

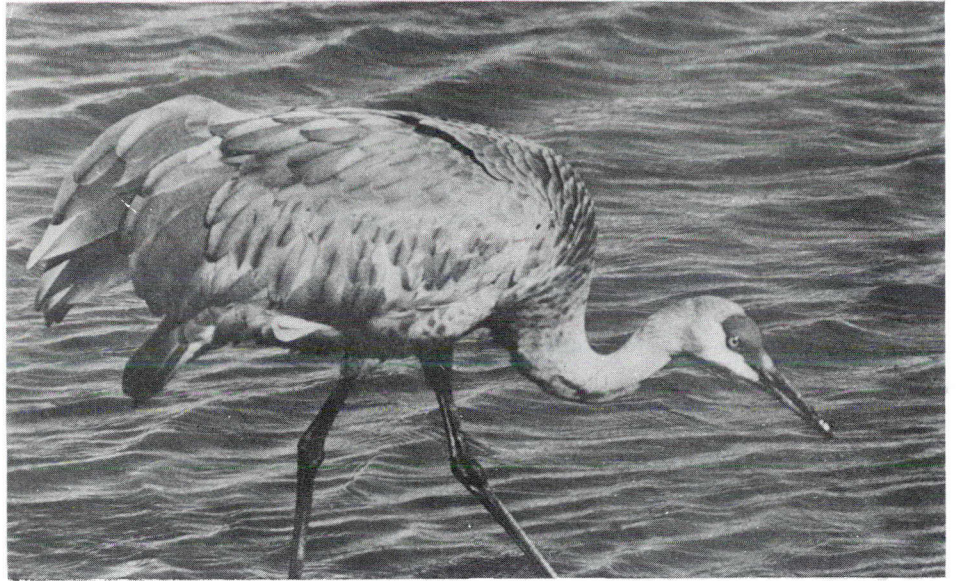
Foster parents help whooping cranes fight for survival

A unique experiment, providing foster parents for the endangered whooping crane, is being carried out by the United States Fish and Wildlife Service and the Canadian Wildlife Service (CWS).

Whooping crane eggs, which were taken from wild nests in Canada were placed in the nests of greater sandhill cranes in Idaho, U.S., in the hope that the sandhills, the whoopers' closest relative, would hatch the eggs and raise the chicks as their own.

The idea is to establish a second population of whooping cranes in the wild, to strengthen their precarious hold on existence. Only 49 wild whooping cranes survive. This population winters on the Texas Gulf Coast and summers in the Northwest Territories. If a second population thrives, it would winter in New Mexico and summer in the Idaho-Wyoming-Montana area, following the pattern of the foster parents.

Eggs have been taken from the nests of wild whooping cranes five times since 1967 and hatched in incubators at the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's Patuxent Wildlife Research Center in Laurel, Maryland. Nineteen of the offspring compose the bulk of the captive breeding flock of 21 birds.



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Sandhill crane, cousin of the rare whooping crane, at the Aransas National Wildlife Refuge, Texas. As an experiment, Canadian and U.S.

scientists are using sandhills as foster parents, hoping to strengthen the whoopers' precarious hold on existence.

The young whoopers will remain with their foster parents throughout next winter and return with them to Idaho in the spring of 1976. At that time, the sandhill crane foster parents will stake out a 40-acre territory for breeding and nesting and will kick out the youngsters. If they venture back onto their foster parents' territory they will be driven off.

When the whoopers mature in five to seven years, they are expected to choose mates. Besides differences in size and plumage, the mating calls and ritual dance of the whooping cranes differ from those of sandhill cranes; a female of one species might be unresponsive to a male of another species. If the pairing of a whooper and a sandhill crane occurs, they will be separated from the rest of the flock so that additional hybrids do not appear.

Many questions remain to be answered in this experiment. The normal diet of whooping cranes differs somewhat from that of sandhill cranes. Whoopers prefer water crustaceans; sandhill cranes favour grain. Both birds have the same range of food tolerance, however, and can derive enough nutrition from either to live a healthy life. Nesting habits also differ: whoopers prefer marshy areas; sandhills prefer solid ground at a marsh's edge.

This experiment is one of several efforts under way to restore the endangered whooping crane to a healthy state in the wild. The first whoopers bred and raised in captivity at the Patuxent Wildlife Research Center have reached sexual maturity and have already laid three eggs. Two were infertile, one was hatched but the bird died some two weeks later. Eventually, offspring of the captive whoopers may be released into the wild.



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Dawn, the first whooping crane chick born from an egg laid in captivity, was only a few minutes old when this picture was taken at the Patuxent Wild-

life Research Center, Laurel, Maryland, U.S. The bird, which was conceived by artificial insemination, died of a congenital defect about two weeks later.