



ANIMAL SECTION - BIRDS

ABOUT

WHOOPING CRANE

The Whooping Crane (*Grus americana*) is the tallest North American bird. Standing almost five feet (1.51m) tall, it can weigh up to 16 pounds (7.25kg). The Whooping Crane is snowy white with black wingtips that can only be seen when the wings are spread. Their wingspan may reach up to eight feet (2.438m). Whooping Cranes have long necks and bills and stand on long, thin black legs. There is a patch of reddish-black bristly feathers on the top and back of the head. Black feathers on the side of the head below the yellow eye look like a long, dark moustache. The Whooping Crane is the only large white bird with black wingtips that flies with its neck straight out in front, legs trailing behind. It also is the only one that walks or stands on long thin legs and does not swim. This bird has a varied diet, which includes crustaceans, insects, fish, frogs, and grain that has been left behind. They breed in freshwater marshes and prairies, using grain fields, shallow lakes, and lagoons. Their nest is a mound of vegetation on the ground in a marsh, with a shallow indentation on top for the 1-3 eggs, which are light brown with brown blotches. Hatchlings are born covered with down and are able to walk and swim soon after hatching. They are also able to feed themselves within a day.

DID YOU KNOW?

Since the 1940s Whooping Cranes have been endangered and were once on the brink of extinction. There are many contributions to the decline of the Whooping Crane population. One is habitat loss due to the draining and clearing of wetland habitats and conversion of wetlands and prairies to hay and grain production. Other reasons for the decline in Whooping Cranes include being hunted for the use of their feathers and meat for the table, and human disturbance in breeding areas and along the migration routes. The biggest killer of Whooping Cranes is collisions with power lines. Thanks to intensive conservation and management work in Canada and the US, their future is looking less bleak. In December 2004 there were 468 Whooping Cranes with 213 in the wild and the rest in captivity.

For more detailed information visit: www.allaboutbirds.org or www.savingcranes.org.

TEST YOUR KNOWLEDGE

Which of these birds is the tallest in North America?

- a. Swan
- b. Whooping Crane
- c. Wattled Crane
- d. Flamingo

Answer is B.

