

ORNITHOLOGY

Whooping Cranes Return

The annual migration of whooping cranes, the rarest birds in North America, has begun with some 20 to 30 birds making the southward journey to their winter home in Texas.

► RAISE your gun and shoot at a big white bird flying south this fall and you may help write "the end" to a 39-year-old struggle to preserve the whooping crane—the rarest bird in North America.

If you sight a long-necked and long-legged white bird, with jet black wing tips, flying with a quick upward "flick" to its wings, do not shoot it.

If you see a five-foot tall bird, white with a red crown and black markings across each cheek, standing or feeding in a marsh, do not shoot it. The bird is probably a whooping crane.

Its flyway is south from Canada, across the Dakotas, Nebraska, Kansas, Oklahoma and central Texas to the Aransas National Wildlife Refuge on Texas' Gulf Coast.

Wildlife conservation officials in Washington warn that the most dangerous time of the year for the whoopers is the three-month period September through November. It is on their 2,400-mile flight along the flyway to winter homes that the birds attract the attention of hunters and face the added danger of the gun. By the end of November usually the last few stragglers are back from their summer nesting grounds.

If hunters are careful, and non-human predators have not taken their toll of young birds, between 20 and 30 rare whooping cranes are expected to arrive at the Aransas wildlife sanctuary this year.

This will bring the total number of birds to its highest point since 1949-50 when there were 34. Five of the birds, three adults and two famous chicks, make their homes in zoos.

For more than half the year, the birds are protected by their remoteness from civilization both in Canada and the United States. From December through April, the cranes winter on the tidal flats portion of the 47,000-acre Aransas refuge. There a crane family can bask in the privacy of a 400-acre homesite.

During their breeding season in the summer, the cranes nest "somewhere" in the vast 17,000 square miles of Wood Buffalo Park in the northwestern Canadian wilderness. The location of the whooping cranes' breeding grounds was discovered in 1955, but ornithologists nevertheless do not locate all the birds that arrive north each year.

Since 1938, it has been a Federal offense to shoot or "otherwise molest" the bird.

At one time, before 1860, the whooping crane ranged from the Arctic coast to central Mexico and from Utah to New Jersey and South Carolina. Instead of seeing possibly as many as 1,000 whooping cranes winging their way south during a fall season, as the pioneer Americans did, a careful observer today may spot some of the two dozen-odd

birds that it is hoped will be returning this fall.

Whooping cranes never travel in large flocks, but usually fly singly, in pairs or in families.

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OCEANOGRAPHY

Northwest Passage Aids In Supplying DEW Line

► THE NORTHWEST PASSAGE found this summer by three American ships and one Canadian ship will be a year-round supply line to the 3,000-mile-long DEW line spanning the top of the continent to warn of possible enemy attack.

Climax of their history-making journey came when the three U. S. cutters, the *Storis*, *Bramble* and *Spar*, first returned to U. S. ports, having proved seaborne support of the DEW (Distant Early Warning) line possible.

The Coast Guard ships were escorted through the most treacherous part of their journey, the short cut through Bellot Strait, by the Canadian icebreaker, HMCS *Labrador*. The deep-water route between the Pacific and Atlantic Oceans was traversed in a west-to-east direction.

With the exception of icebreakers, only

shallow draft vehicles, and few of these, had previously made the Northwest Passage.

Daring men have tried for as long as 450 years, but one of the few who made it was the Norwegian explorer, Roald Amundsen. He completed the passage by sea in a single ship. After wintering three years in the Arctic, he completed the east-to-west voyage in 1906 in the 47-ton, nine-foot draft ship, the *Gjoa*.

Bellot Strait is named for the French naval officer who discovered it in 1852. Its appearance is precisely that of a Greenland fiord. The Strait is about 20 miles long and one mile wide in the narrowest part. It separates Boothia Peninsula, the northernmost point of land of continental North America, and Somerset Island.

The practical Northwest Passage could be used as an escape route for ships of the Military Sea Transportation Service, or MSTs, caught in freezing ice after their cargo had been used to supply DEW line stations in the far North. Previously the ships were sent dashing in as soon as the water thawed, then rushed out after their cargo was discharged.

Exploration for a possible sea route between the Atlantic and Pacific was personally directed last year by Vice Adm. John M. Will, USN, commander of MSTs. He said "this year MSTs faces in some areas of the Arctic the worst ice year ever recorded."

The commander of the MSTs commented that the Service's greatest asset in overcoming the hazards of wind, ice and fog was the experience gained during eight years of polar logistics supplemented by two years' participation in Operation Deepfreeze in the Antarctic.

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SHORT-CUT NORTHWEST PASSAGE — The U. S. Coast Guard ships *Bramble* (WAGL-392), its bow showing in the foreground, *Storis* (W-38) and *Spar* (WAGL-403) pound through heavy ice in the Amundsen Gulf, Canadian Northwest Territory, eastward toward Dolphin and Union Straits.