May 24, 2021


**<u>Sandhill Cranes in Rio Blanco County</u>**


Have you noticed the long-legged, long-necked Sandhill Cranes in the hayfields along the White River?  You may not have seen these birds here twenty years ago as crane breeding distribution has expanded throughout NW Colorado over the past 25 years.

According to the CPW, up to 200 cranes now gather on flood irrigated fields in the upper White River Valley for pre-migration staging annually. Some of the cranes take advantage of the fields and remain in the White River Valley all summer raising their young.

The adult cranes can be up to four feet in length, have a wingspan of up to 7 feet, and weigh up to 11 pounds. During migration, they fly in V-formations or make long lines. Their distinctive calls can be heard for miles.

Sandhill cranes are very territorial during the breeding season. The typical number of young produced by a female is two eggs, which are usually laid on a huge mound of marsh-like plants yanked up by their roots. Nest construction can take up to seven days, and the nests may be five to six feet across.

The pair of cranes, both the male and female, shares incubation. Two chicks (also called colts) hatch two to three days apart, and the older one is often aggressive to its sibling. The parents keep the youngsters separated by walking apart; each adult is followed by one of the chicks.

The birds are omnivorous. They forage for roots, eat seeds, small mammals and reptiles, eggs of other birds and invertebrates, such as worms, clams, insects, and crayfish. Their bills are especially adapted for foraging and wetland hunting. The sturdy bill can penetrate frozen ground, and the serrated edges help the bird to snag slippery prey such as worms and snakes.

For more information on Sandhill Cranes, visit www.cpw.state.co.us and search Sandhill Crane.

Scan link: https://cpw.state.co.us/learn/Pages/Species-Profiles-Detail.aspx?SpeciesTerm=SandhillCrane#:~:text=Sandhill%20cranes%20feed%20in%20mudflats,to%20the%20large%20grain%20fields.