



Whooping Crane (*Grus americana*) Conservation Profile Synopsis



State of the Species

The extant population of the whooping crane (*Grus americana*) represents less than 4% of its historic size. Estimates suggest a population of at least 10,000 prior to European settlement, but the population declined drastically over time to 1,300-1,400 by 1870 and fewer than 20 individuals in the 1940s. Efforts to bolster these populations, including reintroduction of a migratory population in the eastern part of North America and non-migratory populations in Florida and Louisiana have resulted in an increase to about 600 individuals for both wild and captive whooping cranes in 2015.¹

This migratory species now occurs as four distinct subpopulations in North America. The only remaining natural population winters in Aransas National Wildlife Refuge in Texas and breeds in protected areas along the border between the Northwest Territories and Alberta in Canada. In 1999, the Whooping Crane Eastern Partnership (WCEP) was established with the goal of restoring a second migratory population. The coalition includes US and Canadian government authorities, as well as the AZA-accredited International Crane Foundation. WCEP is working to establish a self-sustaining eastern migratory population of whooping cranes that winters in Florida and breeds in Wisconsin, a flock which currently consists of approximately 100 birds. In Louisiana, a small non-migratory flock of about 15 birds has been established by the Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries. Additionally, in 1993 a non-migratory population was reintroduced in Florida.^{1,2}



Source: IUCN 2015

Status

North American Subpopulation

IUCN Endangered (2012)

ESA Endangered (1967)

CITES Appendix I (1975)

AZA Subpopulation

Gruiformes Taxon Advisory Group

Chair Fred Beall

AZA population 160 individuals

Primary Threats to the Species

Historically, this species populations declined due to over-harvesting, land use change in the species' habitat, and disturbance by humans. The whooping crane was listed as endangered in 1967. It was one of the 36 birds listed as an endangered species under the Endangered Species Act when it was signed into U.S. law in 1973. The Canadian government listed the species in 2010 at the federal level.^{1,2}

Though some habitat has now been protected, the quality of wetland habitat, particularly at the wintering grounds in Texas, has deteriorated as a result of pollution and water use by humans. Shootings are a historic threat to whooping cranes that remains to this day. In 1918, the passage of the Migratory Bird Treaty Act made it illegal to hunt whooping cranes. Yet between 2010 and 2016, at least 23 whooping cranes in both the wild and reintroduced populations have been shot and killed in the United States. Additionally, the species is now threatened by deaths or injuries resulting from collision with power lines, especially during migration along the Central Flyway. Marking power lines has been shown to reduce collisions by making the overhead ground wire more visible to cranes. However, most power lines have not been marked.^{1,2,3}

AZA Conservation Support

Between 2011 and 2015, 20 AZA-accredited zoos and aquariums reported taking part in a variety of field conservation projects benefitting whooping cranes. AZA institutions also support the conservation of other crane species around the world. Over those five years, the AZA community invested over \$3.6 million in whooping crane conservation, plus an additional ~\$70,000 to support organizations, such as the AZA-accredited International Crane Foundation (ICF), that worked with multiple crane species and directed the funds based on need. AZA institutions are actively involved in projects that identify critical habitats and reintroduce cranes into the wild, as well as providing financial support to other on-the-ground conservation partners. In 2012, AZA awarded a Conservation Grants Fund to ICF to develop cellular technology that would improve monitoring of reintroduced whooping cranes. These efforts represent the significant ties that AZA-accredited institutions have with crane-focused conservation organizations.

1. IUCN. 2015. The IUCN Red List of Threatened Species. <http://www.iucnredlist.org> Downloaded on 08 May 2015.
2. BirdLife International. 2012. *Grus americana*. The IUCN Red List of Threatened Species. Version 2014.3. <www.iucnredlist.org>. Downloaded on 08 May 2015.
3. Canadian Wildlife Service and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. 2007. International recovery plan for the whooping crane. Ottawa: Recovery of Nationally Endangered Wildlife (RENEW), and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Albuquerque, New Mexico. 162 pp.