



CELEBRATION OF CRANES 2022

CINDY JEFFREY, ORGANIZER OF THE EVENT

Photo by David Stremme

Every year that we have held this event, we have been confronted by a different set of circumstances. Whether it was weather or Covid, we have met the challenges. And this year (2022) presented another challenge: an extreme drought. There was almost no water at Quivira. Did we expect any cranes to show up? In the weeks leading up to Nov. 4-6, there were only a few sightings of cranes, mostly flying over.

Should we cancel the event? No, it would go on. There would be other birds if not cranes. We saw this as an opportunity to educate people about the importance of water to a wetland. And that wetlands occasionally dry up. But we needed to prepare those who registered for the possibility of not seeing any cranes. An email was sent to all registrants about the situation, but only two canceled. We had a total of 30 registered participants, some from out of state. A few others just showed up, once they heard about the Whooping Cranes.

We hoped for a downpour before the event, but didn't plan on it. A few days before the weekend, three or four Sandhill Cranes and an adult Whooping Crane were

spotted in the only area with some water - the Little Salt Marsh where Rattlesnake Creek feeds into the marsh. There was hope.

Friday was cold and rainy. We had all the guides in a group text, so when something was spotted, everyone would know about it. That included me, since I was at home near Manhattan, sick, and disappointed to be absent after weeks and weeks of planning. At least I could follow along by text. Jackie Augustine started with a sighting of a Northern Shrike. Then Tom Ewert, one of the guides, reported ducks and geese on the mud, cranes flying over, and Avocets on a little patch of water. Others started texting – coots and ducks and a Northern Harrier. From the tower 3000-4000 geese, white-fronted and snows, 80 Avocets, and six Wilson's Phalaropes were reported. At the Big Marsh a large group of Northern Pintails were seen. Migrant Mile had juncos, White-crowned and Fox Sparrows. There was sleet, too.

Then three adults and one juvenile Whooping Crane were spotted at Little Salt Marsh along with lots of Sandhill Cranes. Things were looking good! Another



Photo by Bob Gress



AOK leads crane tours for participants. Photo by J. K. Augustine



Whooping Cranes through the scope. Photo by Patty Marlett

text - eight Whooping Cranes - no - thirteen whoopers! Some near the south end of Big Salt Marsh along with pelicans. Friday turned out to be a great day!

Saturday started out with at least 16 whoopers, revised to 17 then 18 at Little Salt Marsh. Next Bob Gress reported 15 adults and 6 juveniles at Little Salt Marsh.

As I sat home sick, following these texts back and forth and the photos I got dizzy with excitement. I was just amazed at the expertise and passion of our volunteers! How lucky we are to have them, and how lucky the participants were to be with them! This has to be one of the best years for Whooping Cranes! And I can't believe we considered canceling!

I must thank all those who made this possible: Jackie Augustine, Vanessa Avara, Levi Beaver, Jonathan Conard, Michael L. Donnelly, Tom Ewert, Bob Gress, Kelley Hurst, Barbara Koester, George Leroux, Patty Marlett. Jackie and Kelley took over my duties at Sterling, making sure everything was set up for our speakers and

lunch.

Dawn to Dusk they worked, communicated with each other and the participants to make this year's Celebration of Cranes one to remember!

Barbara Koester, President of the Friends of Quivira, volunteered this year. I think she said it best:

"I am truly impressed with your organization and volunteers. The skill set and dedication they have is awesome! I am so very happy that your event was graced with so many Whooping Cranes. It was almost like the movie, *Field of Dreams*. Build it and they will come.

Your love of nature in all its many faces was evident during the Zoom call I was able to attend. Anyway, kudos to you all. Your organization is one I will recommend to other nature lovers!! You have much to share."