

## A RECORD OF PRETERRITORIAL COPULATION BY SANDHILL CRANES

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The Malheur-Harney Lakes Basin, Harney Co., Oregon, is an important traditional spring stopover area for the Pacific Flyway Population of Lesser Sandhill Cranes (*Grus canadensis canadensis*). Located in southeast Oregon, mowed and flooded meadows south and east of Burns provide excellent feeding, loafing, and roosting habitat for a majority of the 20,000 to 23,000 cranes in the population (Littlefield and Thompson, Proc. Crane Workshop 3:288-294, 1981). Individual birds remain in the basin from several days to a few weeks before continuing north to nesting regions in southwest Alaska.

Migrants begin arriving in southeast Oregon in late February, peak in early April, and most have departed by early May. Herter (M.S. thesis, Univ. Alaska, College, Alaska, 1982) reported that members of the population arrived in southeast Alaska on 22 April 1979 and 19 April 1980; peak numbers occurred during the last week in April, with most flocks gone by mid-May. Cranes arrive in western Alaska in early May and nest initiation has been observed in mid-May (Boise, M.S. thesis, Univ. Alaska, College, Alaska, 1977). Considering Lesser Sandhill Cranes begin nesting about 2 weeks after arriving on their territories, copulation may regularly occur during migration. Here I report on copulation by a pair of Lesser Sandhill Cranes at least 3500 km from the nearest known nesting area.

While examining cranes for neck collars about 3 km south of Burns, I observed the Lesser Sandhill Crane pair copulate. The incident occurred about 0925 on 9 April 1983. Weather conditions at the time were characterized by snow showers and low overcast, after a minimum temperature slightly below 0°C (NOAA-Burns, Oregon). About 500 lessers were feeding together in a mowed meadow when the male assumed precopulatory behavior. The female became receptive as the male approached, and coition occurred shortly thereafter. This was the first known record for copulation by this subspecies in southeast Oregon, and the first I am aware of for the species in the early phases of migration. No intensive behavioral studies of Lesser Sandhill Cranes have been conducted in this region; therefore, the regularity of copulation has not been ascertained. However, since the subspecies has a short time period for the nesting and brooding cycle, preterritorial copulation may be an adaption for successful reproduction at far northern latitudes.

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### FIELD ASSISTANTS NEEDED

Two volunteers are needed to help collect nesting and movement data on Prairie Falcons in western Wyoming. Food and field housing will be provided. Field work begins in early May and runs to mid-July. Volunteers are asked to stay at least 2 weeks (preferably 3 to 4). Some experience in handling birds or rock climbing is preferred. If interested, send a brief resume to: Bob Hitchcock, Wyoming Fish and Wildlife Coop. Unit, Box 3166, University Station, Laramie, Wyoming 82071. Phone: office (307) 766-2322, home (307) 721-2940.

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