

CRANE RIVER CHRONICLES

IAIN NICOLSON  Audubon
CENTER AT ROWE SANCTUARY

Winter 2009

Season of the cranes

By Bill Taddicken, Director

As the cold north winter winds of Nebraska begin to wrap around to the south and give way to the warmer southerly breezes coming up from Oklahoma, Texas and Mexico, we will once again be anticipating the first arrivals of sandhill cranes to Rowe Sanctuary. All of us here at Rowe Sanctuary look forward to the migration not only because it means the return of the cranes and the magnificent spectacle that this gathering of wildlife provides, but we also look forward to the gathering of people from all over the world that will gain an appreciation for the wonder of this place called the Platte River.

Our mission at Rowe Sanctuary is to preserve Platte River habitats for cranes and other wildlife through education and conservation. The arrival of the cranes to their river roosts each spring reaffirms why we work so hard to protect this critical and shrinking habitat on the Platte River. All of our efforts throughout the year to teach people about this valuable and threatened resource and to manage the habitat on the sanctuary and beyond, are rewarded with the call of the first crane each spring. Standing near the wide, shallow braided channels of the river, hearing and looking up, but not yet seeing, the first cranes of the spring, brings that feeling of hope for the future of the cranes. Straining your eyes for the tiniest speck in the wide blue Nebraska sky and then finally seeing, as if by magic, shapes materialize out of nothingness falling and drifting towards earth and slowly becoming cranes. The

crescendo of tens of thousands of cranes calling and wheeling skyward on an early morning in March and watching the joyful dancing in the relative warmth of the early spring sun, are a few of the most satisfying rewards for this labor of love.

Our educational efforts, whether it is a guided trip to view cranes, a class for elementary children, or just talking to visitors are designed to impart an appreciation for this place we call Rowe Sanctuary and the Platte River. With this appreciation, we strive to establish a conservation ethic in people that will sustain our efforts to protect this magnificent place. Crane Season is the time for Rowe Sanctuary to demonstrate why we need everyone's help to accomplish our mission. The task is huge and we cannot do it without you! Thank you to all of the people that support our work here at Rowe Sanctuary.



Sanctuary/Center News

Kinder Morgan Foundation supports Kearney Public fifth grade SPLASH spring program

A grant from the Kinder Morgan Foundation will give Kearney Public fifth graders the chance to experience the sandhill crane migration through the SPLASH (Senses Providing Language Arts Skills Help) program.

School groups arrive before dawn at the sanctuary to experience the grandeur of thousands of cranes lifting off their roosts in the river as they head to the fields for feeding. The students sketch and journal their observations, thoughts and feelings as they watch the spectacle unfold. After a small breakfast, the students attend a natural history lesson on

cranes and the Platte River, hike to an outdoor viewing blind to experience the river in March and write sensory poetry. A storyteller then recites myths and legends connected to cranes, students write and share their own crane legends.

Education Department Receives New Binoculars and Monoculars

Thanks to the donors of the Stevie Staples Education Fund and Eagle Optic's generous matching program, Rowe's Education Department now has ten additional binoculars and twenty monoculars for students to utilize during educational programs.

Online Newsletter - To receive an email reminder when the online newsletter is posted to the web site, contact kskaggs@audubon.org.

Conservation News - Bird Diverters Replaced

January 18, 2009 - Dawson Public Power Company arrived at Rowe Sanctuary to replace the broken bird flight diverters on the two high voltage power lines that cross the Platte River. These devices were installed last year through a partnership with Rowe Sanctuary, Dawson Public Power, Nebraska Game and Parks Commission, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation. Unfortunately a large number of these devices failed during this past year and needed to be replaced. Dawson Public Power hired a helicopter crew to complete the installation. The helicopter arrived in the morning and the installation was completed by noon that day. The partnership is into the second year of a monitoring effort to determine the effectiveness of the bird diverters. A team of researchers from the University of Nebraska at Kearney is conducting the research and results should be available by the summer of 2009.



Crew replacing
bird flight diverters
on Rowe Sanctuary

Photo by
Alan Bartels

Thank you to our 2009 Crane Season Sponsors

Sandhills Publishing

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Holiday Inn of Kearney

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Calamus Outfitters

2009 Rivers & Wildlife Cele- bration Keynote Sponsors

Nikon

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Platte River Recovery
Implementation Program

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Nature Notes - Helping our feathered friends

By Kent Skaggs, Office Manager

I recently received an e-mail from one of our volunteers regarding a youngster from Ottawa, Canada, who has invented a painted, plastic window decal to prevent birds from flying into windows. I've tried similar decals before with varying success. The new decal is painted with fluorescent ultraviolet paint, which is visible to birds but not humans.

I decided I would look into this further to see if it indeed was a solution to preventing millions, if not billions of unnecessary bird deaths each year. The answer I found was yes and no.

David Sibley, author of *The Sibley Guide to Birds*, has done some tests using the same principle. He took a yellow highlighter and drew closely spaced vertical lines on the inside of windows and found that this reduced the number of bird collisions. He found that the effectiveness of this treatment was best on clear days as the UV light from the sun caused the lines to fluoresce and become visible to the birds.

The drawback to this treatment is the need for sunlight in order for it to be effective. If you feed birds, you know that your feeders are busiest when the weather isn't so nice, usually meaning overcast skies and clouds can block the UV rays making the treatment ineffective.

So the decal will be effective some of the time, provided you have adequate light and have covered enough of the window as spacing is an important component to this treatment as well. Since the decal is essentially clear, the best option appears to be a roll of film that could be cut to fit the entire window. Maybe this will be the next step to help further protect our feathered jewels.

Since light limits the application discussed, what is being done to help birds during migration at night? With the main culprit for window collisions during these periods being in metropolitan areas in the form of high-rise buildings, it's a little tougher nut to crack. There are potential solutions, but they will require changes by the window and architectural industries for them to come to fruition.

Please visit the following links to find out more about the threats that windows pose to birds and treatments that will help save them.

<http://www.birdscreen.com/Articles.htm>

<http://www.flap.org/>

<http://www.nycaudubon.org/home/BSBGuidelines.shtml>

Calendar of Events

For more information on the following events, please visit our 'Calendar of Events' page on our web site at www.rowsanctuary.org.

Great Backyard Bird Count, February 13 - 16, 2009

This event is a great way to see what birds hang out during the winter where you live and a way to contribute to conservation efforts in your area.

2009 Crane Viewing at Rowe Sanctuary

March 7 - April 8

Reservations can be made by calling 308-468-5282, Monday - Friday, between 9 a.m. and 5 p.m.

2009 Rivers & Wildlife Celebration

March 20 - 22

Keynote speakers will be **Joel Sartore**, photographer and writer for National Geographic; **Felipe Chavez-Ramirez**, Director of the Platte River Whooping Crane Maintenance Trust; and **Pete Dunne**, author of birding and natural history books and is the current Director of the Cape May Bird Observatory. He will also be a guest leader of a post festival birding field trip.

For more information or to download a registration form, visit our 'Rivers & Wildlife Celebration' page on our web site.

Fourth Annual Family Crane Carnival at Rowe Sanctuary

March 28 & 29 10:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m.

Fun for the entire family and a great way to learn about cranes. Free to the public.

Fifth Annual Crane Watchers' Breakfast

March 28 7:30 a.m. to 10:30 a.m.

Held at the American Legion in Gibbon and hosted by the Gibbon Area Chamber of Commerce, this breakfast is one you don't want to miss. Great food to go with a great wildlife spectacle.

Crane 101

March 7 - April 8 9:30 a.m. daily

Do you want to know more about cranes in a short period of time? This class is a good place to start. Learn a little about a cranes physiology, why they're here and why the Platte River is so important to them.

Weekend Lunches

March 7 - March 29 Saturdays & Sundays 11:30 - 2:00

The Gibbon American Legion will be serving lunch at Rowe Sanctuary for crane watchers who want to maximize their time looking at the birds. Proceeds to benefit both organizations.

Rowe Sanctuary's Wish List

ConservationProgram

- 4X4 Gator All Terrain Vehicle
- New Lap top computer
- GPS unit
- 12 Fireproof coveralls for the volunteer burn crew
- Annual river clearing - \$20,000

Miscellaneous Items

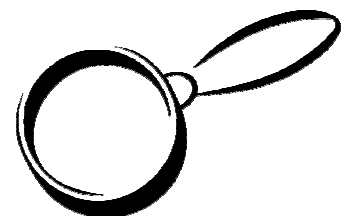
- New color printer
- Golf cart
- Carpeting for the ConAgra Discovery Room
- 2 pair of stereo speakers for the Ron & Carol Cope Viewing Hall

EducationProgram

- 2 Seines
- 20 Kick nets
- 1 Proscope (digital microscope)
- 2 Flow meters
- 5 Field microscopes
- 2 Water quality monitoring field kits
- 2 Anemometer
- 10 Digital meat thermometers
- 10 GPS units

Rowe Sanctuary's Ultimate Wish List

- \$5 Million Endowment
- Volunteer Housing for 20
- ADA accessible trail system
- Solar panels for visitor center



Rowe Sanctuary/Iain Nicolson Audubon Center Donors

Rowe Sanctuary would like to thank everyone who has supported our work on behalf of cranes and other wildlife that depend on the Platte River and its associated ecosystems.

The following gifts were received during the 2008 calendar year.

Organizational Support

\$500-\$1,500

Geo.Spencer Vineyard
Julie Morsman Schroeder Foundation
Prairie Health Ventures, LLC
Stanley M. Truhlsen Family Foundation
The Atticus Trust

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The support and recognition of all our donors is extremely important to us. Space limitations require gift recognition to begin with gifts totaling \$50 or more during the 2008 calendar year. This section will be reported on a quarterly basis in future newsletters and we hope to recognize all donors, space permitting.

We apologize if a donor has been inadvertently left off this list. Please let us know of any missing names so corrections can be made in the next issue.

The Braided River Legacy Society

In 2009 Rowe Sanctuary is happy to announce the formation of the Braided River Legacy Society. This society recognizes generous individual donors whose annual support of \$500 or more sustains our mission to conserve Platte River ecosystems for cranes and other wildlife. The Platte River is North America's most important "braided river" ecosystem. Donors are making possible the education and conservation work at Rowe Sanctuary that will help develop a culture of conservation committed to the future of this treasured natural resource. The Braided River Legacy Society is one way we can extend special recognition to donors leading the effort to establish a natural legacy for the future. If you are interested in joining this society, please contact Bill Taddicken at 308-468-5282 or billtaddicken@nctc.net.

Thanks to these charter members of the Braided River Legacy Society (gifts and pledges received in 2008):

Whooping Crane

\$10,000 and above

Margery Nicolson

Sandhill Crane

\$5,000-\$9,999

Jim & Kathleen McKenzie

Bald Eagle

\$2,500-\$4,999

Duncan & Janice McGregor

Piping Plover

\$1,000-\$2,499

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\$500-\$999

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Joel & Jill Johnson

Dean & Trudy Plautz

Bill & Jeanne Ross

Ed & Wilma Taddicken

Kirby Zicafoose

Education - Harbingers of Spring

By Keanna Leonard, Education Director

I'm excited that the cranes are coming. But I'm also excited for the other signs of spring... like those eerie calls that come from nowhere. You know the ones I mean. Those sounds that invade your consciousness first sounding like insects, but as you concentrate you realize they're frogs. Ah...the first male frogs of spring singing for the ladies.

I usually hear my first frogs on warm March evenings in the viewing blinds. (You really can't ask for more than cranes chattering, frogs singing, and a beautiful sunset on the river!) The song we hear this time of year is from secretive, little western chorus frogs.

Their call is a rapid series of creaking clicks that rise in pitch and sounds very similar to the sound made when running your finger across the teeth of a comb. The frogs repeat the call every one or two seconds until you come too close.

Chorus frogs are not the only frogs we have in Nebraska. We have twelve of

the nearly 3,700 species of frogs and toads worldwide.

Toads and frogs play an important role in our ecosystem. As tadpoles, they feed larger animals such as fish. As adults, they are a big part of our natural pest control system eating insects and other invertebrates. They can also become lunch for reptiles, birds, mammals, fish and other amphibians.

Frogs and toads are also good indicators of change in the environment. Worldwide, most populations of amphibians are on the decline. A lot more research needs to be conducted to find the causes.

That's where Rowe Sanctuary is going to start playing a role. On **Saturday, April 18**, we will host a citizen Amphibian Monitoring Workshop conducted by **Dennis Ferraro**, University of Nebraska Extension Associate Professor and Herpetologist. Participants will be given the tools to help gather data on frog and toads in the area.

Dennis has conducted herpetological surveys and counts in five states, collected data on over 2,700 snakes, 2,200 amphibians, and 300 turtles and lizards. He steers an on-going Prairie Rattlesnake study in the Sandhills of Nebraska and maintains the live animal lab of native snakes for research and educational purposes at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln. Dennis is also the co-creator and developer of "Reptiles and Amphibians of Nebraska" website and has compiled and just released a CD named "Frog Calls of Nebraska,"

If you are interested in joining this workshop, hurry and give me call at 308-468-5282. Space is limited.



Volunteering - Why volunteer?

By Charley Falmlen: Rowe Sanctuary's AmeriCorps Project Member

A little over one month ago, I was sitting at my desk working and thinking about what I really wanted to do with my life. Heaven knows, I had better decide pretty soon! I knew what issues I cared about, but I had never really taken any steps beyond that. I was researching Master's degrees when I stumbled upon an inspirational quote, and it motivated me to step outside my own door and start having an impact on the community around me.

One of the first places I looked at volunteering was Rowe Sanctuary, because I deeply believe in the work they do. I called up Tony, Rowe's Volunteer Coordinator, and he eagerly invited me out, showed me around and made me feel welcome. He then mentioned a wonderful program through AmeriCorps, the University of Nebraska and the United Way. It sparked my interest so we began making contacts and completing paperwork for the

project. This all happened within hours of me deciding I needed to start taking more responsibility for my community and the world around me. I became a part of something.

My role here is to assist Tony by coordinating local volunteers for Crane Season, as well as the rest of the year and to assist the rest of the staff wherever possible. My first month in this role has introduced me to some of the most wonderful people I have ever encountered (and it's not even Crane Season yet!) Every volunteer that I have had the pleasure of meeting has had a sense of confidence and happiness in their eyes, such a look that can only come from a person that operates with a giving nature and a sense of purpose. I know why I volunteer, and within the past month I have started to understand why everyone else does too.

I can't wait to see the spectacle

Mother Nature puts on each spring around the Platte River, and I am looking forward to meeting each and every one of you as you travel from near and far to celebrate it along with us.

"The best way to find yourself is to lose yourself in the service of others."

- Mahatma Gandhi



CRANE RIVER CHRONICLES

Rowe Sanctuary
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The mission of Rowe Sanctuary is to preserve Platte River ecosystems for cranes and other wildlife through conservation and education.



General Information

Iain Nicolson Audubon Center at Rowe Sanctuary
44450 Elm Island Road
Gibbon, NE 68840
Phone: 308-468-5282
www.rowsanctuary.org

Open Monday - Friday, 9 am - 5 pm
Open 7 days a week during crane season

Director: Bill Taddicken btaddicken@audubon.org
Education Director: Keanna Leonard kleonard@audubon.org
Office manager: Kent Skaggs kskaggs@audubon.org
Naturalist-Volunteer Coordinator: Tony Docherty
adocherty@audubon.org

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Please send me information on how to name Rowe Sanctuary in my will or retirement plan.

Name _____
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Please mail to the address above or email us at kskaggs@audubon.org. Thank you!

You can now make donations online through our website at www.rowsanctuary.org!