



CRANE RIVER CHRONICLES

IAIN NICOLSON  Audubon
CENTER AT ROWE SANCTUARY

Spring 2010

Volunteers Make Rowe a Success

By Bill Taddicken, Director

This year the crane season at Rowe was once again a huge success. This success is only possible because of all of our fabulous volunteers at Rowe Sanctuary. People came from eleven states to help us educate people about the cranes and the importance of the Platte River to wildlife and people.

These people put in more than 4,800 volunteer hours during crane season leading tours, cleaning, managing people, educating, staffing the gift shop, answering the phones, repairing equipment, and so many other things I don't have room to mention. Although the housing accommodations and the hours can be trying at best, everyone had a great time and their efforts made a huge impact on our ability to protect the Platte River. Crane season proceeds make up about one third of our operating budget each year and we could not possibly do this without the generous, talented and dedicated volunteers that help us during crane season and all year long. Thank you to all the volunteers and all you do.

If you think you might have the desire to be a part of this amazing group of volunteers, please contact our Volunteer Coordinator, Tony Docherty, at 308-468-5282 to find out how you can help.

Bill Taddicken



Lee and Betty Higbie of Arvada, CO, help answer questions at the 2010 Family Crane Carnival held at the Iain Nicolson Audubon Center.



Rowe Sanctuary relies upon more than 50 volunteers, local and distant, each Crane Season to provide a quality experience for the 10,000+ visitors that walk through our doors during March and April.

Crane Cam is Getting a Facelift for 2011

The Crane Cam has been a standard in many households, offices and schools since 2003. It has been a huge success and is watched by people from all over the world on a daily basis. Teachers have utilized Crane Cam for educating their classes and many people have told me they leave it on their computer all night to listen to the sounds of cranes while they sleep.

As many of you that followed the Crane Cam this year are aware, we struggled to produce a quality image that we could share with the world. The equipment has finally started to reach the end of its service life and will need to be replaced. I am happy to tell you that through the generous donations of both individuals and Corporations, next years Cam will be

better than ever.

Verint Systems Inc. has donated the wireless transmission system needed to bring the image from the river to the building. The Platte River Recovery Implementation Program, Nebraska Game and Parks Commission, and many individuals have donated enough money to replace the camera and the rest of the needed equipment.

Thank you to all that gave towards this project and a special thank you to the Nebraska Central Telephone Company and the Nebraska Educational Service Unit 10 that make it possible to put this on the internet.

Online Newsletter - If you are currently receiving a hardcopy of our newsletter, please consider reading it online on our web site. This will help us save on printing costs, postage and will save energy. To receive an email reminder when the online newsletter is posted to the web site, please contact kskaggs@audubon.org.

Wetland Enhancement to Provide Hands-on Learning Opportunities

By Keanna Leonard, Education Director

Yahoo! This summer we are restoring the small, degraded wetland in front of the Jamalee Blind!

Why am I so excited about this project? One reason is that this will be the first Platte River riparian floodplain wetland devoted to hands-on, inquiry-based education. It opens up a whole new realm of educational activities that we can offer here at the sanctuary!

Another reason is that by restoring this area we add an additional wetland to the larger complex of riparian floodplain wetlands already restored and enhanced on Rowe Sanctuary and along an eighty mile stretch of the Platte River here in central Nebraska. This wetland complex is a key component of the spring staging habitat utilized by over eighty percent of the world's population of sandhill cranes and the wild population of whooping cranes. This area is also critical habitat for piping plovers and least terns.

The project is slated to restore proper water levels and open water in the wetland and reconnect it to the river to allow forage fish and invertebrates to enter the area. After removing encroaching woody vegetation around the wetland, the area will be reseeded with a native plant mix.

Volunteers will construct a teaching deck on one side of the wetland, and Horizon Middle School and the Youth Rehabilitation and Treatment Center (YRTC) are helping with reseeded and trail construction. Interpretative displays will be developed and posted at the site to explain the importance of wetlands to visitors.

Part of the project includes working with Horizon Middle School and YRTC teachers to incorporate wetland activities into existing school curriculum. The culmination of the unit will be a trip to Rowe Sanctuary to conduct a full day of hands-on, inquiry-based, cross-curricular activities associated with the wetland, the river and the restoration.

Though this is a very small wetland in the complex, it will be highly visible and accessible making it a showcase for the principles and benefits of wetland restoration. The completed project will serve ten thousand students of all ages and fifteen thousand visitors per year helping to foster public understanding and support of future restoration activities along the Platte.

Other partners in this endeavor include U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, The Nature Conservancy, Nebraska Game and Parks Commission, University of Nebraska-Kearney, Rowe Volunteers, and donors like you. Thank you to those that have given. If you would like to help ensure that this exciting project is successful, please let us know.



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Guest Feature - A Gathering of Cranes in Fairbanks, Alaska

By Melissa Sikes, Program Director, Friends of Creamer's Field

Nebraska enjoys the gathering of cranes on the Platte River every March and April. Alaska enjoys multitudes of cranes in August and September. Creamer's Field Migratory Waterfowl Refuge in Fairbanks is one place to witness this annual event as families of cranes and geese stage for their fall migration. The Friends of Creamer's Field, Alaska Department of Fish and Game, Alaska Bird Observatory, and Arctic Audubon celebrate this wildlife spectacle with an annual three-day celebration, the Tanana Valley Sandhill Crane Festival. The first festival was held in 1997. Over the years the festival has blossomed into an action-packed 3-day weekend always held during the 3rd weekend in August. The Crane Festival now attracts people from throughout the United States and the World. This year's festival will be held on August 20, 21, and 22nd, 2010.

The Creamer's Field Migratory Waterfowl Refuge is a 2,000 acre state wildlife refuge surrounding the site of the historic Creamer's Dairy. The dairy fields and barns provide a lovely pastoral focal point for Creamer's Refuge. The Refuge is open year-round to the public and offers wildlife viewing platforms

and miles of multi-use summer and winter trails. The Farmhouse Visitor Center contains exhibits on dairy history, migration, and wildlife as well as a small gift shop. The Visitor Center is open daily 10am-5pm mid-May through mid-

September and on Saturdays Noon-4pm for the remainder of the year.

Weekend festival activities include: Nature Walks, Crane Watches, Bird Banding Demonstrations, Crafts, Wildlife Sketching, Crane Poetry Walk, Brunch with the Cranes, Key-note Lecture, Birds of Prey Presentation, Photography Workshop, Art/Photo Exhibits, and the ever popular Crane Calling Contest.

The 2010 featured speaker will be Paul Johnsgard, noted ornithologist, author, and artist from Nebraska. Dr. Johnsgard is returning for his second trip to the festival, having been the festival's featured speaker in 2004. Dr. Johnsgard is a Foundation Professor Emeritus of Biological Sciences at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln where he taught for 40 years.

Past featured speaker and crane biologist George Archibald noted that "close encounters with magnificent Sandhill cranes are assured when one walks the paths across Creamer's Fields in August as huge flocks gather before their migration south. Through years of protection, the cranes have become amazingly tame. It's one of those once-in-a-lifetime experiences to be so close to creatures that are usually very shy."

You can call 907-452-5162 or visit www.creamersfield.org for more information .

Calendar of Events

First Sundays at Rowe

This monthly opportunity for nature exploration will be held on the first Sunday of every month at the Iain Nicolson Audubon Center. To find out more, visit our 'Calendar of Events' page on our web site or give us a call at 308-468-5282.

National Events

International Migratory Bird Day

May 8, 2010

Typically held on the second Saturday in May, International Migratory Bird Day (IMBD) is celebrated whenever migratory bird arrival is celebrated in your own community. For more information, visit <http://www.fws.gov/birds/imbd.html>

Rowe Sanctuary's Wish List

Conservation Program

- 4X4 Gator All Terrain Vehicle
- New Lap top computer
- 12 Fireproof coveralls for the volunteer burn crew
- Annual river clearing - \$20,000

Education Program

- 2 Seines
- 20 Kick nets
- 1 Proscope (digital microscope)
- 2 Flow meters
- 5 Field microscopes
- 2 Water quality monitoring field kits
- 2 Anemometer
- 10 Digital meat thermometers
- 10 GPS units

Miscellaneous Items

- Golf cart
- 2 pair of stereo speakers for the Ron & Carol Cope Viewing Hall

Rowe Sanctuary's Ultimate Wish List

- \$5 Million Endowment
- Volunteer Housing for 20
- ADA accessible trail system
- Solar panels for visitor center

Am I Lucky or What?

By Mike Smith, Volunteer - Tucson, AZ

Dusk, March 1: "They're finally coming!!" A long steady stream of Sandhills overflowed four of us in front of Rowe. Three nights later, a flock displaced some unhappy snow geese right out in front of Stevie. For 5 minutes, I stood alone, cold and transfixed, as hundreds of cranes and geese flew right at and over me. On my video I state, "I have never seen anything like this in my whole life."

But 2 days later, I was home, after a week of hanging camouflage, reflectors, blind window covers, painting, building a sundial, cleaning the barn, and being allowed to play with power tools. My last job was helping Tony place the crane cam.

I left feeling I had unfinished business in Buffalo County. I was missing Rowe's crane season and meeting other volunteers. And I still had yet to be lead guide to a blind. Keanna told me that volunteers were needed in early April, planting a idea that just maybe I could return. I convinced my wife that Rowe really needed me, when it was I who needed Rowe! She knows my wanderlust.

On March 31, I returned to more cranes, people, liquid water, and a house so full of volunteers that I slept in the library while Mike Forsberg (*that* Mike Forsberg) slept in Keanna's office. No problem. Two Mikes. Two nights both of us were there. Two nights I took his advice and slept in the gift shop, where I fell asleep to the sound of cranes. Too cool.

I was up at 5 a.m. and in bed at 10 p.m.. I went to the blinds 11 times, was lead guide twice and ran the crane cam once. Rosemary offered me a teaching job in South Dakota (declined) and asked me to clean the men's bathroom (accepted). I taught Crane 101, painted, answered questions, did dishes and got dinner for everybody one night. Once, as lead guide, I had to be gatekeeper, but my good friends Erv and Sandra took care of the visitors inside. At Rowe, we do whatever needs to be done.

I met Carolyn, who along with Janet, reinforced my opinion that Sandhillers are a special breed. I can't remember all the volunteers I met, but I will always remember how supportive everybody was! It has been a long time since I felt so alive. When I called, my wife commented that my voice was different.

Rowe runs on a shoestring, 4 staff are the heart, scores of volunteers the lifeblood. I have seldom worked with such a smoothly running system that melded many different personalities to focus on having visitors see the cranes, protect the birds and the Platte ecosystem.

I hit the peak of the season. One visitor said she never saw better dancing on the stage. Another visitor quietly wept, she was so moved. One night, maybe 50,000 darkened the western sky. I told many visitors that I paid my way up, worked 17 hour days, saw the cranes morning and night, and finished with "Am I lucky or what?"

Rowe Sanctuary/Iain Nicolson Audubon Center Donors

Rowe Sanctuary would like to thank everyone who has supported our work on behalf of cranes and other wildlife that depend on the Platte River and its associated ecosystems.

(The following gifts were received between January 1 and March 31, 2010)

Organizational Support

\$1,000-\$4,999

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In memory of Phillip A. Henderson

The support and recognition of all our donors is extremely important to us. We apologize if a donor has been inadvertently left off this list. Please let us know of any missing names so corrections can be made in the next issue.

The Braided River Society

The Braided River Society recognizes generous individual donors whose annual support of \$500 or more sustains our mission to preserve Platte River ecosystems for cranes and other wildlife. We hope you consider joining them, making possible the education and conservation work at Rowe Sanctuary that will help develop a culture of conservation committed to the future of this treasured natural resource.

Whooping Crane

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Nature Notes - The Ghost Otter

By Kent Skaggs, Office Manager

Native to Nebraska, river otters disappeared from the state in the early 1900's due to the fur harvest industry. In the late 1980's, two dozen river otters were released on the sanctuary by the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission as part of a project to reintroduce this species to the state.

Since that release, otters have been reported on or near the sanctuary from time to time and I was fortunate enough to see three in December of 2002 a couple of miles downstream of the center. Other staff and visitors have caught a glimpse of these cool critters since then, but I haven't seen one since.

This past winter, multiple sightings occurred on the sanctuary, with the first coming a mere 20 yards outside the Director's window here at the center. Bill quickly called Keanna into his office to see the otter and both were able to watch it work its way upstream, then out of sight. I missed seeing this individual by minutes that morning, as I took a brief detour on my way into work in order to check on some trumpeter swans that had been staying close by. I enjoyed the swans, but really wanted to get a look at that otter.

The next report came from Bill's wife, as she discovered tracks and slides in a cornfield between their house and the river after a fresh, powdery snow. Mike Forsberg later followed the tracks back to the river, passing right by a camera trap he had set up on the sanctuary, but no picture of the otter. Mike did inform me that it appeared that there were at least two individuals, maybe three from all of the sign he was finding along the river. My chances of seeing an otter again were improving.

March was now here and more eyes would be on the river, thus more sightings, which proved to be true. One of our volunteers, Ed Pembleton, while guiding one of our morning crane viewing trips, witnessed an otter fishing and eating his/her catch right in front of our Jamalee blind. More sightings followed, with several crane watchers catching glimpses of an otter from a blind. Those lucky boogers!

I finally made it out to the blinds a few times late in the season, but by that time the otter sightings had ceased. Even though I didn't see an otter during March or April, it was exciting to think that we may have a family residing on the sanctuary. When I confirm that we do, I'll be sure to let everyone know. :-)



CRANE RIVER CHRONICLES

Rowe Sanctuary
44450 Elm Island Road
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The mission of Rowe Sanctuary is to preserve Platte River ecosystems for cranes and other wildlife through conservation and education.



You can now make donations online through our website at www.rowsanctuary.org!

When considering a cash gift to Rowe Sanctuary, please check with your employer to see if they have a matching gift program. This is a way to make your gift do more for wildlife!

Please send me information on how to name Rowe Sanctuary in my will or retirement plan.

Name _____

Address _____

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Please mail to the address above or email us at kskaggs@audubon.org. Thank you!

General Information

Iain Nicolson Audubon Center at Rowe Sanctuary
44450 Elm Island Road
Gibbon, NE 68840
Phone: 308-468-5282
www.rowsanctuary.org

Open Monday - Friday 9 - 5; Sunday 1 - 4
Open 7 days a week during crane season

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Education Director: Keanna Leonard kleonard@audubon.org
Office Manager: Kent Skaggs kskaggs@audubon.org
Naturalist-Volunteer Coordinator: Tony Docherty
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