

**The Whooping Crane** has often been described as the symbol of wildlife conservation in North America. The tallest bird in North America, its elaborate courtship displays and haunting bugling call have long inspired humans, but it is a Texas native that almost wasn't.

In 1942, there were only 16 Whooping Cranes left in what was to be the last flock in the world, a small group of birds that wintered on the central Texas coast near Rockport and nested in northwestern Canada. Throughout the 1940s and 1950s, this last remaining band of Whooping Cranes still precipitously clung to existence with numbers in the 20s and 30s. Slowly, over time, with habitat conservation and protection from shooting, numbers climbed. In 2012, the Texas-Canada flock approached 300 birds, and now Whooping Cranes also exist in several experimental flocks and captive breeding facilities.



## Texas Whooper Watch

While the traditional wintering grounds on and near Aransas National Wildlife Refuge are well-known, biologists have much less information about locations used by Whooping Cranes in migration. In addition, as the Whooping Crane population continues to grow, whoopers are beginning to explore new wintering habitat away from traditional areas.

Texas Whooper Watch seeks the help of citizen scientists in identifying Whooping Crane migration stopover sites and non-traditional wintering areas, in assessing whether any hazards exist to whoopers at these sites, and in learning more about behavior and habitat use at these sites.

## Reporting Sightings

If you spot a Whooping Crane, first consult the checklist and drawings in this publication to double-check your identification. If you still believe it is a Whooping Crane, then submit your observations and any photos to Texas Whooper Watch in one of the following ways:

**WEB:** [whoopingcrane.com/report-a-sighting/](http://whoopingcrane.com/report-a-sighting/)  
**EMAIL:** [whoopingcranes@tpwd.state.tx.us](mailto:whoopingcranes@tpwd.state.tx.us)  
**PHONE:** (512) 389-TXWW (8999)

## Sighting Data

Make note of the following to submit with your report:

1. Date
2. Time (beginning and ending)
3. Number of whooping cranes - adult and juvenile
4. Are any bands present on the legs?
5. Behavior (feeding, flying, resting, etc.), including any food items observed
6. Distance you were from the bird(s)
7. Any binoculars or scopes used
8. Location, including any of the following available:
  - a. Roads
  - b. Distance and direction from nearest town
  - c. County
  - d. GPS coordinates
  - e. Site name (park, reservoir, etc.)
9. Habitat description
10. Any other bird species present
11. Any hazards present

**NOTE:** If you do see an injured Whooping Crane or a whooper in a hazardous situation, then please immediately contact a Texas Parks and Wildlife Department or U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service office.

## Become a Whooper Watcher

If Whooping Cranes remain in an area for an extended period of time, then you can help Texas Whooper Watch by gathering data on Whooping Crane movements and behavior. Texas Whooper Watch will provide you with a behavior checklist and data form. You can also capture behavior information using video cameras and submit the files to Texas Whooper Watch. Simply let us know if you'd like to be a "Whooper Watcher."

Contact us at:

[whoopingcranes@tpwd.state.tx.us](mailto:whoopingcranes@tpwd.state.tx.us)  
or (800) 792-1112 x8999 (TXWW)  
[www.tpwd.state.tx.us/whoopingcranes](http://www.tpwd.state.tx.us/whoopingcranes)



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For many people, a glimpse of a Whooping Crane is the thrill of a lifetime. Texas Whooper Watch is seeking volunteers to report sightings of one of the state's most famous winter Texans – the endangered Whooping Crane.



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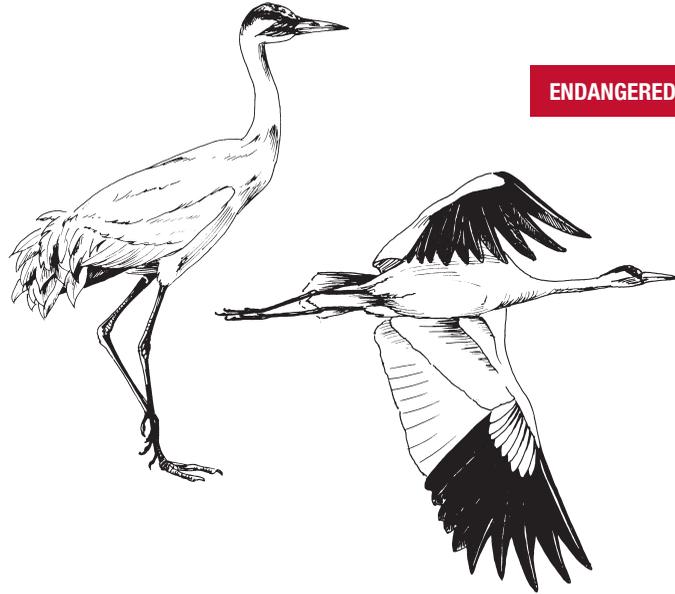
## Is It a Whooping Crane?

Review the following checklist to help you in your identification:

- HEIGHT** – Whooping Cranes stand nearly 5 feet tall. They will be the tallest bird you see.
- COLOR** – adult birds have bodies that are pure white except for a red patch on the head and a black “mustache.” Juvenile birds will have rusty feathers with the white.
- WINGS** – the wingtips (primary feathers) are black in Whooping Cranes, but black does not extend all the way along the wing edge to the body.
- FLIGHT** – Whooping Cranes fly with long necks and long legs fully extended.
- FLOCK** – Whooping Cranes usually travel and feed in small groups – from one to eight or ten birds. They may sometimes travel with Sandhill Cranes, but never as a large flock of Whooping Cranes.
- VOICE** – whoopers are known for their loud, bugling call. In flight they may produce a deep trill, similar to sandhill cranes.
- WHEN** – Whooping Cranes do not arrive in Texas until mid-October and are gone from the state by late April.
- WHERE** – Whoopers are usually seen in the areas of Texas shown below, although there may be possible sightings in southeast Texas. It is not necessary to report cranes that are seen while visiting Aransas National Wildlife Refuge or while participating in whooping crane tours.



# WHOOPING CRANES AND OTHER SIMILAR SPECIES



**ENDANGERED**

### WHOOPING CRANES

White with black wingtips, red cap and red malar stripe

Juveniles have a mixture of white and brown body feathers, with black wingtips

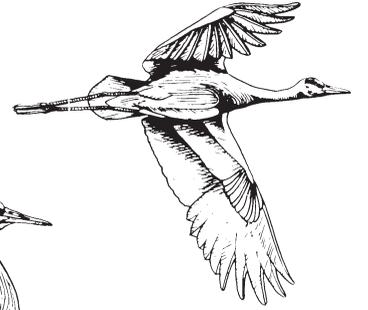
Necks long, extended straight forward in flight

Wingspan: 7-1/2 feet

Legs extend beyond tail in flight

Slow wingbeat

Flocks of 2 to 7, sometimes migrate with sandhill cranes



### SANDHILL CRANES

Gray, with dark wingtips; may appear white in some light

Neck long, extended straight forward in flight

Wingspan: 6-1/2 feet

Legs extend beyond tail in flight

Slow wingbeat

Flocks of 2 to hundreds



### SNOW GOOSE AND ROSS'S GOOSE

White with black wingtips

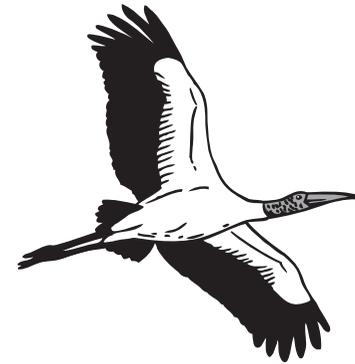
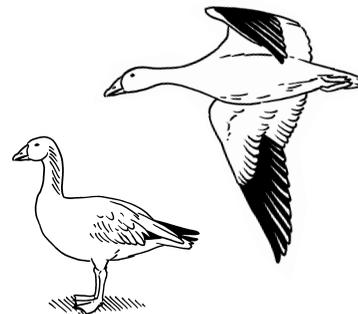
Wingspan: 4-1/2 feet

Short legs

Rapid wingbeat

Flocks of 20 to hundreds

Usually noisy



### WOOD STORKS

White, with black tail and black along entire edge of wings

Neck long, extended straight, bare and dark near head; heavy bill curved down

Wingspan: 5-1/2 feet

Long legs extend beyond tail in flight

Flaps slowly, glides and soars

May be seen in groups or as single birds

### AMERICAN WHITE PELICANS

White wings with black edgings extending almost to body

Long neck, folded in flight

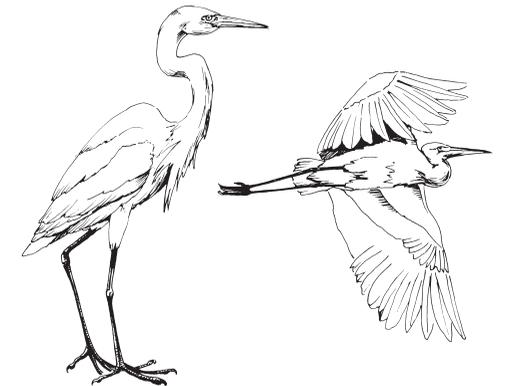
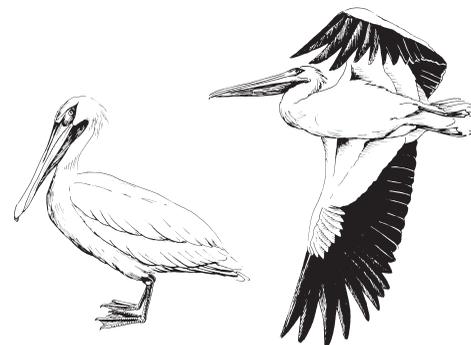
Wingspan: 9 feet

Short legs, do not extend beyond tail in flight

Long, yellow bill

Often in flocks of 20 or more

Usually circle while soaring



### GREAT EGRET

An all-white heron with 4-1/2 foot wingspan and bright yellow beak

Long legs

Neck usually tucked in flight

Slightly smaller than sandhill cranes when standing