

Sandhill Crane Information from the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission

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.

An individual Crane spends about a month 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. It has been estimated that the Cranes consume nearly 1,600 tons of corn during their stay.

At dusk, the Cranes gather along 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 fields 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 outstretched 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.

For information from the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission call 308-535-8025.

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EXPERIENCE *Sandhill Cranes* in the North Platte River Valley

Each year several hundred thousand Sandhill Cranes will spend six weeks in the Platte River valley near North Platte on their way to their nesting grounds. The Cranes will feed, loaf and dance in the crop fields and meadows. The spectacular Dance of the Sandhill Crane is something that can't be experienced in a viewing blind on the river.



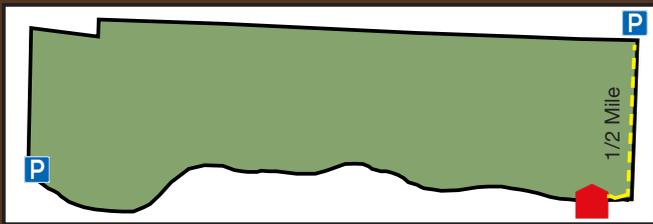
Crane Viewing Circle Drive

The best way to experience the Dance of the Sandhill Crane is to use your car as a mobile viewing blind along the rural roads. The best viewing times are mid-morning to late afternoon.

When driving on rural 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. Please stay in your vehicle. Do not go onto private property. Road conditions are greatly affected by the weather.

Viewing Blind

A viewing blind is available at the North River Wildlife Management Area north of Hershey. See circle drive map for location.



The North River WMA Viewing Blind is available on a first-come first-serve basis.

- Crane Viewing Blind
- Parking
- Trail
- Management Area Boundary

For morning and evening viewing, arrive at the parking lot two hours prior to sunrise/sunset. Morning users should remain in the blind until all Cranes have left the river. Evening users should remain in the blind until it is completely dark.

No artificial lights are allowed within 100 yards of the river bank before sunrise or after sunset.

Be respectful of others in the blind. No flash photography. Keep electronics set on a low light level. Silence cell phones. Keep sound to a minimum.

Stay on the identified trail to get to and from the blind to avoid interfering with other WMA users. Do not cross the fence. Stay on public land.

Viewing opportunities for Sandhill Cranes and other migratory birds can also be found at the Buffalo Bill Ranch State Recreation Area (2921 Scouts Rest Ranch Rd) and the Golden Spike Tower and Visitor Center (1249 N. Homestead Rd.)

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in the North Platte River Valley

