

A sunrise chorus of 500,000.



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NEBRASKA

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Each spring something magical happens on the Platte River; more than 500,000 Sandhill Cranes converge on this sliver of threatened habitat. "I've traveled far and wide, and coming to Nebraska, and seeing and hearing the cranes always restores my soul," said renowned anthropologist Jane Goodall.

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How can I see the cranes

The first sandhill cranes can be seen as early as mid-February, however large numbers usually don't appear until the start of March. Timing of early arrivals varies considerably year to year depending, partly, on the severity of the current winter.

Middle March is the usual peak of the sandhill crane migration, with estimates up to a half-million birds in the central Platte River valley. The first arrivals generally roost south of Grand Island and Alda. Later arrivals fill in portions of the river to the west, so while more cranes may be in the region as a whole it may not be noticeable in a particular spot on a day-to-day basis. Even so, mid March is generally the best and safest crane-viewing bet.

In early April sandhill cranes begin to leave, but viewing can still be quite good. By this time the cranes' main source of food — waste corn from the previous fall's harvest — runs low in fields near the Platte River, forcing the birds to spread out as far as 12 miles either side of the river. Flocks at this time are often more dispersed, but the evening gatherings along the river are still awe-inspiring. Longer, warmer days and later sunsets make for more comfortable conditions and cranes are often full of corn, and they'll sometimes linger in one place for longer stretches.

Early April is also your best chance of seeing a rare whooping crane. With about 300 or so in the wild flock, your odds of seeing this tallest of North American birds are slim but not none.

Day-to-day weather effects how the cranes behave. A warm, sunny day may keep them in the fields longer; a windy, snowy day often brings birds to the river well before sunset. If you're traveling here specifically for the sandhill cranes, allow two days of viewing if possible so bad weather on one of the days doesn't spoil your entire trip.

Adapted from an article by Dan Glomski

Book your guided tour

The best way to see the Sandhill Cranes up close is with a Crane Trust viewing blind tour at dawn or dusk. Blinds are situated near traditionally successful roosts along the Platte River. After an orientation, a guide will take you to the blind.

Call the Trust (308-382-1820) or visit their website (CraneTrust.org) to reserve a spot on a viewing blind tour.

What to bring

- Binoculars or spotting scope
- Camera (no flash in the blinds)
- Birding guide
- Warm clothing with layers
- Waterproof footwear, umbrella
- Good friends
- A hotel reservation

The Sandhill Crane

Height	3-4 feet
Wingspan	6 feet
Weight	8-12 lbs
Color	Gray
Migration	170-450 miles/day
Flight Speed	~38 mph
Nesting Area	N. Canada, Alaska, Siberia
Mating	Begins at 3-4 years
Eggs	2 per year
Lifespan	20 years in the wild



Sandhill Crane Spring Migration Viewing Map



Hall County is home to the largest crane roost in the world.

*-Greg Wright
Crane Trust scientist*



Crane Viewing Etiquette

The Platte River Valley provides Sandhill Cranes with necessary nourishment for the rest of their migration and nesting. Disturbances during their critical stopover in Nebraska can jeopardize reproductive success at their northern nesting grounds.

Crane watchers should avoid disturbing the cranes at their roosting or feeding areas:

- Do not approach cranes on foot while they are in fields. Cranes do not tolerate humans.
- Stay in your car and use it as a viewing blind.
- Use appropriate locations for viewing the cranes on the river. Do not attempt to approach or otherwise disturb cranes on the river.

While driving to and in crane viewing areas, observe the following rules:

- Do not slow or stop on the road. Use the shoulder. Never slow down or stop on bridges.
- Never block a driveway or any other farm road.

Most land adjacent to the river including agricultural fields are private property. Please:

- Stay on county roads. Don't drive on farm roads.
- Assume all property is private and obtain owner permission before entering.
- Never cross a fence or open a cattle gate without the owner's permission. Respect the rights of the people who live in the area.

Information courtesy of
Nebraska Game & Parks Commission



We can help you find a room for your sandhill crane experience.

GIHospitality.org



Crane Trust Nature & Visitor Center
CraneTrust.org | 308-382-1820



Central Platte Natural Resource District
CPNRD.org | 308-385-6282