

ORNITHOLOGY

Whooping Crane Lives

A baby whooping crane hatched under the watchful care of a bantam hen is doing well and is expected to develop into a healthy adult—By Barbara Tufty

► A RARE baby whooping crane has won its battle over death and is now doing fine.

As a matter of fact, Zoe, as the bird is called, now "eats like a horse and gallops like one," a U.S. Fish and Wildlife biologist at the research station at Lafayette, La., said.

The crane developed a defect in one of its tiny legs about four hours after it hatched April 28.

Tractions were used on the delicate limb, which was taped to its good leg, and now the danger is past.

Zoe's first meal after recovery consisted of eight meal worms, relieved wildlife officials and researchers reported.

The tiny crane made such a strong and fast recovery that it was carefully flown by plane to a Wildlife refuge in Monte Vista in the San Luis Valley of Colorado, to be a nucleus of a future big flock of captive whooping cranes.

This future flock will be a new effort to save the beloved species from extinction. As the captive flock is built up in Colorado, surplus birds will gradually be added to the wild flock which spends each winter in Texas and each summer near Great Slave Lake in Canada.

The great migrations of these beautiful tall white birds with their black-tipped wings create interest throughout the United States, as they fly north in the spring, and south in the autumn.

The latest count on the wild flock of whooping cranes is now 32.

Zoe makes the eighth whooping crane held in captivity. Seven adult cranes live at the New Orleans Zoo, including Zoe's parents, Josephine, a temperamental female, and Crip, an injured male.

Since Josephine keeps deliberately breaking her eggs, special efforts were made to save some of them. About a month ago two of her precious eggs were carefully transported to Lafayette where they were mothered and hatched by two Japanese silkie bantam hens, called Patience and Petulance.

The bantam hens actually may be too good as mothers and heat the eggs too well, for the eggs were hatched in 28 days, about two days premature. The other baby crane died 30 hours after hatching. Each foster mother hen weighed only one pound, just a half pound more than the whooping crane egg she tended.

No one knows whether Zoe is a male or female, reported the biologist. In fact, researchers may not even be able to tell at maturity. Telling the sex of these birds is extremely difficult, even for ornithologists.

The incubation system using bantam hens as foster mothers has worked so well that four bantams, including Patience and Petulance, have been sent to sit on other whooping crane eggs at the New Orleans Zoo. Josephine is going strong in laying eggs. She has already produced eight eggs this year.

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U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service

HANDLE WITH CARE—Baby whooping crane, Zoe, looks healthy and chipper.

NATURAL RESOURCES

Need for Nature Study

► A SPECIAL OFFICE should be set up in the White House to speak for wildlife, conservation, botany and the natural things of our life, believes Associate Justice William O. Douglas of the U.S. Supreme Court.

Man today needs more emphasis on nature, and less on engineering and chemistry, said Justice Douglas, who is well known for his hikes and bird walks around the capital's park areas.

Justice Douglas was guest of honor at a breakfast and bird-watching expedition to the Patuxent Wildlife Research Center at Laurel, Md.

During an hour-long stroll through the sunlit woods and tranquil marshes of the Research Center, which is maintained by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, many noted ornithologists and nature lovers expressed their views on trying to preserve the wonders of nature in a society geared to machines and technology.

"Our wildlife could be preserved in several ways," stated Roger Tory Peterson of Old Lyme, Conn., author of many bird books, as he listened to the lilting trill of a Louisiana waterthrush.

One way is to acquire and set safely aside vulnerable lands such as seashores, marshes and bits of original prairies like those along railroad tracks, Mr. Peterson

said. Few people realize what valuable breeding grounds these places are for our wildlife.

Another way is to prohibit the use of chlorinated hydrocarbon pesticides, he said, watching a mother phoebe dart from a hidden nest holding five white eggs.

Pointing out a yellow-throated vireo, he said these chemicals are dangerous, because they do not break down. They accumulate in the biological chain of nature. The infected insects are eaten by fish, which in turn are eaten by larger fish, which are eaten by birds such as the osprey and the bald eagle.

By 1970, Mr. Peterson predicted, we will be seeing the last of the ospreys in the Connecticut areas, adding that there were 300 ospreys in 1954, 120 in 1960, 48 last year and only 30 this year. The presence of insecticide in the eggs prevents them from hatching, he explained. We have no young ones coming on.

Created about 25 years ago as a conservation center, the Patuxent Wildlife Research Center carries on principal research in pesticides, developing new waterfowl habitats, controlling pest plants in marshes, studying populations of migrating birds, and other wildlife projects.

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AGRICULTURE

Valuable Forage Crop Created From Weeds

► A NEW vigorous type of wheatgrass resists drought and contains high nutritive value for cattle.

By combining one of the most persistent weeds of the midwestern hayfields, quackgrass, with a nutritive cattle forage crop, wheatgrass, scientists have come up with a promising new hybrid which is drought-resistant and nourishing, tough and leafy.

Breeding this desirable combination has a few problems, however, stated D. R. Dewey, plant geneticist at the Agricultural Research Service, part of the U.S. Department of Agriculture, in cooperation with the Utah Agricultural Experiment Station in Logan.

The hybrid plant frequently is sterile, he said. The few seeds that form usually back-track and produce one or the other parent plant, instead of the new hybrid. Several breeding techniques are underway to overcome this breeding problem in order to provide western ranchers and farmers with a valuable forage and cover crop.

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