs@audubon.org.

Crane Culture 101

By Keanna Leonard, Education Director

There are fifteen different species of cranes found around the world. Their complex social behaviors have provided the basis for folklore around the world.

The ancient Greeks and Romans believed that cranes danced to celebrate life. Apollo, the sun god, was believed to have disguised himself as a crane when visiting the mortal world. The Greek alphabet is said to have been invented by the god Mercury as he watched cranes fly.

In early Asian history, people would time the planting of their crops to the arrival of the cranes. They also believed that the souls of the dead rode to heaven on the backs of these large birds. In Japan, cranes symbolize longevity, prosperity and good health. Cranes are many times depicted on traditional wedding kimonos to represent fidelity, prosperity and longevity of the marriage.

In ancient Europe, cranes were usually associated with vigilance and loyalty, but the Druids believed cranes were treacherous and associated them with war, evil deeds and evil women.

Many Native American cultures told stories using cranes to illustrate morality. One goes like this:

Crane was known for his great parties and his dancing. In those days, Crane had beautiful, long feathers down his legs. When Crane danced, these feathers would flit and swirl. It was an incredible, magical sight to behold.

One day, Coyote threw the most elaborate party the animals

had ever been too. He had even learned an impressive new dance. Coyote's party was talked about for days.

Crane became very jealous and wanted to out do Coyote. So he planned a new party and devised a new dance. He invited the animals over and everyone raved about the food and all the decorations. Then Crane announced that he had a new dance to show everybody. He bowed and leaped into the air. He picked up sticks in his bill and tossed them. He twirled and skipped. His leg feathers danced and shimmered in the light. Each time he repeated the dance he drew closer and closer to the fire. With one ill-fated leap, he jumped into the fire and started his leg feathers ablaze.

Crane screamed and ran to the pond to put the fire out. When he looked down, he started to cry. All of his prized, beautiful leg feathers were gone. Because of his jealousy, he lost something precious. To this day no crane has leg feathers and they stand in water to remind them why they should not be jealous.

Cranes have made an impact in our culture too. The mechanical cranes at construction sites are named after the birds. Cranberries were first called crane berries by colonists who thought the flower resembled the head and bill of a crane. Even our flower the geranium, or cranes bill, is so named because the fruit resembles the bill of a crane. Would you believe that I have only scratched the surface of crane folklore? If you would like to learn more, please let me know. I love to share these stories!

Guest Feature - A Night with the Sandhill Cranes

By Kris Reiswig, Lincoln, NE

Last March, I had the pleasure of spending a night in a photo blind. What a delight. Even if you are not a photographer, I'd highly recommend you consider this adventure. It was so much fun. After we settled in, we sat on our stools and started exploring our surroundings. The first couple of hours we talked about what we thought was going to happen, had a bite to eat and enjoyed watching a few other birds in the area.

Then the magic happened. The sandhill cranes started arriving. From every angle, covering the entire sky, there they were. They would drop in and land and just start chattering. There was a sense of "coming home and talking about your day" going on. There was also a sense of happiness as we watched them interact with each other. It was amazing. I felt as if I was a guest in their house. And they didn't seem at all to mind that we were there.

After the sun had set, we decided that it was time for us to sleep too. Space is at a premium in the blinds. We carefully blew up our individual air mattresses and got into our sleeping bags. The noise outside was loud, but not irritating. It was time for sleeping. I woke up a couple of hours later and much to my surprise, it was quiet outside. I listened and once in a while I would hear a peep, but that was it. The

birds were sleeping too.

Early morning was very interesting. It was quiet outside and then all of a sudden, you could hear from down the river, the sound of the birds "coming on-line." The sound shot up the valley and then all at once, the birds were chattering again at full volume. Just a few minutes later, a whoosh like a jet flying by happened as the birds took flight. Even with the birds that left early, there were still plenty that stayed behind. That gave us a chance to take some nice pictures in the early morning light.

Once they all left for the day, we were picked up by a member of the staff. It felt good to stand up and stretch after being in the blind overnight. The river valley was as empty as it had been when we arrived, but our minds were now filled with the experience of spending a night with the sandhill cranes.



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Calendar of Events

40th Annual Rivers & Wildlife Celebration

March 18 - 21, 2010 Holiday Inn, Kearney, NE

Join other wildlife enthusiasts in celebrating the annual spring migration of sandhill cranes and much more. Keynote speakers will be Michael Forsberg, Ron Klataske and Scott Weidensaul. More details can be found at the following link:
<http://www.nebraska.audubon.org/RWC.htm>

Fifth Annual Family Crane Carnival

March 27, 2010 Rowe Sanctuary

Fun for the entire family and a great way to learn about cranes. Hours are 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. and it is free to the public.

Sixth Annual Crane Watchers' Breakfast

March 27, 2010 Gibbon, NE

Held at the American Legion in Gibbon and hosted by the Gibbon Area Chamber of Commerce, this breakfast is one you don't want to miss. Great food to go with a great wildlife spectacle. Breakfast served from 7 a.m. to 10:30 a.m.

First Sundays at Rowe

This monthly opportunity for nature exploration will be held on the first Sunday of every month at the Iain Nicolson Audubon Center. To find out more, visit our 'Calendar of Events' page on our web site or give us a call at 308-468-5282.

Big Bend Audubon Society's monthly meeting schedule

Big Bend is our local Audubon Chapter and there monthly meetings are open to the public. Programs are scheduled the day of meetings and are free of charge. For questions about the programs or meetings, please contact Grant Newbold at 308-830-3070.

Upcoming meeting dates are February 21 and April 18. Please check Rowe's 'Calendar of Events' page on our web site for program information.

National Events

The Great Backyard Bird Count

February 12 - 15, 2010

A joint project of the Cornell Lab of Ornithology and the National Audubon Society, this event is a great opportunity for families, students and people of all ages to learn about birds in their backyards and parks, while providing valuable data for bird conservation. For more information, visit www.birdsource.org/gbbc/

International Migratory Bird Day

May 8, 2010

Typically held on the second Saturday in May, International Migratory Bird Day (IMBD) is celebrated whenever migratory bird arrival is celebrated in your own community. For more information, visit <http://www.fws.gov/birds/imbd.html>

Rowe Sanctuary's Wish List

ConservationProgram

- 4X4 Gator All Terrain Vehicle
- New Lap top computer
- 12 Fireproof coveralls for the volunteer burn crew
- Annual river clearing - \$20,000

EducationProgram

- 2 Seines
- 20 Kick nets
- 1 Proscope (digital microscope)
- 2 Flow meters
- 5 Field microscopes
- 2 Water quality monitoring field kits

- 2 Anemometer
- 10 Digital meat thermometers
- 10 GPS units

Miscellaneous Items

- Golf cart
- 2 pair of stereo speakers for the Ron & Carol Cope Viewing Hall

Rowe Sanctuary's Ultimate Wish List

- \$5 Million Endowment
- Volunteer Housing for 20
- ADA accessible trail system
- Solar panels for visitor center

Rowe Sanctuary/Iain Nicolson Audubon Center Donors

Rowe Sanctuary would like to thank everyone who has supported our work on behalf of cranes and other wildlife that depend on the Platte River and its associated ecosystems.

(The following gifts were received between October 1 and December 31, 2009)

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The support and recognition of all our donors is extremely important to us. Space limitations require gift recognition to begin with gifts of \$25 or more. We apologize if a donor has been inadvertently left off this list. Please let us know of any missing names so corrections can be made in the next issue.

The Braided River Society

The Braided River Society recognizes generous individual donors whose annual support of \$500 or more sustains our mission to preserve Platte River ecosystems for cranes and other wildlife. We hope you consider joining them, making possible the education and conservation work at Rowe Sanctuary that will help develop a culture of conservation committed to the future of this treasured natural resource.

Members as of December 31, 2009

Whooping Crane

\$10,000-\$24,999

Margery Nicolson

Sandhill Crane

\$5,000-\$9,999

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A Special Thanks to...

Rowe Sanctuary would like to pay a special thank you to the following folks.

First we would like to say thank you to Nan Chrostek of Omaha for initiating the gift of a HP Color Printer/Scanner through Hewlett-Packard's U.S. Employee Product Giving Program. This was an item that we had on our wish list, which now can be crossed off. Thanks Nan!

The other special thank you goes to Ward and Norma Schrack of Kearney. Ward and Norma donated the publishing rights to two children's books that Ward had written. One of the books, Shimmingo, has been sold in Rowe's gift shop over the years. His most recent book, Winkum, will now be available in our gift shop too. Thank you Ward and Norma!

We would also like to thank everyone again that has supported our work over the past year, whether monetarily or by volunteering. Thank you so much for your support!

Crane Cam meets

Crane Cam will be available again this year thanks to the generosity of the fine folks at Educational Service Unit 10 (ESU 10) in Kearney and Nebraska Central Telephone Company (NCTC) in Gibbon. ESU 10 will be doing the hosting, while NCTC will be providing the band width for the web cam. We look forward to working with them again this season.

One item that will be returning to Crane Cam is a venue to ask questions or post observations. A person will have to join facebook and then become a 'fan' of Rowe Sanctuary. To do this, do a search for Rowe Sanctuary in the 'Search' window at the top of the facebook page. Select Rowe Sanctuary's page by clicking on the words and you should be there. To become a fan, just click on the 'Become a Fan' button and you're done. To post a question or comment, just type in the window that says 'What's on your mind?' and click on the 'Share' button.

We hope to see you as a fan of Rowe Sanctuary on facebook soon and please spread the word!



CRANE RIVER CHRONICLES

Rowe Sanctuary
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You can now make donations online through our website at www.rowsanctuary.org!

When considering a cash gift to Rowe Sanctuary, please check with your employer to see if they have a matching gift program. This is a way to make your gift do more for wildlife!

Please send me information on how to name Rowe Sanctuary in my will or retirement plan.

Name _____
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Please mail to the address above or email us at kskaggs@audubon.org. Thank you!

General Information

Iain Nicolson Audubon Center at Rowe Sanctuary
44450 Elm Island Road
Gibbon, NE 68840
Phone: 308-468-5282
www.rowsanctuary.org

Open Monday - Friday 9 - 5; Sunday 1 - 4
Open 7 days a week during crane season

Director: Bill Taddicken btaddicken@audubon.org
Education Director: Keanna Leonard kleonard@audubon.org
Office Manager: Kent Skaggs kskaggs@audubon.org
Naturalist-Volunteer Coordinator: Tony Docherty
adocherty@audubon.org

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