



# United States Department of the Interior

## FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE

Ecological Services  
Nebraska Field Office  
203 West Second Street  
Grand Island, Nebraska 68801

January 27, 1995

### MEMORANDUM

To: AES, R-6, MS 60120 (Attn: Larry Shanks)

From: <sup>Acting</sup> Nebraska Field Supervisor

Subject: Cooperative Whooping Crane Tracking Project

The attached report documents whooping crane sightings reported to our office during the 1994 fall migration. We thank everyone involved for their cooperation in monitoring the whooping crane migration.

Please contact Mr. Wally Jobman of our staff at the above address or telephone (308)382-6468 if additional information is needed.

### Attachment:

cc: EHC, Washington, D.C.  
ES, Salt Lake City, UT  
ES, Helena, MT  
ES, Cheyenne, WY  
ES, Bismarck, ND  
ES, Pierre, SD  
ES, Billings, MT  
ES, Manhattan, KS  
ES, Tulsa, OK  
ES, Arlington, TX  
James Lewis, Whooping Crane Coordinator, Albuquerque, NM  
Law Enforcement District #2, Albuquerque, NM  
Law Enforcement District #6, Denver, CO  
John Cooper, SRA, Pierre, SD  
Manny Medina, SRA, Wichita, 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  
Refuge Manager, Salt Plains NWR, Jet, OK  
Bird Banding Laboratory, Laurel, MD  
Warren Hill, National Park Service, O'Neill, NE  
RW Field Offices (19), SD, ND, KS, NE

**COOPERATIVE WHOOPING CRANE TRACKING PROJECT**  
**(August 1994 - January 1995)**

Whooping crane spring and fall migrations are monitored each year. Sighting reports are forwarded to the Ecological Services Field Office of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Grand Island, Nebraska, by private individuals, the National 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.

Between 1977 and 1988, 132 juvenile whooping cranes were color-marked on the breeding grounds; of these 51 were accounted for during the winter of 1993-94. Fourteen color-marked cranes were observed during the fall migration. All sightings of color-marked whooping cranes during migration are maintained at the Grand Island office. We cannot over-emphasize the importance of observers looking closely for the colored leg bands.

Whooping crane arrivals at 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 whooping cranes reports received from the United States are on record in the Grand Island Ecological Services Field Office and are available upon request.

One hundred thirty-three cranes began the 1994 spring migration. Three additional birds spent the summer at Aransas. Nest and chick surveys during May confirmed only 28 nests, and 15 chicks were located during a June survey. Under optimum conditions about 148 birds were expected to arrive at Aransas last fall. The first arrival at Aransas was confirmed on October 5, and the last arrivals (a family group) were confirmed on January 12, 1995. This was the latest than an adult pair of whooping cranes had ever arrived at Aransas. A total of 132 (125 adult/subadult, and 7 young) whooping cranes are wintering at Aransas. A solitary chick sighted with sandhill cranes in Oklahoma on January 2, is the 133rd crane in the flock. We have no information on where the migrational and summer losses might have occurred nor the cause.

The first dates recorded for confirmed observations of migrating whooping cranes were August 16 in Canada, and September 7 in the United States (Table 1). The last sighting date was January 5. Sightings were reported from Alberta, Canada (1); Saskatchewan, Canada (18); Montana (1); North Dakota (5); South Dakota (2); Nebraska (5); Kansas (13); Oklahoma (4); and Texas (1).

Weather during September and October was mild with only minor disturbances. The first significant outbreak of cold air occurred during the week of November 13. The migration progressed slowly, perhaps due to the mild weather. There were two or more whooping cranes present at Cheyenne Bottoms State Wildlife Area, Kansas, between October 13 and November 29, with a peak of 18 birds present on November 1. A group of 5 whooping cranes was present at Cheyenne Bottoms between October 25 and November 29 (36 days), which is a record migration stopover time for the United States.

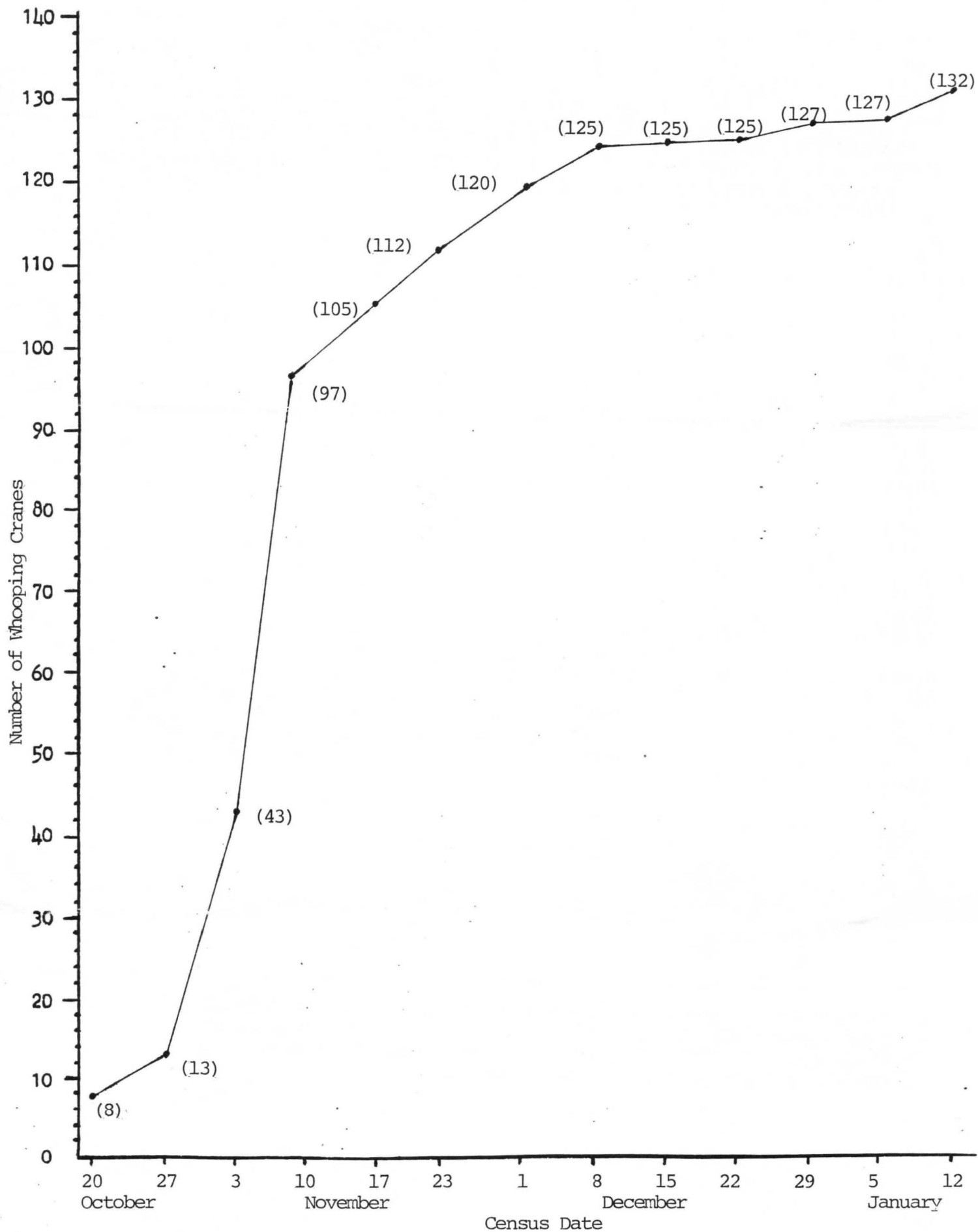


Fig. 1. Chronological arrival of whooping cranes at Aransas NWR, Texas; fall 1994. Numbers include 3 birds which summered at Aransas.

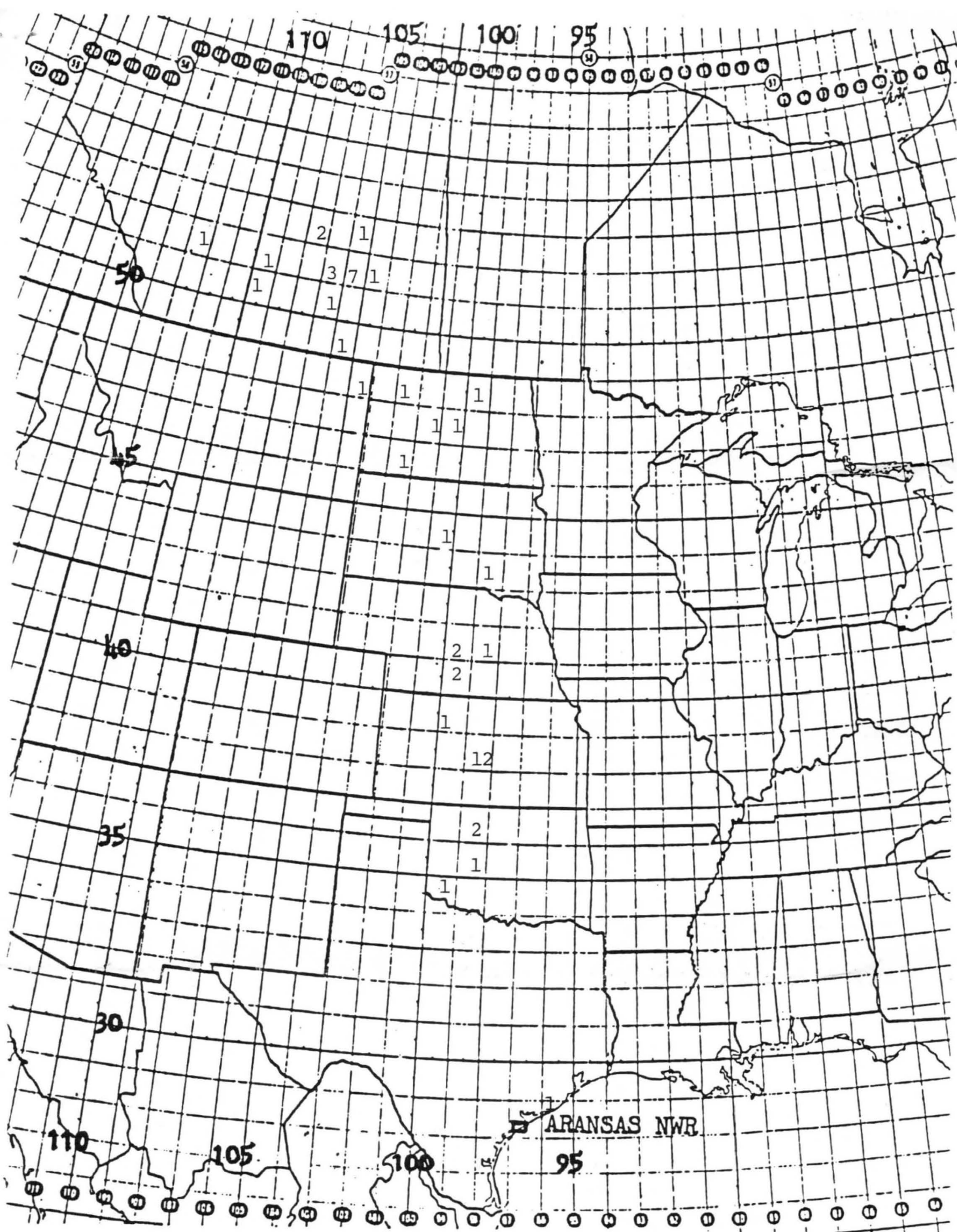


Fig. 2. Number of confirmed whooping crane sightings, reported in each degree-block during the fall 1994 migration.