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Nature Note

Whooping Crane

➤ WITH WHITE NECKS outstretched, legs trailing full behind and huge black-tipped wings beating the air, the world's last remaining wild whooping cranes migrate 2,500 miles from Texas to Canada each spring, and then back again each fall.

Seriously threatened with extinction, the brave little band of America's tallest birds now has 42 members, the largest number in the last 25 years. At one time, the birds were fairly common along the Atlantic and Gulf Coast, but were hunted and driven out by hunters, until in 1939, their numbers had dropped to the alarming total of 14.

Now among the most protected birds in the country, they are carefully guarded in their winter home at Aransas National Wildlife Refuge in Texas and in their summer nesting refuge near Great Slave Lake, Canada. As they fly over the states between these two areas each spring and autumn, hunters are warned not to shoot.

The graceful birds are all white except for long slim black legs, black wing tips, and a crimson grainy skin that partly covers the crown of their heads. Their eyes are a bright fierce yellow. An adult whooper is almost five feet high, and can weigh as much as 25 pounds. They get their name from the high-pitched, clear, bugle-like "whoop" that can be heard three miles away on a still day.

Whooping cranes are shy of human beings, and prefer the lonely marshes of lakes and coastal areas, where they feed on crabs, frogs, insects, and grain of nearby plants.

• Science News Letter, 87:366 June 5, 1965

Do You Know?

The only known steroid photochemical reaction in the body is the production of *vitamin D*, but others are believed to exist.

Since the extermination of the dodo in the 1600's, about 75 species of *birds* have passed out of existence, mostly from man-made causes.

Radiation research of male houseflies indicates that *irradiation* of some animals may curtail or eliminate certain basic causes of aging.

• Science News Letter, 87:366 June 5, 1965

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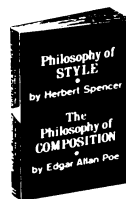


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