

The Tallgrass Journal

Goose Lake Prairie Partners, 5010 N. Jugtown Road, Morris, IL 60450



Freshwater Wetlands and Uplands Make Ideal Nesting Areas For Sandhill Cranes. Article continues on pages 4 & 5...



“Cranes from northern populations generally undertake tremendous migrations, with some birds logging thousands of miles a year.”



Since Sandhill Cranes are often spotted at Goose Lake Prairie State Natural Area in the Spring, we felt it appropriate to include more information on them in this issue of the Tallgrass Journal.



Many thanks to photographer and Partner Pam Ridgley for supplying the photos to accompany the article on Sandhill Cranes.



“All cranes engage in complex "dance" displays, which typically consist of synchronized dips, bows, head swings, wing spreads, leaps, and flaps.”

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Park Notes:

Our park staff is keeping the visitor areas ready, so why not plan an outing? There are many trails to choose from.

Good walking shoes, a hat and you should pack a bit of water. Yes bring the dog for a walk also, but remember to pick up after him/her and when you return from the prairie fields, check the pets for ticks also. Reminder: pets must be on a leash.

Stay informed by checking the website. <http://gooselakeprairie.org>

FRIEND US ON FACEBOOK

Calendar of Events

Special Events for 2012

Cabin Festival, 28th Annual June 2 10:00 – 3:00 p.m.

See authentic pioneer crafts done by the Prairie Partners and Friends as they re-enact in authentic dress. Visit the Cragg Cabin history exhibit and prairie life presentations. Park your car in the visitor center parking area. Walk the trail to the Cabin or ride the wagon. Some demonstrators and vendors will have items for sale. The event is to celebrate cabin living and life in the 1830's. Location is in and around the Cragg Cabin north north-east of the Visitor's Center.

Nature Photography Contest, 6th Annual

August 12	Noon – 3:00 p.m.	Accept photo entries
August 17	6:00 p.m.	Contest Judging in Auditorium
August 18-19	10 a.m. to 4:00 p.m.	Exhibit Days during Center hours
August 19	4:00 to 5:00 p.m.	Photo pick up

The Nature Photo contest offers budding photographers a chance to display the best photographs from their many trips to State Parks in Illinois. While we would hope that everyone visits the GLPSNA to see the entries, we know you will find a few nice shots in the many parks in Illinois. See our website for details. All activities are in the Visitor's Center.

Prairie Day, 15th Annual September 15 10:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m.

The Annual Prairie Day celebrates the prairie environment normally held in conjunction with National Prairie Week at the Goose Lake Prairie State Natural Area. Presentations on the environment and nature play a very important part of the day's activities as well as playing on the special features of the park itself. Various presentations, educational talks, and projects for children are the special offerings of the day. All special aspects of the park are open, the Cragg Cabin, the Visitors Center, nature trails with wagon rides and etc. Prairie Day began as an annual activity in 1997. It traditionally falls on the third Saturday of September. Located in and around the Visitor's Center.

Holiday Open House November 10th 1 p.m. - 3 p.m.

We will be decorating the Christmas tree once again with homemade ornaments. If you would like to contribute to our tree, come join us. Partners will be in 1830 period dress. Hot apple cider and home-made cookies will be served. Children will make holiday ornaments. Located in the Visitors Center.

ALL DATES ARE SUBJECT TO CHANGE. NO RAIN DATES WILL BE ASSIGNED.



Please mark the dates on your calendar. More information on events is posted on the Goose Lake Prairie Partner Website in a timely fashion. <http://gooselakeprairie.org>

Please bookmark it and return often.

Look for us on Facebook.

Pioneer Woman's Letter to her Parents by Jo Fleming, Prairie Partner

15 January 1847

Dear Parents,

Greetings from all of our family. We hope this missive finds you both well and happy.

We are well here, having been blessed with a good harvest, and we are ready for winter, despite having a terribly hot and dry summer. John and the boys have already taken some crops to market, and prices were good, so you need not worry about us; we should be able to provision well with the proceeds.

Communities are building near, and we now have access to better markets. The large settlement north of

us has been built on a large River and towboats travel east and west, taking our crops, and bringing in more trade goods. It is so much closer than the old trading post in Chicago. Things seem to be changing from day to day.

My sweet Bossie surprised us with twin heifers this fall, they are lovely, healthy girls and I am hoping they will be good milkers like their mama. I sold one to a nearby family and traded the other

to my friend Anne for a pair of newborn lambs. Anne will teach me their care, and how to card and spin. John has made a drawing of her wheel and will build one for me this winter. I am excited! With our last trip to market, I bought yarn to knit stocking for all of us, and a good warm vest for John. He catches cold so easily, and suffers too long.

We send grateful thanks for the package of fabrics you sent. They are lovely, and I will be able to sew new shirts for the boys and John. Our old best dresses get handed down, or for everyday. The children are growing so much. You would love to see them, I know. I wish we could make a trip home, but we cannot leave the farm for long. Perhaps with the improved travel, you could visit us? We would love that.

John and the boys were busy just before harvest, too. Despite the heat, they dug a root cellar next to the cabin, and built a shelter, so we are able to access it easily. With the growing appetites, we needed more storage space. It is now quite filled with pumpkins and squash. The girls and I put up extra sauerkraut, dried corn, beans, apples and potatoes and also dried fruits. The root cellar under the cabin was no longer big enough for all our food!

Oh yes, we have nearly a bushel of walnuts from a tree the boys found while out hunting. More blessings. We have also salted meats and hams, so we seem to be ready to finish out the winter, and we are so grateful to our Lord.

I must finish here, so that John can send this off tomorrow; he leaves early for market, and perhaps I will join him. I need to purchase tea, coffee, sugar and flour; and the weather looks to be good to travel.

For now, I shall say goodbye, hoping we hear from you soon, and that all is well with you.

Your loving and grateful daughter,
- Lidabel

Prairie Partner Jo Fleming has written a letter much like what a pioneer wife and mother might write back to her parents in the east.

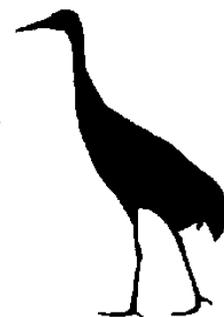


Winter at Cragg Cabin, GLPSNA.

Sandhill Cranes submitted by Art Rohr

Family: *Gruidae* Order: *Gruiformes*

Sandhill Cranes are large, elegant wading birds with long necks and legs, and wingspans ranging from 6 feet to 7 feet 3 inches (1.8-2.2 m). Most species are predominantly pale gray or white, with patches of red on the face. Their grace and their elaborate "dance" displays have inspired artists, choreographers, and biologists alike. They inhabit a variety of freshwater wetlands and uplands, including agricultural tracts, but are typically restricted to open habitats. Outside the breeding season they often gather in large flocks. Huge congregations of migrating Sandhill Cranes (*Grus canadensis*) attract birders to Nebraska and other staging areas every spring.



Taxonomy

The cranes comprise two subfamilies: the Balearicinae, with two species of crowned cranes from Africa, and the Gruinae, with 13 species of typical cranes. The genus *Crus* contains both North American species: the Whooping Crane (*G. americana*) and the Sandhill Crane. Researchers currently recognize six subspecies of Sandhill Crane, although all have been combined as a single taxonomic unit in the past, and there is much intergradation in appearance among subspecies.

Superficially cranes resemble herons, storks, and flamingos; all have long legs and necks, and all occur in wetland habitats. Cranes, however, are only distantly related to these families and are classified instead in the order Gruiformes, along with the rails and the Limpkin (*Aramus gurauna*), as well as several groups not found in North America.

Food and Foraging

Most cranes have a varied diet and are opportunistic, taking whatever food is available. They typically feed by pecking at the ground or probing the mud as they walk along. In the wetlands where they are usually seen, Whooping Cranes eat crabs, clams, various other aquatic invertebrates, and small vertebrates such as fish, frogs, and snakes. They will also forage in upland habitats, eating acorns and agricultural grains if available. Sandhill Cranes often feed on seeds in farm fields but will also eat berries, leaves, tubers, various invertebrates, and small vertebrates.

Displays

All cranes engage in complex "dance" displays, which typically consist of synchronized dips, bows, head swings, wing spreads, leaps, and flaps. Birds also will occasionally pick items off the ground and toss them into the air.

Dancing is an important component of courtship and is especially common among subadult birds that have yet to breed. It often occurs early in the morning and during spring migration, when dancing activity can spread contagiously through a flock, creating a spectacular show. Older birds typically retain their mates from the previous breeding season and dance less frequently.

Cranes also engage in a variety of aggressive behaviors that are used to defend breeding territories or feeding areas. Sometimes these aggressive displays are incorporated into dances.

Breeding

Both North American cranes build a simple platform of vegetation in a marshy area, gathering materials from the area immediately around the nest to form a "moat." Males and females both incubate, although the female does about 70 percent of the job. At the time of hatching, young cranes are covered with down and are mobile, but they depend on their parents for food. The young leave the nest within hours after hatching and follow the parents on foot. As they grow, they increasingly feed themselves, although they continue to solicit their parents for food until they become independent, several months after hatching. The young cranes stay with their parents in a family group until the end of their first spring.



Pam Ridgley took this photo of Sandhill cranes by the Cragg Cagin in 2008.



Movements

Cranes from northern populations generally undertake tremendous migrations, with some birds logging thousands of miles a year. Cranes may spend weeks at staging areas socializing and fattening up before migration begins. Typically birds start migrating a few hours after sunrise, when thermals begin to develop.

Most Sandhill Cranes fly at altitudes of 500 to 2,500 feet (150-750 m) when they migrate, but some have reached 12,000 feet (3,600 m). After achieving "cruising" height, cranes often fly in a V formation, gliding up to 500 miles (800 km) in nine or ten hours. Young cranes rely on their parents to teach them the route to the wintering grounds.

Features of the Sandhill Crane

1. 36-69" (90-176 cm) wading birds.
2. 15 species in at least 2 genera worldwide; on all continents except Antarctica and South America, with greatest diversity in Old World. 2 species in 1 genus breed in North America, 1 species found throughout continent; plus 1 accidental species.
3. Eat wide variety of plant material and small animals, picked off ground or dug up with bill.
4. Territorial. Monogamous; pairs bond for life. All perform "dancing" displays. Temperate zone species migratory.
5. Breed first at 2-6 years old, but early breeding attempts usually fail.
6. Nest is large platform on the ground with surrounding "moat"; built by both parents from adjacent vegetation. Nests are rarely reused.
7. Usually 2 variably colored, subelliptical eggs. Both parents incubate during day, female at night. Hatching asynchronous, after 28-36 days. 1 brood per year.
8. Precocial young mobile, covered with down at hatching. Both parents feed. Fledge at 50 days-18'h weeks.
9. Adult annual survival typically exceeds 80%. Among oldest on record: 23 years in wild (Sandhill Crane); more than 40 years in captivity (Whooping Crane).

What Makes a Bird a Bird? submitted by Art Rohr

Birds evolved from small reptiles more than 160 million years ago. They still share some characteristics with reptiles, such as laying eggs and having scales on their legs and feet. Development of the ability to fly required not only feathers and wings but good eyesight, a sense of balance and fine muscle coordination. Like mammals, birds are **warm-blooded** vertebrates, meaning their internal body temperature is maintained at a constant level regardless of external conditions. This characteristic allows birds to maintain high levels of energy and a **metabolic rate** necessary for flight. By comparison, reptiles and amphibians are cold-blooded, meaning they rely on the temperature of the air and/or water to regulate their body temperature.

Birds have three characteristics that distinguish them from other animals: feathers; hard-shelled eggs; and hollow bones.

FEATHERS: Feathers are an adaptation of reptilian scales. They range in size from 0.05 inch on a bird eyelid to the tail feathers of a male peacock (*Pavo cristatus*) which may be five feet long. In number they range from 1,000 on a hummingbird to 25,000 on a swan, and generally comprise 15-20 percent of the entire weight of the bird. Feathers perform a variety of functions, such as flight, regulation of body temperature (**thermoregulation**), protection of the body and skin, attraction of mates and differentiation of species.

(continued on page 6)

What Makes a Bird a Bird? Cont. from page 5

The feathers most commonly observed are contour and down feathers. **Contour feathers** cover the body of a bird and have a strong, hollow **shaft** and network of hooks or **barbules**. The contour feathers on the tail and wings have been modified for flight. **Down feathers** are small and lie under the contour feathers. The purpose of these feathers is to insulate the bird from the cold and protect against sunburn.

Birds must take care of their feathers so they can continue to fly and remain warm. **Preening** feathers spreads oils over the feathers and "re-hooks" the barbules. Even though they are kept clean, feathers become worn and are usually replaced at least once a year. This process is called **molting**.

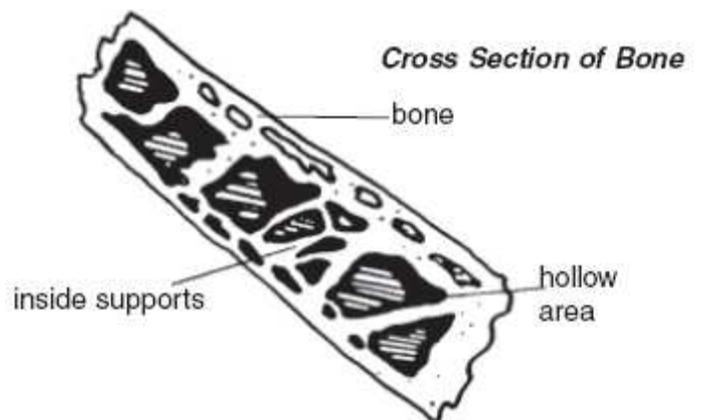
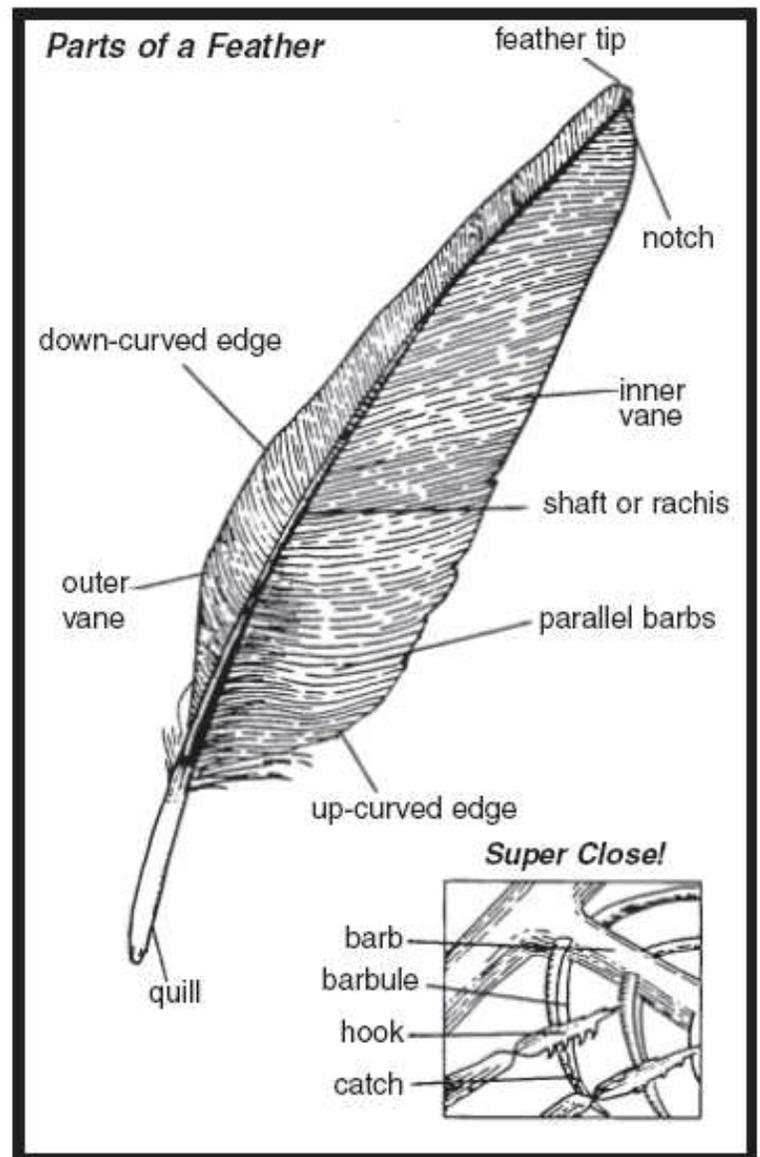
HARD-SHELLED EGGS: Birds lay hard-shelled eggs made mostly of **calcium carbonate**. The hard shell keeps an egg from **dehydrating** and allows parents to sit on the eggs during **incubation**. Even though bird eggs are hard-shelled, they possess microscopic pores which allow oxygen to pass into and carbon dioxide to exit the shell.



Egg of the Sandhill crane.

Eggs come in a variety of colors, patterns, shapes and textures. Colors and patterns on eggs vary depending on the need for camouflage. The shape of the egg depends on where the bird nests. Most eggs are oval. Birds that lay their eggs on ledges need eggs with a pointed end so they will not roll off the ledge. The texture of an egg may vary from smooth (hummingbird) to coarse (chicken).

HALLOW BONES: Simply having feathers does not permit birds to be creatures of the sky. Extremely lightweight bones are also necessary for flight. Bird bones are strong and hallow with inside supports. Many bird bones are fused together which increases the strength of the bones.



Park Happenings

The Goose Lake Prairie Partners will begin their weekend desk service the first weekend in March. A calendar will be sent round to members soon so it is time to begin preparations to work the desk. We ask those members that can to sign up to work Saturday or Sunday from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. We will accept half day sign ups also (10 a.m. to 1 p.m. or 1 p.m. to 4 p.m.) Many of the park visitors on weekends has expressed their appreciation for this service.

If you have not yet been trained to volunteer to serve as a desk assistant please call Susie at 815-942-1838. We will set up a time for training, and you will sign up to work with an experienced desk assistant for your first two assignments.

Many of our volunteers use the time to help visitors enjoy the park, learn more about the prairie or to complete tasks for the Partners. We look forward to providing the park with the volunteer weekend service again.

—President Susie Johnson

Gifts To The Park Are Tax Deductible.

Goose Lake Prairie Partners are looking for a few new items to add to the visitors center as well as the park itself. If you or your organization is looking for a special project why not consider the following items:

- 1.) Choose a park trail and monitor it to keep it pristinely clean for our visitors.
- 2.) Volunteer to work the Visitor Center Desk during the weekend to help keep the center open. Normally the Center is only open on weekends if volunteers work the center.

3.) Consider purchasing an item for the park. At the current time our “Want List” includes:

- New mounted bird or mammal species.
- Park benches to strategically place around the park on various trails.
- New folding chairs for our events.
- New folding tables with plastic tops
- Fund a mural for the Auditorium
- Purchase a chain saw art piece to sit in Bird Corner.
- Sponsor the Partner Website or Newsletter.

If you are looking for an interesting program for your club or group, why not consider a Nature Program? Call the Park Desk for more information.

Tax deductible gifts are recognized with a “certificate of gift” which can be used for tax deductions.

**Call 815-942-2899
for information.**

Park Contacts:

Joe Giacone, Site Superintendent

Char McDade, Office Coordinator

Susie Johnson, Prairie Partner President

Bev Mansfield, Vice-President

Rebecca Sipple, Secretary

Jackie Martin, Treasurer/Purchasing Agent

Norma Hedges, Gift Shop Chairperson

Jo Fleming, Historian.

Tom Kaluzny, Board Member

The Mission of the Goose Lake Prairie Partners

The mission of the Prairie Partners is to help the Goose Lake Prairie State Natural Area in the following ways.

- To understand, maintain and attract the public to the park by producing various festivals, educational events, and displays centered around early life on the prairie and on the natural environment of the park.
- To provide assistance and funds as needed by the park and its staff for equipment, supplies and other items for improvement and maintenance.

Monetary or Time Donations Are Always Welcome.

Text in this publication is the sole responsibility of the authors of the articles and not the responsibility of the Park or the Prairie Partners.

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Books for Kids

Rachel and Sammy Visit the Prairie and *Rachel and Sammy Visit the Forest* are the first two books in an educational children's series by Jennifer Powelson. Both books contain an entertaining storyline, with Rachel Raccoon teaching Sammy Skunk about the plants featured in the books.

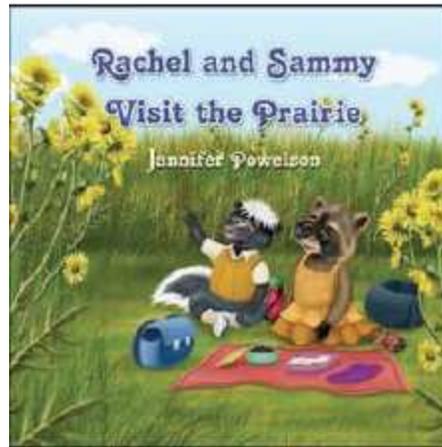
Dialog between Rachel and Sammy, realistic illustrations, and vivid photographs taken by the author, all combine to turn these fun stories into junior field guides to help children learn more about nature and plants. These are great books to read inside but are even better to take on a nature hike!

Take Only Memories.
Leave Only Footprints.
Thank You Very Kindly.

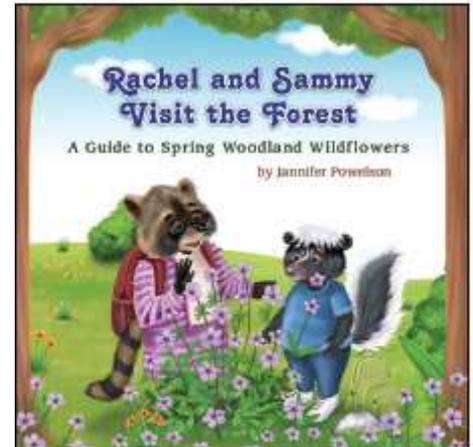


We are on the Web

<http://gooselakeprairie.org>



\$17.00



\$15.00

**Keep the Prairie Partners Gift Shop in mind
when you visit our center...**

*Many Nature Books are available, some Jewelry items,
Handmade Leather Pouches, Clothing & Hats commemorating
the Prairie Park and Hand-woven Rag Rugs.*



\$4.00 each

*Walking in the park in the Winter is a great treat. Just last week a Snowy Owl was spotted.
Pheasants and Turkeys do not migrate. Many of those birds are running in and out the dried plant stems.*