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## **Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries and Audubon Nature Institute Join Hands To Rehabilitate Injured Whooping Crane**

(New Orleans, La.) - The Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries has teamed up with Audubon Nature Institute animal care staff to rehabilitate an endangered whooping crane found recently in Jefferson Davis Parish after suffering a potentially fatal injury.

In early March, during routine tracking and monitoring efforts by LDWF biologists, the seven-year-old male crane was discovered with the injury. Initially, the bird, whose wing was drooping, did not appear to be in grave danger.

On March 20, Dr. Priscilla Joyner, associate veterinarian at Audubon Freeport-McMoRan Audubon Species Survival Center, joined LDWF staff in the field to examine the bird and bandage the wing. Joyner and the patient then made the three-and-a-half-hour trek to the Species Survival Center in Lower Coast Algiers.

Further examination under anesthesia revealed the bird's injury was critical as the nerve and blood supply to the left wing was traumatized beyond repair causing necrosis (death of tissue). At that point, the decision was made to partially amputate the wing.

"Left untreated, the bird would not have survived in the wild either due to predation (the inability to escape from predatory animals) since it couldn't fly, or infection," Joyner said.

She said there was no evidence of a gunshot wound and the exact cause of the injury remains a mystery. In the meantime, Audubon veterinary staff are doing everything possible to nurse the crane back to health from what was a major medical procedure.

"Treatments include antibiotics, pain relief, wound care and fluid therapy," Joyner said. "Experienced crane keepers also are providing safe housing and food, water and regular cleanings."

The whooping crane, which never had a formal name and is known as L10-11, will remain at the Species Survival Center as it recovers from the surgery.

Because the bird is injured, he will become part of the Whooping Crane Species Survival Plan (SSP), a program overseen by the Association of Zoos and Aquariums (AZA) that will determine which AZA facility will be the best future home for the crane.

The SSP works closely with the Whooping Crane Recovery Plan (managed by the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service) that is designed to return the birds back into the wild.

The injured crane is a “graduate” of a ground-breaking program launched decades ago to rescue whooping cranes from the precipice of extinction by breeding and rearing birds for release into the wild.

The project – a model for successful wildlife conservation – has been based at Audubon and other facilities, including the Patuxent Wildlife Research Center in Laurel, Md., where the injured crane was costume-reared before being released in Vermillion Parish in December 2011. After 51 years, Patuxent’s crane program will be closing, resulting in an increase in the number of cranes at Audubon.

After crane chicks hatch, they learn essential behaviors from human and crane “foster parents.” Animal care experts interact with impressionable chicks while wearing long, monk-like robes to prevent the young from imprinting on humans.

The chicks learn to eat by watching the costumed crane experts peck the ground with a fake crane head, and the young chicks are encouraged to follow them around the pens to keep their legs strong and promote growth.

Today, the program is considered a success and the total population of whooping cranes has risen from a grim low of several dozen to a more hopeful collection of nearly 600 wild cranes.

Louisiana’s whooping crane reintroduction project began in 2011 when 10 whooping cranes from the Patuxent facility were released to White Lake Wetlands Conservations Area in southwest Louisiana to develop the non-migratory flock.

This marked a significant conservation milestone with the first wild whooping cranes in Louisiana since 1950. Each year since, more whooping cranes have been added to the initial flock and the current population is almost 70. In 2016, the first chick hatched in the wild in Louisiana since 1939, a significant sign of recovery for the species.

“Our goal is to establish a self-sustaining whooping crane population in Louisiana,” said LDWF biologist Sara Zimorski, who oversees LDWF’s whooping crane program. “So far, we’ve made good progress in that. We have many partners who have greatly assisted us. Audubon Nature Institute has been a wonderful addition, especially recently with the help they’ve provided for the injured crane.”

“Although we are sad to lose L10-11 from the wild Louisiana population, we hope he will continue to contribute to the future of his species through a managed setting.”

To learn more about Louisiana’s whooping crane population, go to [www.wlf.louisiana.gov/wildlife/information](http://www.wlf.louisiana.gov/wildlife/information) or <https://www.facebook.com/lawhoopingcranes/>. To contribute to the whooping crane project or any LDWF initiative, go to the LWFF website at <http://lawff.org>

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