



DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR

Fish and Wildlife Service Regional Information

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE - Feature Story

BUREAU OF SPORT FISHERIES AND WILDLIFE

FOR THESE GREATER SANDHILL CRANES IT'S THE ONLY WAY TO GO -- FLY

Twelve captured Greater Sandhill Cranes went to the Bureau of Sport Fisheries and Wildlife Patuxent Wildlife Research Center, Maryland, the only way to go -- they flew -- by air freight, that is.

The wild birds were captured in August on the Malheur National Wildlife Refuge near Burns, Oregon, for the endangered species propagation program at the Research Center. The cranes will undergo a variety of tests including behavioral, physiological, nutritional and pathological studies in relation to the whooping crane, a close relative.

Shipping a live bird with a seven-foot wing span, weighing up to 13 pounds, in a crate large enough for comfort and small enough for a ride in a jet liner is a pretty neat trick, but multiply that one by 12 and you have a reason for a king-sized headache.

The research station drew up specifications for Malheur personnel to construct a dozen burlap lined, wire netting covered crates, 20" x 24" x 36". It would be quite an environmental change for the Sandhills from their wide open habitat in the wilds of the refuge.

Plane flights and time schedules were thoroughly checked so the birds would be crated for as short a time as possible on their journey across the Nation. Ray Bauchman, Chief Agent of United Air Freight, Boise, Idaho, scheduled four birds on each of three different flights to meet airline limitations on carrying live animals. Plans were made to capture the cranes as late as possible the evening before the flights; the climax of three weeks of preparation to capture the wild birds came on August 20. That's when a crew of five from the refuge staff, headed by John Scharff, Manager, drove some 25 miles up the Blitzen Valley to set a recoilless rocket net trap. At 4:30 that afternoon the rocket was fired and the net settled over 18 Sandhill Cranes. It was a real stroke of good luck! There was still much to do to get the birds to the Malheur Refuge headquarters and the Boise airport on time. The chosen dozen included eight males, three females and one of unknown sex. They were weighed and crated, and within an hour and a half were headed toward refuge headquarters. Three other birds were banded with streamers marked Fish and Wildlife and released. Observers reporting sightings later would enable biologists to learn more about migration habits and characteristics of the cranes. One of the 18 was a recaptured crane banded in September 1966. Two others escaped.

- More -

It was almost 7 o'clock in the evening when Biologist Eldon L. McLaury and Assistant Manager Richard Toltzmann reached the refuge with their prizes. The Boise airport was still 200 miles away, and the crew was dead tired. They ate supper, then "hit the sack" for a short sleep and were up again before midnight. Counting an hour lost by the change to Mountain Daylight time, it was 5:45 in the morning when the men reached Boise. The cantankerous cranes waited as the men gulped a quick breakfast before heading for the airport where Agent Bauchman met them at 6:15. Shipping tags were completed and the first crates were put aboard as the sassy occupants poked their bills through burlap liners to nip at fingers.

It was a take off the cranes will never experience again as the jetliner accelerated and hurled itself into the sky.

By 9:30 that night, Atlantic time, less than 25 hours and some 3,000 miles from their capture, all the birds were in Patuxent to begin their new role in various studies to gain more knowledge of the species in relation to the whooper. This knowledge will be the foundation of a better management program for the rare and endangered whooping crane.

For these Greater Sandhill Cranes, it was the only way to fly.

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Pictures or sketches available on request.

U. S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE
BUREAU OF WILDLIFE
WASHINGTON, D. C. 20250
JAN 11 1966
MAIL ROOM
RECEIVED

It was almost 1 o'clock in the evening when Biologist Eldon L. Melanson and Assistant Manager Richard Tolman reached the refuge with their prizes. The boat was still 100 miles away, and the crew was hard tired. They ate supper, then "hit the sack" for a short sleep and were up again before midnight. Counting on being lost by the change to Mountain Daylight time, it was 5:45 in the morning when the men reached Boise. The conservation cranes waited as the men gulped a quick breakfast before heading for the airport where Agent Bachman met them at 6:15. Shipping tags were completed and the first cranes were put aboard as the easy occupants packed their bags through bureau lines to ship at 6:30 a.m.

It was a task off the cranes will never experience again as the jetliner accelerated and hurried itself into the sky.

By 9:30 that night, Alaskan time, less than 25 hours and some 3,000 miles from their capture, all the birds were in Portland to begin their new role in various studies to gain more knowledge of the species in relation to the whooper. This knowledge will be the foundation for the management program for the rare and endangered whooping crane.

For these Greater Sandhill Cranes, it was the only way to fly.

1974-1975

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Reprints of sketches available on request.

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