

and sickly on 28 Aug. The feather tracts on its back appeared somewhat barren that day, while its sibling displayed remarkably abrupt advances toward juvenal plumage. The next morning, I found fresh dog-tracks where the weakened chick had been cowering the previous day, but no other signs of that individual.

The surviving young continued its rapid maturation, and sustained its first brief flight on 30 Aug. 1996.

Literature Cited:

Bent, A.C. 1928. Life histories of North American shorebirds, Part 1. Washington, D.C. Smithsonian.

Bohlen, H. D. 1989. The birds of Illinois. Indiana University. Bloomington, IL.

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Sandhill Cranes Nest in Winnebago County

On 8 May 1993, Jack Armstrong, Beth Goeppinger, my wife, Barbara, and I discovered the first confirmed nest of Sandhill Cranes (*Grus canadensis*) in Winnebago County during the Spring Bird Count. We were working our way through an oxbow marsh, formerly part of the Pecatonica River, on the north side of the river, about eight miles west of the Village of Rockton. The area is locally known as Moody Marsh.

Moody Marsh, one of few marshes left in Winnebago County, is owned by three separate parties. In 1996, the Natural Land Institute purchased the middle third of the marsh, plus 40 acres of adjoining cropland, from a private landowner who had it listed for sale as a building site. NLI intends to transfer it to the Winnebago County Forest Preserve District, which will place the marsh into its natural areas inventory to protect the nesting site. The landowner on the south has always generously allowed birders to access the marsh through his property to conduct the spring census and monitor cranes.

The oxbow was part of a much larger marsh and wet prairie complex in the original Pecatonica River floodplain. Most of that wetland has been drained for agriculture in the 150 years since the county was settled. The oxbow is the lowest part of the area, and likely cannot be drained further without major effort. The landowner on the north has recently excavated a pond at the edge of the marsh, and built a new house overlooking the pond.

Sandhill Cranes probably once nested in Winnebago County, but no old records confirm this. The species has nested in Rock County, Wisconsin, immediately across the state line, at sites as close as seven miles away. The subspecies that breeds in Wisconsin, of which the Illinois birds are a part, is *G. c. tabida*, or Greater Sandhill Crane, although historically, *G. c. canadensis*, the Little Brown Crane, occurred in Illinois as evidenced by bones found in Jackson County (Bohlen 1989). Bohlen reports that the species "probably bred fairly commonly in Illinois until about 1890." Before 1993, nesting had been confirmed only in Lake and McHenry Counties, with a probable nesting pair in Whiteside County in 1985 (Bohlen 1989).

We discovered the first Winnebago nest when I inadvertently flushed an adult bird. From approximately 30 feet away, I observed a platform of vegetation elevated approximately 12 to 18 inches above the knee-deep water, with a shallow depression in the center of the top of the vegetation. In the depression were two large light-brown eggs with darker brown spots and blotches. Not wanting to disturb the nest or attract predators, I withdrew immediately. As we left the site, we saw both adult birds. One of them returned to the nest while we were watching. We returned periodically to see if the pair successfully fledged young. Alan Branhagen reported seeing an immature bird with the adults in late August.

Within three weeks of this sighting, a second pair of birds at a nest was located by Vicki Nuzzo just west of the Sugar River, and immediately South of Yale Bridge Road, while she was doing a plant survey on wetland property owned by the Natural Land Institute. That property has since been transferred to the Winnebago County Forest Preserve, and is approximately seven miles northwest of the first site. Whether a pair successfully fledged any young that year is unknown. The remote site is difficult to access. Scott Robinson reported a pair in the same location in 1994 (Kleen 1994), and three birds were seen there, calling and circling, in May, 1996 during the Spring Bird Count.

Since 1993, Sandhill Cranes have continued to nest at the original site, usually within 100 meters of the first nest, if not in it. They have successfully fledged young each year. In 1996, they were observed with two almost completely grown young on 10 Aug., foraging in a soy bean field that immediately adjoins the marsh.

In 1994, Jeff Donaldson and Alan Branhagen discovered a third nest site in a large marsh along Telegraph Road, east of the town of Pecatonica. The cranes there fledged young that year, and each year since. Brad Grover discovered a pair of King Rails with young in June, 1995 at the same site (Kleen 1995). This marsh, locally known as Telegraph Marsh, is at the bottom of a