

COOPERATIVE WHOOPING CRANE TRACKING PROJECT
(September - December 1989)

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 82 were accounted for during the winter of 1988-89. No young were color-marked in 1989. Seventy-nine color-marked birds began the 1989 spring migration and 45 (57 percent) of these birds were observed during the 1989 fall migration. 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 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 October 5 through December 12 (Fig. 1). The first arrival was a yearling which summered in North Dakota. A total of 146 (126 adults/subadults and 20 young) whooping cranes were reported at Aransas as of December 12, 1989. One hundred thirty-one cranes departed for the breeding grounds last spring (one additional bird summered at Aransas), and at least 20 young fledged during the summer. Under optimum conditions, a total of 151 birds were expected to arrive at Aransas last fall. The subadult which spent the summer at Aransas has not been seen since August 24, 1989. Five birds (one 1987 and four 1988 subadults) summered in Saskatchewan, and one 1988 bird summered in North Dakota. The only confirmed mortality during migration was a one-year old bird, which was found dead October 31, 1989, in southwestern Nebraska. The bird apparently struck a 7.2 kV power line. A 1988 color-banded bird was observed on October 17, in Saskatchewan, with a possible injury, and has not arrived at Aransas.

The first dates recorded for confirmed observations of migrating whooping cranes were September 2 in Canada, and September 17 in the United States (Table 1). The last sighting date was November 5. Sightings were reported from Alberta, Canada (1); Saskatchewan, Canada (36); North Dakota (4); Montana (1); South Dakota (2); Nebraska (5); Kansas (3); Oklahoma (2); and Texas (3).

Mild weather during September and the first three weeks of October allowed the birds to linger in Saskatchewan. Ninety-seven birds in thirty-four groups were confirmed in Canada between September 2 and October 30, 1989. Although some birds began moving into the United States during the period October 11-17, the major migration from Canada occurred when a strong weather system moved from Canada into the United States on October 28 and 29. The migration then progressed rapidly with major arrivals at Aransas during the first week of November (Fig. 1). A family group, first observed at Aransas on December 12, was the last arrival.

Good news! The 1986 bird (WbW-o), which wintered in Oklahoma as a chick, and north of Aransas for the past two winters, has finally been reported at Aransas. Prior to last summer, when it was observed in Wood Buffalo National Park with another whooping crane, it had been seen only in association with sandhill cranes.

Thanks again to the many cooperators. Use-site evaluations were continued this spring; 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.

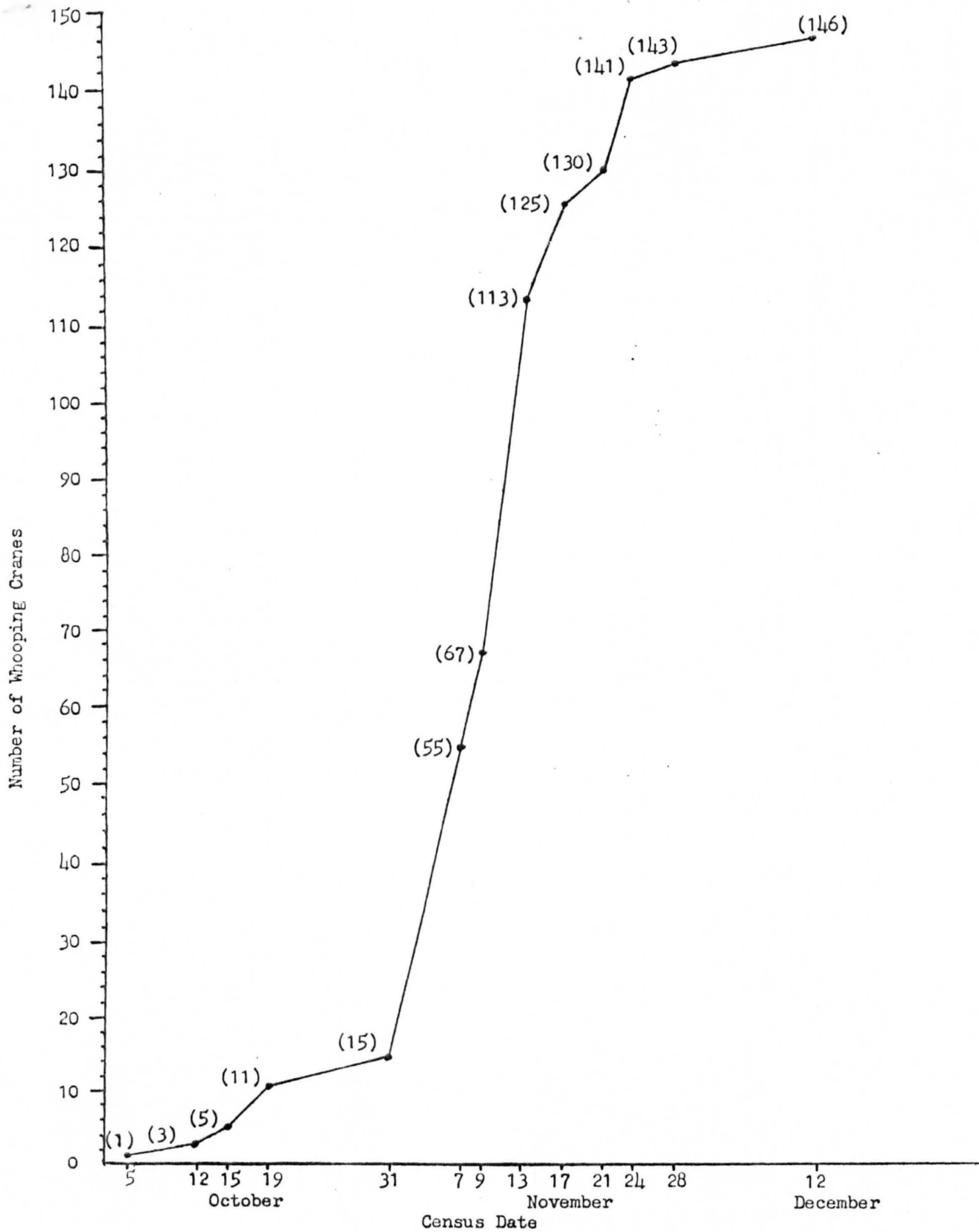


Fig. 1. Chronological arrival of whooping cranes at Aransas NWR, Texas; fall 1989.

Table 1. Date, State or Province of occurrence, and number of birds observed in confirmed whooping crane sightings reported during the fall 1989 migration.^a

Date ^b	TX	OK	KS	NE	SD	ND ^d	MT	Sask., CA ^c
9-2								2-0
9-5								<u>3-0</u>
9-10								<u>1-0</u> ; 2-0
9-11								<u>3-0</u> ; <u>2-0</u>
9-12								<u>2-0</u> ; <u>2-0</u>
9-15								3-0
9-16								<u>2-0</u> ; 3-0
9-17						<u>1-0</u>		
9-19								2-0; <u>1-0</u>
9-21								<u>1-1</u> ; <u>2-0</u>
9-23								<u>2-1</u>
9-28								<u>2-1</u> ; 6-1
9-29								<u>2-1</u> ; 3-0
10-1								<u>2-0</u> ; <u>1-1</u>
10-4								<u>2-1</u>
10-5								<u>3-0</u>
10-6								<u>1-0</u>
10-7								<u>1-0</u>
10-9								<u>2-0</u>
10-11						<u>2-0</u>		
10-13				<u>4-0</u>				
10-14								2-1
10-17						4-0	4-1	<u>1-0</u> ; 2-0
10-18								2-0
10-19	1-0							
10-20								2-0
10-21	1-0							<u>2-0</u>
10-25								<u>1-0</u>
10-27			<u>4-1</u>					<u>3-0</u>
10-28								<u>2-1</u>
10-29				2-1				
10-30								2-0
10-31				3-1; <u>1-0</u>				
11-1					1-0	6-1		
11-2			<u>2-0</u> ; <u>3-0</u>					
11-3	1-0							
11-4		2-0		<u>2-0</u>	2-1			
11-5		<u>4-2</u>						
TOTAL REPORTED SIGHTINGS								
	3	2	3	5	2	4	1	37

a Each report represented by number of whooping cranes reported; adult-young. Sightings in which color-marked birds were present are underlined.

b Month-day; first date of sighting used when bird(s) at location several days, except as indicated in footnotes c and d.

c The 10-1 sighting of two birds was in Alberta, CA. For birds which summered in Sask., the last date bird(s) observed in summering area is used.

d ND sighting on 9-17 is last date bird observed in summering area.

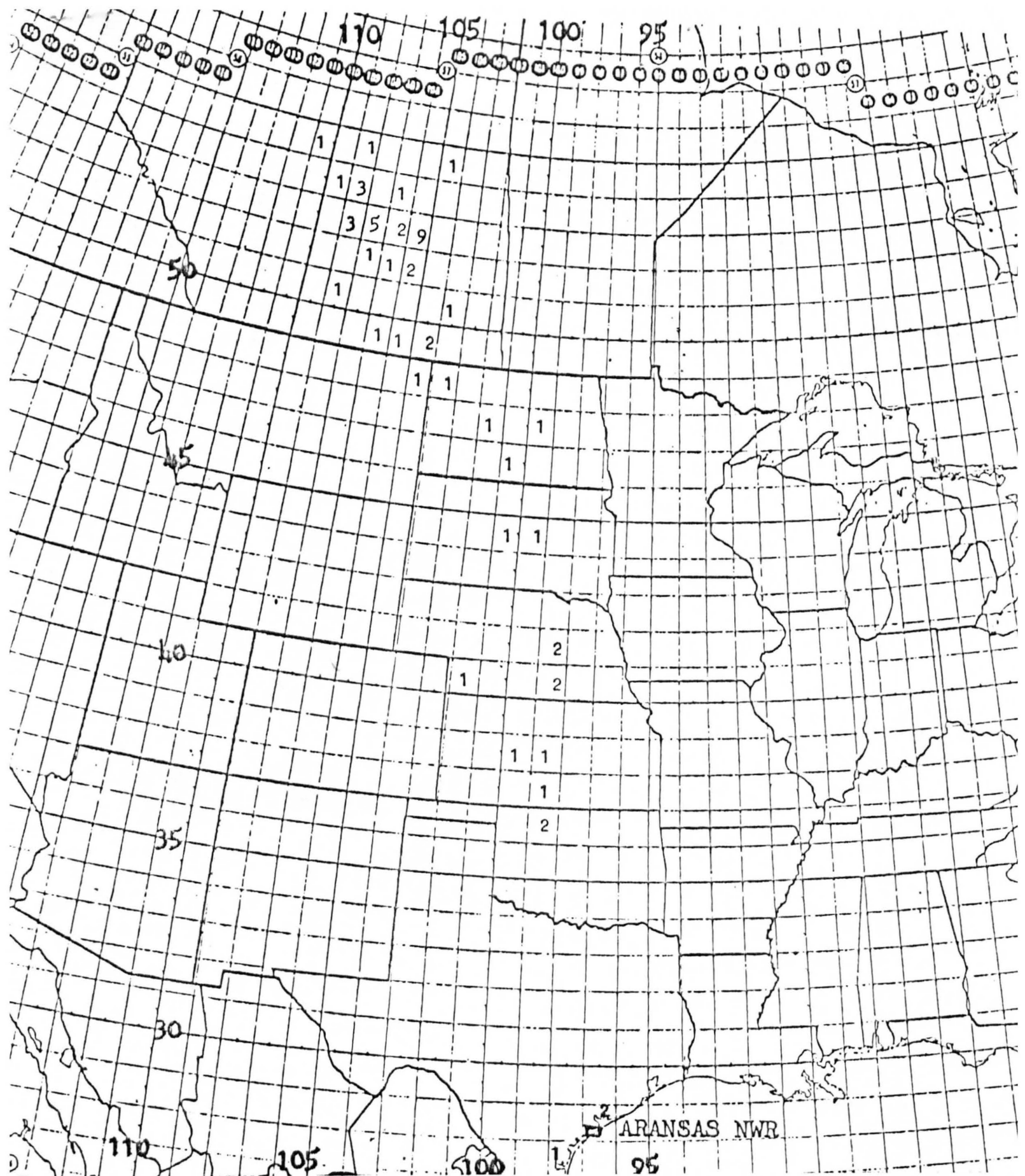


Fig. 2. Number of confirmed whooping crane sightings, reported in each degree-block, during the fall 1989 migration.