



*Working to Save Animals from Extinction #SavingSpecies*

## Trio of Critically-Endangered Mississippi Sandhill Cranes Hatch at Freeport-McMoRan Audubon Species Survival Center

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(New Orleans, La.) - Audubon Nature Institute animal care staff are working tirelessly to rear three critically-endangered Mississippi sandhill cranes that hatched last month at the Freeport-McMoRan Audubon Species Survival Center. They are the first of many expected this year.

The hope is that following six months of intense monitoring by Audubon staff, the chicks will be released into the Mississippi Sandhill Crane National Wildlife Refuge in Gautier, Mississippi.

The unique conservation program has resulted in a stabilized population of a critically endangered subspecies that was on the brink of extinction 30 years ago.

Since the partnership began in 1995, Audubon has released more than 200 birds into the Mississippi refuge. Today, about 65 percent of the wild crane population was hatched and raised at Audubon. Fewer than 35 of the Mississippi sandhill cranes existed in 1975 when the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service established the 19,300-acre refuge in Mississippi, the first ever created under the Endangered Species Act of 1973.

These three chicks will be reared by foster parent cranes housed at the Species Survival Center.

“The first three chicks we had hatch this year came from eggs laid by wild birds in the Mississippi Refuge,” explained Michelle Hatwood, Animal Curator at the Survival Center. “U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) officers occasionally send us a few eggs collected from wild nests each year because the chicks have a much higher survival rate being raised in our care for the first 6 months. We are lucky to have such good crane foster parents!”

Animal staff at the Species Survival Center also are expecting several eggs to hatch this year that were laid by resident birds living at this Audubon facility; the hatching season has just begun.

Currently, the refuge population hovers between 120 and 130 birds. The goal is to create a self-sustaining population of birds in the wild that is no longer reliant on captive breeding.

“We are very close - the birds in the wild are thriving, finding mates, laying eggs and hatching chicks,” said Hatwood. “The challenge we are facing now is that many chicks hatched in the wild are not surviving their first year of life. The staff at the Species Survival Center and our USFWS partners at the refuge are working hard to solve this problem.”

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Hatwood added, "We are making sure to raise and release birds that know how to protect themselves and their offspring from predation, and the USFWS staff is working hard to create a safer habitat at the refuge for these birds to thrive. I am very optimistic that one day, the cranes at the refuge will raise their own chicks to adulthood. I'm excited for that day, a lot of us are, but we will continue working hard to save this species until that day comes."

Audubon Nature Institute operates a family of museums, parks and research facilities dedicated to celebrating the wonders of nature. Through innovative live animal exhibits, education programs, and scientific discovery, Audubon makes a meaningful contribution to preserving wildlife for the future. Audubon Nature Institute flagships include Audubon Park, Audubon Zoo, Audubon Aquarium of the Americas, Entergy Giant Screen Theater, Audubon Butterfly Garden and Insectarium, Audubon Louisiana Nature Center, Freeport-McMoRan Audubon Species Survival Center, Woldenberg Riverfront Park and Audubon Wilderness Park. Ron Forman is President and CEO of Audubon Nature Institute.

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