
Press Release

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Bios for the Birds: USGS-Raised Whooping Crane Chicks Leave the Nest

Editors: For downloadable photos of the entire gang and each individual bird, please go to the [press release](http://usgs.gov/newsroom/article.asp?ID=2705) in the USGS newsroom. (<http://usgs.gov/newsroom/article.asp?ID=2705>)

All photos should be credited to Jane Chandler, USGS Patuxent Wildlife Research Center

LAUREL, Md. — Imagine spending your time feeding, nurturing, and teaching the daily tasks of survival to a baby who could never know your true identity.

The dedicated U.S. Geological Survey scientists and caretakers of the ten gangly, adolescent whooping cranes being publicly released today in Louisiana do just this. But that doesn't mean that they don't know each of these cranes as well as parents know each of their children.

They do, and the whooping crane team at the USGS Patuxent Wildlife Research Center in Laurel, Md., would like Louisianans to know something about these new state residents as well and have prepared short bios for the birds.

The caretakers raised the cranes being released today by wearing white costumes, never using their human voice around the cranes, exercising them and taking them for walks and swims, using a crane puppet to feed insatiably hungry chicks round the clock and patiently teaching them about the wild outside world.

All the whooping cranes alive in North America today derive from a flock of about 16 birds, of which maybe only 3 or 4 females were laying eggs. The cranes were essentially extinct in the wild, but through the hard work of federal, state, and nongovernmental groups, about 250 whooping cranes live in the wild now. Another 150 more whoopers live in captivity, with USGS having the largest breeding flock of about 60 birds. About half of these USGS-raised birds are returned to the wild each year.

"It is wonderfully gratifying to be able to contribute to the survival of such a magnificent species and to see them as a flock of adult whoopers in the wild," said John French, a USGS ornithologist and the head of the USGS Whooping Crane Project. "So today, as the chicks literally leave the nest, it's a huge milestone for us, for the state of Louisiana and for the whooping cranes."

Whooping Crane Chick L1-10

Sex: Female

Hatched: 5/27/10

Parents: USGS Patuxent Wildlife Research Center Breeding Pair

Points of Interest: As a young chick, she did not follow the costumed handler very well when going for walking exercises, but she continued to grow strong. She became best friends with Chick L2. She has always had lighter plumage than the others chicks, and currently is the chick with the whitest plumage.



Whooping Crane Chick L2-10

Sex: Female

Hatched: 5/27/10

Parents: USGS Patuxent Wildlife Research Center Breeding Pair

Points of Interest: As a young chick, she learned to eat and drink very quickly, which her caretakers loved. She did not follow well for walks, but she was able to gain leg strength in other ways such as going for swims. She is good buddies with Chick L1.



Whooping Crane Chick L3-10

Sex: Male

Hatched: 5/28/10

Parents: Egg from Calgary Zoo

Points of Interest: As a young chick one of his legs began to deviate, and he required a lot of extra swimming and walking exercises to prevent the problem from becoming too serious. He has always been a very good follower and continues to be one of the most costume-friendly of the group.



Whooping Crane Chick L4-10

Sex: Male

Hatched: 5/29/10

Parents: USGS Patuxent Wildlife Research Center Breeding Pair

Points of Interest: He was a cry-baby as a youngster, his caretakers report. Just “peep, peep, peep” all day long. He was also aggressive to his feeding puppet. But Chick L4 grew into a big, handsome bird that got along well with the other chicks. He quickly became the dominant bird, but was never mean or troublesome about it.



Whooping Crane Chick L5-10

Sex: Female

Hatched: 5/31/10

Parents: Egg from Calgary Zoo

Points of Interest: Chick L5 is a sister of Chick L3. She and Chick L4 are walking exercise buddies. Both chicks are very good about following the costumed leader and behave well.



Whooping Crane Chick L6-10

Sex: Female

Hatched: 6/2/10

Parents: Egg came from Necedah National Wildlife Refuge

Points of Interest: Chick L6 is quite independent. She sometimes spends time away from the other chicks and is not attached to the costumed leader as most other chicks tend to be.



Whooping Crane Chick L7-10

Sex: Female

Hatched: 6/3/10

Parents: Egg from Audubon Species Survival Center in New Orleans

Points of Interest: Chick L7 is returning to her home country! As a youngster she was easily distracted by spiders, flowers, insects, and so on, but she also liked to stay close to the costumed leader when in a new situation. She is a very alert chick. Welcome home, Chick L7!



Whooping Crane Chick L8-10

Sex: Male

Hatched: 6/4/10

Parents: Egg from Calgary Zoo

Points of Interest: When Chick L8 was about a month old, we must report that he became a “meanie” toward other chicks and could not be walked with any other cranes. He had to live and exercise by himself for a long time and was the last bird to be socialized with the rest of his cohorts. We are happy to report that he was just a late bloomer and eventually learned to live peaceably with others.



Whooping Crane Chick L9-10

Sex: Female

Hatched: 6/5/10

Parents: Egg from Calgary Zoo

Points of Interest: Chick L9 is a sister to Chick L8. This bird was a fast learner and captured the hearts of more than one of her human caretakers by being cute *and* smart. She and Chick L10 were exercise buddies.



Whooping Crane Chick L10-10

Sex: Female

Hatched: 6/9/10

Parents: USGS Patuxent Wildlife Research Center Breeding Pair



Points of Interest: As a young chick, Chick L10 was timid about going into the back field for her exercise walks. Now she has gained confidence and is not afraid. She is even known for sneaking up on the costumed technicians and pecking at them. Way to go, Chick L10!

To watch a video about the Whooping Crane Project at the USGS Patuxent Wildlife Research Center, please visit <http://gallery.usgs.gov/videos/172>. For more information on whooping cranes and the re-introduction of whooping cranes to Louisiana, please visit the LDWF's website at www.wlf.la.gov or the Service's website at <http://www.fws.gov/southeast>

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