

Sandhill Crane Information from the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission

An individual crane spends about 29 days along the Platte. During that time, it will deposit up to a pound of fat, which provides the energy necessary to complete the migration and initiate nesting. About 90 percent of their diet consists of corn while the remaining 10 percent is made up of invertebrates such as earthworms, snails, and insect larvae. It has been estimated that the cranes consume nearly 1600 tons of corn during their stay.

At dusk, the cranes gather along the broad, shallow reaches of the Platte to roost for the night. They prefer to stand in water about six inches deep, taking on the configuration of submerged sandbars.

At dawn, the cranes leave the river and head to the fields to feed. They usually range within five miles of the river. The cornfields provide cranes with a source of energy, while meadows and alfalfa fields provide essential proteins and minerals. They also serve an important social function as loafing and courtship areas.

The “dance” of the Sandhill Crane is well known. Pairs engage in elaborate bowing displays with out stretched wings and leap high into the air. Often, a corn cob or stick is picked up and thrown upward repeatedly.

At midday when the sun is shining, look for soaring “kettles” of cranes over the river valley. These groups appear as wisps of smoke from a distance. The birds are testing the thermals and keeping their flight muscles toned for the journey that lies ahead.

Best viewing times for the pastures and crop fields are mid-morning to late afternoon. For the river sites, Muskrat Run WMA, early morning or early evening are best (pre-dawn and after dark). Just be sure not to disturb the cranes in their roosting spots on the river.

For information from the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission call 308-535-8025 or email Thomas.walker@nebraska.gov

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EXPERIENCE

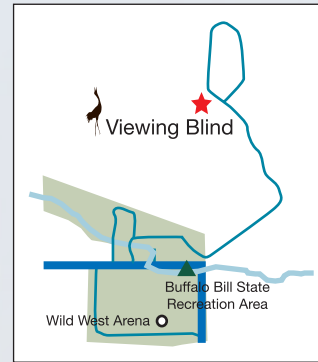
Sandhill Cranes in the North Platte River Valley

The Central Flyway cranes winter in Texas, New Mexico, and Mexico. They usually begin arriving along the Platte in February. Numbers continue to climb, peaking in late March. About April 10, a mass exodus occurs, with a few stragglers remaining through early May.



Sandhill Cranes

in the North Platte River Valley



Crane Viewing Circle Drive in Lincoln County

Sandhill Cranes and other migratory birds can be seen from the viewing platforms of the Golden Spike Tower and Visitor Center, 1249 N. Homestead Rd., (308) 532-9920. Admission required.

To view Sandhill Cranes in the Lincoln County area, start driving north on Dewey/Jeffer (Hwy 83). After you cross the North River Bridge, turn west (left) on North River Road. Watch for signs and turn south (left) on W. Wildlife Road. You will stay on this road all the way to North Hershey Road (approximately 6 miles). Turn south (left) and drive about 3 miles, then turn back east (left) on W. Platte Valley Road. Follow Platte Valley east for approximately 6 miles to North Front Road. From here you can turn north (left) and visit Muskrat Run Wildlife Management area or turn south (right) and go to Highway 30. Turn east (left) and drive for about a mile and a half. When the highway begins to curve south (right), take a left and merge onto Scouts Rest Ranch Road. Follow this road to visit the viewing blind at Buffalo Bill State Recreation Area. To view the cranes from viewing blind at Buffalo Bill Ranch, it is best to be in place before sunrise to experience them leaving the river and arriving in the wet meadow.

If the weather has been dry, feel free to venture onto any of the cross roads within this area. They are all on a mile grid, so you will easily be able to find your way back to the main route.

When driving on country roads, drive slowly for safety. Watch both sides of the roads for cranes and other wildlife. If you stop, be sure to pull to the side of the road, and check to make sure cars coming from both directions can see you. Do not go onto private property without permission. Road conditions are greatly affected by the weather.

