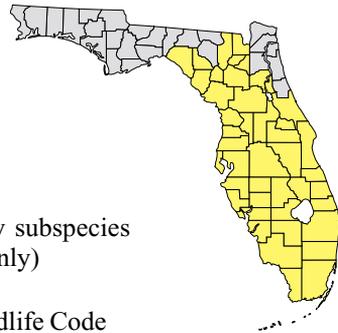


FLORIDA SANDHILL CRANE
Grus canadensis pratensis



Order: Gruiformes
Family: Gruidae
FNAI Ranks: G5T2T3/S2S3
U.S. Status: Endangered (nonmigratory subspecies in Cuba and Mississippi only)
FL Status: Threatened
U.S. Migratory Bird Treaty Act and state Wildlife Code prohibit take of birds, nests, or eggs.



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Description: A tall, long-necked, long-legged bird with a clump of feathers that droops over the rump. Adult is gray overall, with a whitish chin, cheek, and upper throat, and dull red skin on the crown and lores (lacking in immatures); feathers may have brownish-red staining resulting from preening with muddy bill. Immature has pale to tawny feathers on head and neck and a gray body with brownish-red mottling. Flies with neck extended. Their distinctive rolling call can be heard from far away.

Similar Species: Indistinguishable from greater sandhill crane (*Grus canadensis tabida*), which winters in Florida. Greater sandhill crane generally arrives in Florida in October and leaves in March, so the date observed or definite evidence of reproduction may be used to differentiate the two. Great blue heron (*Ardea herodias*) is sometimes mistakenly

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identified as a crane. This heron lacks the bald, red crown of the sandhill and flies with its neck tucked in, typical of herons and egrets. Whooping crane (*G. americana*) is white.

Habitat: Prairies, freshwater marshes, and pasture lands. Avoids forests and deep marshes but uses transition zones and edges between these and prairies or pasture lands. Will frequent agricultural areas like feed lots and crop fields, and also golf courses and other open lawns, especially in winter and early spring. Nest is a mound of herbaceous plant material in shallow water or on the ground in marshy areas. Favors wetlands dominated by pickerelweed and maidencane.

Seasonal Occurrence: Nonmigratory. Very sedentary, although may forage widely. Large influx of northern migratory subspecies in winter (October - March).

Florida Distribution: Most of peninsular Florida within appropriate habitat, though not as common south of Lake Okeechobee. Rarely reported west of Taylor County.

Range-wide Distribution: Florida range plus extreme southeastern Georgia (Okefenokee Swamp).

Conservation Status: Population estimate in 1975 of approximately 4,000 birds (25 percent are nonbreeding subadults) is still considered accurate. Habitat availability will become more and more of concern as Florida continues to lose open rangeland and native prairie to development and more intensive agricultural uses (e.g., citrus, row crops). Nesting success in human-altered areas is well below that of native areas. Shallow wetlands used by cranes are easily affected by drainage of adjacent uplands even if they are not directly disturbed. Florida sandhill cranes are found on federal and state lands and on local government lands (e.g., wellfields).

Protection and Management: Because of large home-range requirements, public lands do not protect large populations of cranes. Acquire land, through fee-simple acquisition and conservation easements on suitable ranchlands, in areas that bolster existing protected populations. Periodic fire important to retard invasion of woody vegetation in crane habitat. Filling drainage ditches to restore natural hydrological conditions important in some areas.

Selected References: Poole and Gill (eds.) 1992, Robertson and Woolfenden 1992, Rodgers et al. (eds.) 1996, Stevenson and Anderson 1994, Toland 1999a.