

CRANE ENDANGEREDMississippi Sandhill Crane

By: W. H. Turcotte

The 1973 edition of Threatened Wildlife of the United States lists the Mississippi Sandhill Crane as "nearing extinction because of a very small and restricted population and deteriorating habitat." Present distribution is in Jackson County near Ocean Springs and Fontainebleau between the Pascagoula River and the Jackson-Harrison County line north to Bluff Creek. Estimated numbers are between 38 and 40 birds remaining in the wild, with nine in captivity at the Patuxent Wildlife Research Center in Maryland.

Mississippi Sandhill cranes have been described as a subspecies--Grus canadensis pulla (Aldrich). The birds are the same size as the Florida sandhill cranes but darker colored, the darkest of all the sandhill cranes.

The birds are declining chiefly because of reduction of suitable habitat (which is semi-open and wet pine savannah) by changing land use including drainage, planting of trees, suburban development and highway building.

Protective measures have been taken by the Bureau of Sport Fisheries and Wildlife by rearing this subspecies in captivity from eggs taken from wild nests over a period of the past six years. One egg is taken from a nest which usually contains two eggs. Not more than four or five eggs have been taken in any one year. Acquisition and restoration of habitat in the present range and adjoining areas has been proposed by the Bureau of Sport Fisheries and Wildlife. It is hoped that the captive rearing program will be expanded to produce stock for subsequent liberation. No reproduction has occurred to date among captive Mississippi cranes at the Patuxent Center.

State Game and Fish Commission biologists have cooperated with the Bureau by participation in the crane research and propagation projects since they were initiated. Reprinted from Marine Briefs, Vol. 2, No. 6, p. 3.

