



Whooping Crane Classroom Kit

Teacher's Guide

Dear Educator,

Ecology North developed this resource with funding from the Northwest Territories Species Conservation and Recovery Fund. Here, you'll find fun and interactive ways to educate students about Whooping Cranes and the threats affecting them. These activities are ideal for grades 1-6.

About the Whooping Crane

The Whooping Crane is the tallest bird in North America. In the 1940s, Whooping Cranes almost went extinct due to habitat loss and hunting (with only 21-22 left). They have recently made a comeback, with over 100 nests recorded in 2017. These birds are incredibly resilient and can live up to 30 years or more in the wild! Thanks to conservation efforts and the protection of their habitat, the Whooping Crane is recovering.



Photo from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Services
Nature Conservancy Canada

Status: **Endangered**

Federal Species at Risk Act List: **Endangered**

NWT General Status Rank: **At Risk**

Are you faster than a Whooping Crane?

Whooping Cranes can fly non-stop for up to 10 hours, covering distances of 750km at a top speed of 75km/hour.

The Whooping Crane vs The Sandhill Crane

Know what makes each bird unique!



Name

Whooping Crane

Sandhill Crane

Latin Name

Grus americana

Grus canadensis

Appearance

Body Colour: White
Distinct Features: Yellow eyes, rust coloured patches on their head, black feathers on both sides of their head, black tipped wings only visible in flight

Body Colour: Slate Grey
Distinct Features: Pale cheeks and red skin on the crown

Size

Standing Height: Up to 1.5 meters
Wingspan: Over 2 meters

Standing Height: Up to 1.2 meters
Wingspan: Over 2 meters

Habitat

Nests in shallow ponds or wetlands, typically separated by narrow ridges where trees such as white and black spruce grow.

Forage in open prairies, grasslands and wetlands. Outside of breeding most often roost in the deep water of ponds or lakes.

Range

Whooping Cranes winter in southern Texas and arrive in the NWT to breed in April and May.

Sandhill Cranes can be found all over North America, including the NWT. They migrate to southern areas like New Mexico and Texas during the winter months.

Population

More than 850 birds are alive today. They are descendants of only three family lines.

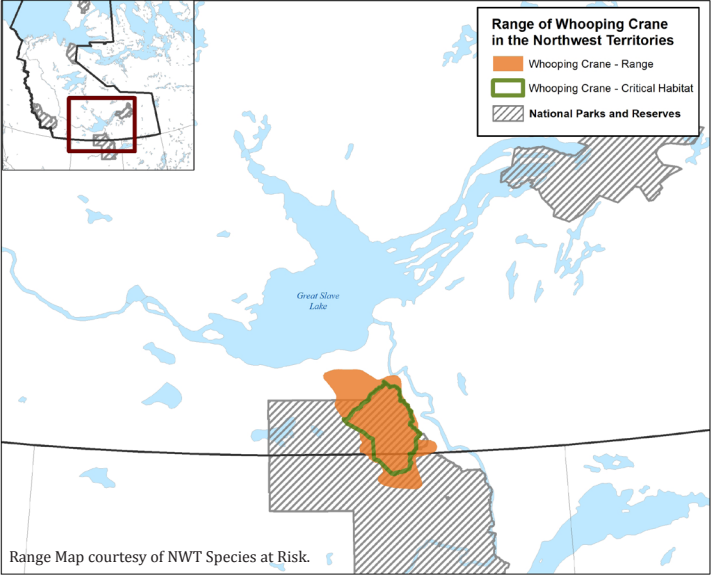
840,000 birds according to the 2019 spring average calculated by the Alberta Conservation Association.

Diet

Whooping Cranes are omnivores. They eat a wide variety of insects, minnows, crustaceans, dragonfly larvae, berries, molluscs, frogs, snakes, and small rodents. Food is readily available at their breeding grounds in the NWT. In South-Central Saskatchewan, Whooping Cranes feed on waste grains (barley and wheat), tubers, insects, voles, deer mice, and snakes. In the winter, they feed on blue crabs and clams.

Behaviour

Whooping Cranes find a mate when they’re about 4 or 5 years old, and pair for life. While in Texas for the winter, they flap their wings and dance around in an attempt to attract the keen eye of a potential mate. Once paired, they begin their spring migration with their flock to the NWT, where they build their nest and lay their eggs. Chicks are born in early June, and both the parents share the duties of raising the young. Whooping Cranes are very territorial, meaning they mark and defend their area from any intruders or predators. In Wood Buffalo National Park, you may notice how Whooping Cranes do not socialize with one another, nor do they merge their area boundaries.



Range and Habitat

Whooping Cranes can only be found in North America and there are no subspecies. Researchers believe that Whooping Cranes are one of the oldest birds on Earth with fossils dating back over 3.5 million years. All breeding Whooping Cranes in Canada are located within a small, single geographic region approximately 75km west of Fort Smith, Northwest Territories. Their home in the NWT is a critical habitat and is identified as protected under the Federal Species at Risk Act.

Indoor Activity

Whooping Crane Art Activity

Have students cut recycled paper into feather shapes. Glue the feathers on the Whooping Crane colouring sheet included in this package. Get creative with it! To print more sheets, visit the NWT Science Focus website listed below.

Outdoor Activity


Race a Whooping Crane

Measure a 100 meter distance. Mark a start and a finish. Have the kids run as fast as they can to see if they can travel the distance faster than a Whooping Crane. At top speed, a Whooping Crane will travel 100 meters in just 5 seconds!

Whooping Crane in Other Languages

French	grue blanche d'Amérique
Cree	wâplcâhk
Chipewyan	del delgai


Sourced from Alberta Cree Dictionary and South Slave Divisional Education Council Chipewyan Dictionary



Resources

- www.nwt-speciesatrisk.ca Information about species at risk in the NWT and their management plans.
- www.nwt-sciencefocus.ca Ecology North’s educator resource hub for lesson plans and activities, including more Species at Risk guides and activities.
- www.allaboutbirds.org Library of bird resources and tracking of bird species.

Listen to the Whooping Crane’s trill by scanning this QR code or clicking [here!](#)



Threats

- Whooping Crane habitats and breeding grounds are being challenged on the ground by human and ATV traffic and in the air by airplanes and powerlines.
- Whooping Cranes face numerous predators, including bears, wolverines, wolves, foxes, mink, lynx, eagles, and the common raven.
- Hunters often mistake them for Sandhill Cranes, known as the rib eye of the sky, in Canada and the United States.
- Droughts and climate change also threaten the Whooping Crane. The changing climate could reduce the size of their breeding grounds, threatens their food security, and introduces new predators.

Whooping Cranes are naturally aggressive towards human beings. Do not approach them!