

An aerial census of the Aransas NWR and surrounding areas made 17 April, 2001 estimated the number of whooping cranes currently present at Aransas at 20 adults + 1 young = 21. It is estimated that about 153 cranes have started the migration. The current size of the Aransas / Wood Buffalo population is estimated at 174. The peak population during the 2000-2001 winter was 180. An estimated six whooping cranes died at Aransas this winter.

Recap of cranes observed: (20 + 1)

Refuge	Lamar	San Jose	Matagorda	Welder
2 + 0	0	5 + 0	10 + 1	3 + 0
20 + 1 = 21				

Remarks: Skies were overcast throughout the census so that a few cranes may have been overlooked. The census effort was reduced to 4 flight hours because of the low number of cranes present. However, just about all of the crane range was covered.

It is estimated that up to 119 whooping cranes have migrated since the previous flight on April 4. This is basically "on schedule". Migration conditions have been very good throughout that period. Some cranes on the south half of Aransas NWR started the migration April 13-16.

All whooping cranes present on today's flight were thought to be subadults. One chick was present by itself on Matagorda and not near any other cranes. This chick was part of a single parent family throughout the winter. The census airplane made the chick nervous and it flushed a short distance on two of the three approaches by the airplane. This type of behavior was not noticed all winter and demonstrates how the behavior of a juvenile changes dramatically when it is no longer with its parents.

An ongoing blue crab census indicates that crabs are finally moving back into the marshes. Tides became higher at the end of March, and were extremely high April 10-11. This movement of crabs was basically too late to help the cranes substantially before their migration. Marsh salinities are 23-25 ppt, but bay salinities are lower, measured at 15 at the refuge boat canal on April 16.