

This resource is based on the following source:

Kale, H. W., II, B. Pranty, B. M. Stith, and C. W. Biggs. 1992. The atlas of the breeding birds of Florida. Final Report. Florida Game and Fresh Water Fish Commission, Tallahassee, Florida.

This resource can be cited as:

Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission. 2003, January 6. Florida's breeding bird atlas: A collaborative study of Florida's birdlife. <http://www.myfwc.com/bba/> (Date accessed mm/dd/yyyy).

Sandhill Crane *Grus canadensis*

The Sandhill Crane is one of the largest breeding birds in Florida and a popular species with the public. The subspecies breeding in the state is *G. c. pratensis*, 1 of 6 races in North America. Cranes are easily located by their large size and loud trumpeting call, which carries over a long distance.

The Florida Sandhill Crane ranges as far north as Georgia and formerly bred as far west as Louisiana (AOU 1957).

Habitat. Habitat includes wet and dry prairies. Maidencane and slough communities and low-growth emergent vegetation associated with freshwater marshes and ponds are preferred. Cranes nest in herbaceous wetlands (to about 0.2 ha [0.5 acre] in size) associated with freshwater ponds or marshes.

Hatchlings are fed the eggshell, followed by a diet of insects, earth worms, small vertebrates, and assorted vegetable foods and grains, as available. The birds forage on open uplands or marshes, digging or probing with their bills as necessary.

Pair bonding occurs as early as 2 years of age. The nest is built by both adults, generally in wet areas, of sticks, reeds, grasses, and mosses. Nest bulk may depend on elevation or wetness of the site. Two buff-to-olive eggs marked with olive-brown are laid a few days apart, and incubation, shared by both parents, takes 28 to 32 days.

Downy young leave the nest site in a couple of days, but remain near the nest marsh for the first 10 to 14 days, after which they begin self-feeding. Fledging occurs at about 67 days, and young may stay with parents up to 12 months.

Seasonal Occurrence. The Florida race of Sandhill Cranes typically starts nesting earlier (late December) than the others and continues into June. Northern birds migrate to Florida in winter (October-November) and return their Canadian breeding grounds in the spring (February-March).

Status. Although the Sandhill Crane is locally common in parts of its range, it is considered Threatened by the Florida Game and Fresh Water Fish Commission [editor: now Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (Wood 1991)]. Historically, this race concentrated in the general region of Alachua and Putnam counties, south from the Kissimmee Prairie through the Everglades. Current Atlas data verify the breeding range shown by Johnsgard (1983), with confirmed breeding in 263 quadrangles and 86 "possible" or "probable" records. Loss of wetlands is a distinct factor in reduced breeding, but protection of these vital areas in recent years has helped. The Sandhill Crane appears to be holding its own in Florida, at the present. There is some indication of adjustment to human invasion of habitat, with nesting on golf course marshes and isolated wetlands in housing subdivisions. In many areas, adults and young may be found wandering from yard to yard, and some have become adept panhandlers.

Cynthia H. Plockelman

Sponsored by Frank Gunnip
Cornelia L. Leahy

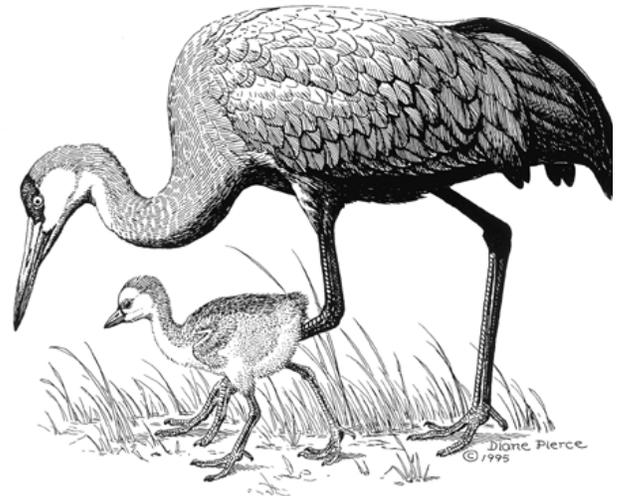


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Sandhill Crane

