



# United States Department of the Interior

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January 15, 1991



## MEMORANDUM

To: AWE, Region 6 MAIL STOP 60153  
(Attention: Larry Shanks)

From: *[Signature]* Field Supervisor  
Nebraska-Kansas Field Office

Subject: Cooperative Whooping Crane Tracking Project

Enclosed is a resume of whooping crane sightings reported to our office during the 1990 fall migration. Thank you for your cooperation in monitoring the migration of the whooping crane.

Please contact Mr. Wally Jobman of our staff if additional information is needed.

## Enclosures

cc: EHC, Washington, D.C.  
FWE, Salt Lake City, UT  
FWE, Helena, MT  
FWE, Cheyenne, WY  
FWE, Bismarck, ND  
FWE, Pierre, SD  
FWE, Billings, MT  
FWE, Manhattan, KS  
FWE, Tulsa, OK  
FWS, Arlington, TX  
James Lewis, Whooping Crane Coordinator, Albuquerque, NM  
Law Enforcement District #2, Albuquerque, NM  
Law Enforcement District #6, Denver, CO  
Cleveland Vaughn, SRA, Omaha, NE (69460)  
John Cooper, SRA, Pierre, SD (69450)  
David Kraft, SRA, Bismarck, ND (69430)  
Cornelis Vendel, SRA, Lenexa, KS  
Director, Patuxent Wildlife Research Center, Laurel, MD  
Rod Drewien, Soda Springs, ID  
Central Flyway Representative, Golden, CO  
Refuge Manager, Aransas NWR, Austwell, TX  
Refuge Manager, Medicine Lake NWR, Medicine Lake, MT (61530)  
Refuge Manager, Salt Plains NWR, Jet, OK  
Bird Banding Laboratory, Laurel, MD  
Bureau of Reclamation, Grand Island, NE  
Bureau of Reclamation, Bismarck, ND  
RW Field Offices (19), SD, ND, KS, NE

COOPERATIVE WHOOPING CRANE TRACKING PROJECT  
(August - December 1990)

Whooping crane spring and fall migrations are monitored each year. Sighting reports are forwarded to the Fish and Wildlife Enhancement Office of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Grand Island, Nebraska, by private individuals, the Audubon Society, other private organizations, State and Federal conservation agencies, and the Canadian Wildlife Service. Cooperation throughout the whooping crane flyway continues to be excellent. Special thanks go out to each participant.

Identification of color-marked birds is providing new information each migration. Since 1977, 132 juvenile whooping cranes have been color-marked on the breeding grounds; of these 75 were accounted for during the winter of 1989-90. Seventy-two color-marked cranes began the 1990 spring migration and 39 of these birds were observed during the 1990 fall migration. We cannot over-emphasize the importance of observers looking closely for the colored leg bands.

Whooping crane departures from Aransas National Wildlife Refuge (Aransas) (Fig. 1), a sighting report summary (Table 1), and a map of degree-block sighting locations (Fig. 2) are included with this narrative summary. Repeat sightings of the same birds at the same location during a stopover period are not included when known to be repeats. Only sightings classified as confirmed, based on whooping crane recovery plan criteria, are shown in the report. Probable and unconfirmed sightings are not shown. All U.S. reports received are on record in the Grand Island Fish and Wildlife Enhancement Office and are available upon request.

Arrivals at Aransas occurred from September 26 through December 19 (Fig. 1). The unbanded bird which arrived on September 26 was the earliest migrant ever recorded at Aransas. A single bird, observed during an aerial survey at Aransas on August 17, may have been present all summer and simply overlooked. A total of 146 (133 adults/subadults and 13 young) whooping cranes were reported at Aransas as of December 19, 1990. One hundred forty-two cranes departed for the breeding grounds last spring, and at least 13 young fledged during the summer. (Note: The Spring 1990 Tracking Report stated that 141 birds began the migration. However, one bird assumed dead was observed during the fall migration and is currently at Aransas). Under optimum conditions, a total of 155 birds were expected to arrive at Aransas last fall. One unbanded adult, three banded subadults, and five unbanded subadults had not arrived at Aransas as of December 19. One of the missing birds is the 1986 female (WbW-o) which was last seen in Texas in February 1990. Five unbanded whooping cranes summered in Saskatchewan and Alberta, and one banded bird summered in North Dakota.

The first dates recorded for confirmed observations of migrating whooping cranes were August 13 in Canada, and September 22 in the United States (Table 1). The last sighting date was November 8. Sightings were reported from Alberta, Canada (2); Saskatchewan, Canada (36); North Dakota (11); Minnesota (2); Nebraska (6); Kansas (14); Oklahoma (6); and Texas (1). The 78 confirmed sightings reported in Canada and the United States set a migration record.

Forty confirmed sightings were reported in the United States which tied the fall migration record set in 1987.

Mild and unseasonably warm weather during September and the first three weeks of October allowed the cranes to linger in Saskatchewan and North Dakota. Ninety-three birds in thirty-four groups were confirmed in Saskatchewan between September 3 and October 26. Birds began to move south when a series of cold fronts progressed through the Central United States on October 17, 20, and 23. Sightings peaked in Kansas on October 22 and 23 when at least 34 birds were confirmed in the state. The migration then progressed rapidly with major arrivals at Aransas during late October and the first week in November (Fig. 1). Three unbanded subadults, first observed on December 19, were the last arrivals.

Several unusual observations were made during the fall migration. Thirteen birds (a record high) were observed migrating together in Saskatchewan on October 12. Seven of these birds were color-banded. Two sightings of a single bird with sandhill cranes (probably the same bird) were confirmed in northwestern Minnesota. One juvenile at Aransas is not associated with its parents. The parents of this chick may be the same breeding pair whose first two chicks wintered in Oklahoma and the Texas Panhandle. A 1988 subadult with a severe limp was observed in Saskatchewan and at Aransas. The bird may have a fractured tibiotarsus and is currently unaccounted for at Aransas.

Thanks again to the many cooperators. Use-site evaluations were continued this fall; your continued assistance is essential to the evaluations. Please contact Mr. Wally Jobman, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Office in Grand Island, Nebraska, if observation details are desired (203 West Second Street, Federal Building, Second Floor, Grand Island, Nebraska 68801; commercial telephone: 308/381-5571).

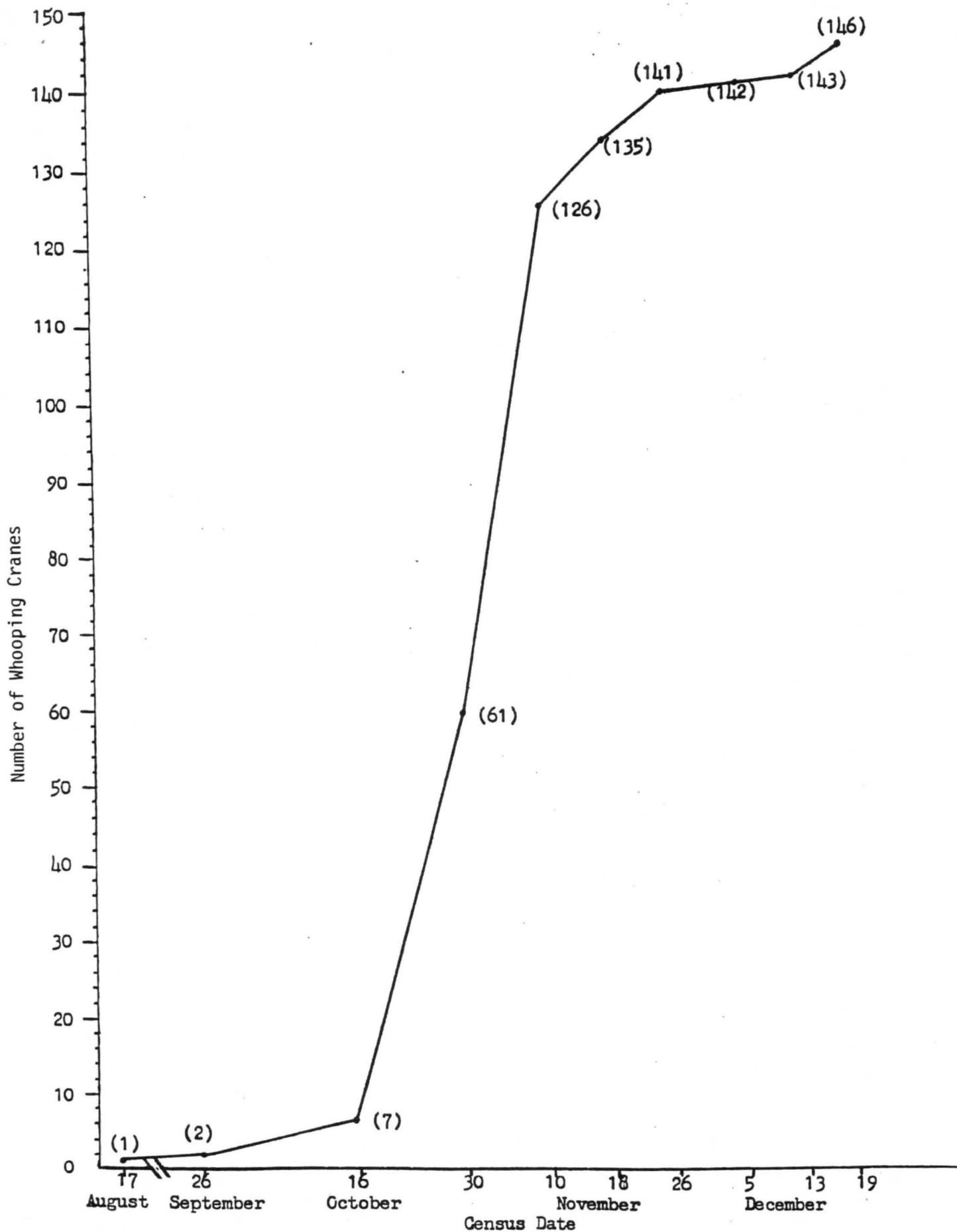


Fig. 1. Chronological arrival of whooping cranes at Aransas NWR, Texas; fall 1990.

Table 1. Date, State or Province of occurrence, and number of birds observed in confirmed whooping crane sightings reported during the fall 1990 migration. <sup>a</sup>

Date <sup>b</sup>	TX	OK	KS	NE	ND	MN	Sask., CA <sup>c</sup>
8-13							1-0
8-20							1-0
8-21							1-0
8-29							1-0
9-3							<u>3</u> -0
9-11							1-0
9-12							<u>2</u> -0
9-13							1-0; <u>2</u> -0
9-18							1-0; 1-0
9-19							2-0
9-20							<u>3</u> -0; 2-0
9-21							1-0
9-24							2-0; 2-0
9-26							<u>2</u> -0
9-27					1-0		
9-29							<u>4</u> -0; 2-0
9-30					3-0		
10-2					1-0		<u>4</u> -0; <u>3</u> -0
10-3					1-0		
10-4					3-0; 2-0; 1-0		
10-5					<u>2</u> -0		
10-6							<u>1</u> -0
10-10					3-0		1-0
10-11						1-0	
10-12							<u>13</u> -0
10-14			3-0				<u>4</u> -0; <u>2</u> -1
10-15	1-0						2-1
10-16					2-0; 3-0		
10-17							<u>3</u> -1
10-20							2-0; 2-0
10-21						1-0	2-1
10-22		2-0	7-1; 7-0; 6-2 4-1; 4-1; 2-1				2-1; <u>2</u> -1

Table 1. Continued.

Date <sup>b</sup>	TX	OK	KS	NE	ND	MN	Sask., CA <sup>c</sup>
10-23		2-0	2-0; <u>4-0</u>	3-0			
10-24			<u>4-0</u>	2-0			2-1
10-25		2-1					4-1
10-26				2-1			2-1; 2-1
10-27		3-0					
10-28		2-0	<u>3-0</u>				
10-29			1-0	1-0			
11-1				1-0			
11-2			3-0				
11-6		2-1					
11-7				<u>2-1</u>			
11-8			<u>4-0</u>				
TOTAL REPORTED SIGHTINGS							
	1	6	14	6	11	2	38

- a. Each report represented by number of whooping cranes reported; adult-young. Sightings in which color-banded birds were present are underlined.
- b. Month-day; first date of sighting used when bird(s) at location several days.
- c. The 8-21 and 9-19 sightings were in Alberta, CA.

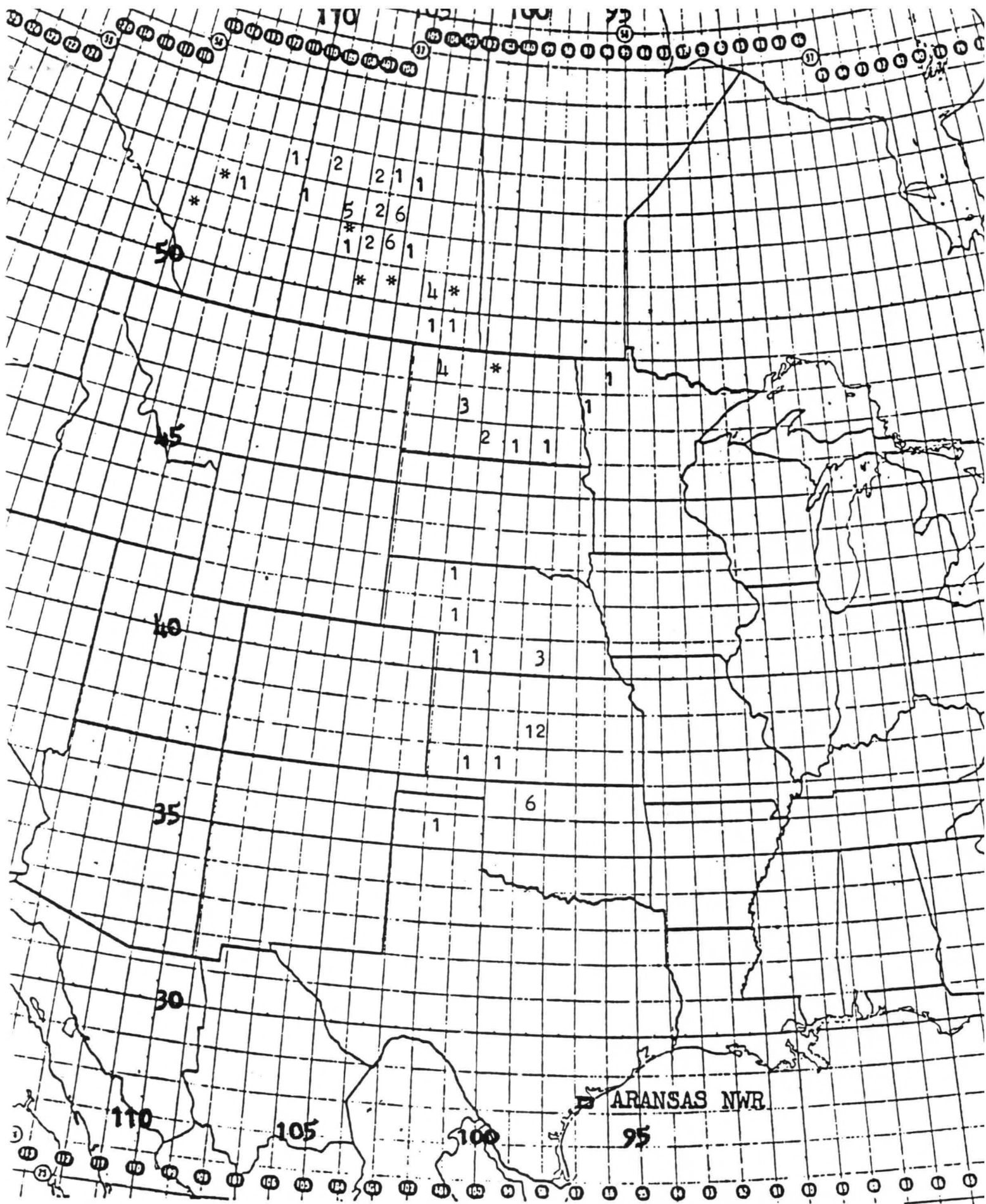


Fig. 2. Number of confirmed whooping crane sightings, reported in each degree-block, during the fall 1990 migration. Asterisks indicate summer 1990 sightings of subadults.