

## THE WHOOPING CRANE CONTINUES TO VISIT LOUISIANA

By E. W. NELSON

In February and early March, 1928, the writer spent some time investigating the distribution and habits of the Blue Geese (*Chen caerulescens*) on the coastal marshes of Louisiana. On March 11, with the local game warden, Ulyese Veazey, I rode over some miles of slightly flooded, hard marsh lying between the shore of the Gulf of Mexico and the long oak ridge, some eight miles inland, known as Pecan Island. About two miles from the Gulf, at a distance of perhaps a mile, we saw cloud-like flocks of blue geese, aggregating five or six thousand birds, rising and settling uneasily on their feeding ground, filling the air continuously with their chorus of rather highly pitched notes.

The son of the owner of a small cattle ranch on the coast rode with us and on inquiry as to what part of the marsh the big white cranes frequented, of which he and his father had told us, he pointed to the right and farther inland. After following that direction for nearly a mile I was delighted to see a splendid pair of *Grus americana*, their plumage gleaming white in the bright sunshine as they stood in the midst of a little group of half a dozen cattle.

We took a course that would lead us within about 500 yards to one side of them and as we approached that point they arose with slow and stately wing strokes and moved across the marsh, at an elevation of about 100 feet, for about a mile and, alighting, stood on the alert. After watching them for some time we turned away and left them in peace.

I believe that all the members of the Cooper Club will appreciate the exultant thrill I experienced in seeing these majestic birds in life for the first time since the middle 70's when, as a youngster, I roamed the prairies of the Mississippi Valley. As my eyes followed these birds moving deliberately away a feeling of sadness arose as I realized this was probably my last sight of some of the very few survivors of one of the finest birds native to our fauna but doomed to early extinction. So far as I could learn among the trappers and hunters living in these marshes, from the delta of the Mississippi to the border of Texas, this pair is all that survives of the many Whooping Cranes that once wintered there.

On January 7, 1929, Ulyese Veazey wrote me from Pecan Island that this pair of cranes was again wintering where we had seen them in 1928. He had seen them within two weeks of the time he wrote and he frequently heard their rolling call notes from a distance as he worked his trap-line daily in the marsh.

One disquieting element regarding these birds is that this is the fourth successive winter they have passed on this section of the marsh, always without young. Possibly these birds may be of the same sex, but in any case they fail to rear young, so far as the evidence goes, and when they meet their fate, in the not distant future, the species may disappear forever from this region. Formerly Whooping Cranes wintered commonly south to the marshes at the head of Lake Chapala, Jalisco, on the southern part of the Mexican tableland, but they vanished from there many years ago.

Mr. Veazey, who has spent his life on Pecan Island, informed me that years ago, from 15 to more than 20 Whooping Cranes regularly wintered in the section of marsh where we saw the pair. Ordinarily they were seen singly or in groups of from 2 to 5, but on one occasion he counted 21 gathered in a loose flock, but it soon broke up and the birds scattered as usual. He stated that for the last 15 or 20 years these birds have been steadily decreasing.

My first acquaintance with Whooping Cranes was during the early 70's, when I made a practice of prowling along the several blocks on South Water Street, in Chicago, where dealers in game were located. There, of a spring morning, from 8 to 10 Whooping Cranes might be found hanging. They were usually purchased by large restaurants which specialized in game. Their large size, pure white plumage and black wings made them conspicuous, and they always attracted admiring attention as was shown by the number of people who stopped to look at them.

It was in these places that I first became familiar with blue and other geese, many kinds of ducks and waders. The displays of game were fascinating from the amount and variety of species sent to this great distributing point. One never knew what he might find, as the term "game" was an elastic one in those unregenerate days and might include pileated woodpeckers, flickers, robins, meadow-larks, shore-larks, with occasional hawks, owls and numerous other strange feathered victims.

*Washington, D. C., April 8, 1929.*