



Audubon Nature Institute is fighting to save America's tallest bird from extinction

Audubon Rearing Trio of Endangered Whooping Crane Chicks

Help Spread Awareness on Whooping Crane Day – May 28

(New Orleans, La.) - Animal care experts at Freeport-McMoRan Audubon Species Survival Center are working around the clock to raise three endangered whooping crane chicks. Collected from the wild in Wisconsin, the eggs were transported to the Species Survival Center in New Orleans for incubation. Since hatching, the chicks are learning essential behaviors from their human and crane “foster parents.” They will join a burgeoning wild flock at White Lake Wetlands Conservations Area in southwestern Louisiana in Vermilion Parish when they reach maturity.

Audubon staff interacts 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.

While some of the chicks hatched out in this program are parent or foster-raised, others need this proven crane protocol to give them the best shot at survival in the wild. Mortality is high, and when there are two eggs in the nest, pulling one and hand-raising the chick increases their odds of making it. Among the recent group of eggs, one is being foster-parent raised and two are being costume raised.

“Whooping cranes are especially significant for Audubon,” said Michelle Hatwood, Curator at the Species Survival Center. “Audubon Zoo was closely associated with the last managed group of whooping cranes before the species crashed after a decades-long decline in the 1960s. It’s widely reported that Audubon Zoo was the first place whooping cranes successfully bred in human care.”

Today, the population of whoopers has risen from a grim low of several dozen to a slightly more hopeful collection of 450 wild whooping cranes.

“Audubon’s birds will directly support wild populations in Louisiana,” said Hatwood. “The whooping crane program is the oldest breeding and release program in the world. Audubon’s goal is to increase whooping crane egg production by 20% - a monumental achievement for North America’s most endangered bird.”

One of the easiest ways that the public can take part in conservation efforts for whooping cranes is to visit an Association of Zoos and Aquariums (AZA) accredited zoo. Doing so directly supports the collaborative efforts of hundreds of researchers, field conservationists and scientists working to save animals from extinction.

Audubon Zoo will celebrate Whooping Crane Day on Sunday, May 28, with special presentations about the endangered species. Audubon Zoo's bird curators will greet visitors at 10:30 a.m. Sunday in front of the whooping crane habitat, located near the Cooper Plaza fountain. A display board with

information about whooping cranes will be outside the exhibit throughout the day. Audubon Zoo is home to a duo of whooping cranes, Kiowa and Sioux.

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