

CONSERVATION

28 Whooping Cranes Left

Ten fewer whooping cranes are migrating northward this year than last and special pleas for their protection have been made by the Secretary of the Interior—By Barbara Tufty

► THE REMNANT POPULATION of the whooping cranes, the tallest birds in the U.S., is soon to leave the Gulf Coast on their spring migration to Canada—a voyage of 2,500 miles.

This year the widely protected birds number only 28, state the wildlife researchers of the Interior Department, Washington, D. C. That is four less than made the successful southward migration last fall, and ten fewer than the flock that started the northward migration a year ago in the spring.

Secretary of Interior Stewart L. Udall has made special pleas for careful protection for these tall white birds as they fly north. Anyone seeing a whooping crane is asked to report it to the nearest state or Federal fish and game official.

Whooping cranes are majestic birds, about five feet tall, with long stork-like legs. They are white, with red-crowned heads and black-tipped wings. They have a wing spread of seven feet. They fly so high that they are sometimes out of sight, and only their trumpet-like calls can be heard resounding through the sky.

The people have taken much interest in saving this bird from extinction, and each year their migratory flights are followed carefully in the United States. The numbers of wild whooping cranes have varied con-

siderably since the birds first were counted in the winter of 1938-39. At that time, there were only 14, and it wasn't until ten years later that the number increased to 31.

The winter of 1961-62 was the year of the greatest number—38. This past winter produced no young offspring, wildlife officials reported.

There is still hope that some or all of the missing birds have survived and will rejoin the flock. Perhaps they have been eluding the census takers, or have spent their winter in some other area, wildlife officials hope.

Usually the birds remain during the winter months in a refuge created especially for them, called the Arkansas National Wildlife Refuge on the Gulf Coast of Texas. They spend the summer months in another special refuge, Wood Buffalo Park near Great Slave Lake in Canada.

This year the whooping cranes have behaved in an unusual manner, said Wilbur B. Stiles, researcher in the wildlife refuge section of the Interior Department. They were especially active in foraging in the scrub oak flats in the interior of their Texas refuge, an area they do not usually visit. Blue crabs and other marine invertebrates are the ordinary diet of the cranes.

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ORNITHOLOGY

Giant Canada Goose Believed Extinct, Alive

► THE GIANT Canada goose, until recently considered extinct, has been discovered in a city park lake in Rochester, Minn.

Thousands of these birds, the largest geese in the world, were sighted last winter by Dr. Harold C. Hansen of the Illinois Natural History Survey.

"People considered the giant goose, *Branta canadensis maxima*, extinct for so many years mainly because nobody took the trouble of seeking them out and identifying them," explained Dr. John W. Aldrich, wildlife research specialist of the Interior Department, Washington, D. C.

The missing bird has a long thin black neck and head with white patches on the cheeks. Its body is brown, with light borders of the feathers forming bars. It belongs to the well-known genus *Branta*, which includes species that vary little in pattern and color but greatly in size.

The giant Canada goose is difficult to identify because it closely resembles the western Canada goose, Dr. Aldrich said. The main difference is in size. The giant weighs about 14 to 18 pounds, while the western weighs 12 to 14 pounds. Also, the

giant has more white on his chest, a tendency for a white ring around his neck under the black band and a patch on his forehead.

Dr. Aldrich has recently returned from inspecting the birds in Minnesota, bringing back a few specimens with him for closer study. The geese were found mingled with other Canada geese in a flock of 5,000, he reported. The only place the giant has been spotted to date is in Minnesota and around Sand Lake and Waubay Refuges in north-eastern South Dakota.

Formerly this goose used to breed in the Great Plains in North and South Dakota, Nebraska, Kansas, Minnesota, Iowa, Missouri, western Kentucky, Tennessee and northern Arkansas.

Considered the most sedentary of the Canada geese, the birds do not migrate far. Their nesting places are still a mystery, said Dr. Aldrich, but are believed to be somewhere in western Minnesota, the Dakotas and southern Manitoba in Canada.

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ORNITHOLOGY

Rare Family Photograph: Robins Feeding Young

See Front Cover

► ROBIN REDBREAST, harbinger of spring, is settling down to building nests and later feeding the young.

Seen on this week's front cover is a very rare family picture of the mother and father robin together, with tidbits ready to be dropped into the open mouths of the baby birds. The photograph was taken from inside a house, 100 feet away, by pulling a string attached to the shutter of a camera two feet from the nest.

The robins build their nests of leaves, pieces of twigs and other materials, with a smooth inner layer of mud, in trees and protected areas. Their diet consists mainly of insects, berries and some grains. After about two weeks, the young birds try their wings and soon fend for themselves.

Throughout the summer, the familiar song of the robin is heard in wooded areas and in the gardens around the home.

When winter comes again, most robins migrate southward.

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HERPITOLOGY

Poisonous Snake Bites Itself and Dies

► A BITE IS A BITE, but when a poisonous snake bites itself, that's a fatal mistake.

Poisonous snakes are not immune to their own venom, keepers of the Philadelphia Zoological Garden have sadly discovered.

Their one and only Gaboon Viper, a highly dangerous serpent from Africa, died from its own poison. Keepers of the Reptile House found him with his fangs deeply imbedded in his own back. They think he tried to scratch himself with the handiest thing around—his fangs. He was found dead in a box used for moving poisonous snakes.

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Radio Corporation of America

PLASTIC LASER—Dr. Nikolaus E. Wolff holds a spray of plastic fibers similar to those used in a new plastic laser developed by RCA Laboratories. The laser produces coherent pulses of intense crimson light and is expected to lead to a family of lasers that can be mass-produced in fiber, sheet or molded form.