



Wildlife Window: SANDHILL CRANE

Sandhill Cranes with their Colts – it must be Springtime.

Photo-story by the P&P Committee

[Woodlands Word – April 2021]

3.11.21

(Bob Frank photo)

Spring has sprung in Rivendell... the best time to enjoy Sandhill Cranes and their Colts strolling around our community. These long-legged, long-necked, gray, heron-like birds (*Grus canadensis*) have a distinctive patch of bald, red skin on top of their head. Males and females look identical. They can reach a height of 47 inches with a wingspan of 6-7 feet. Cranes fly with necks outstretched like geese (whereas herons fly with necks tucked in on their backs).



A distinguishing feature of the Florida Sandhill Crane is its call, described as the “call of the wild”, with a bugling or trumpeting sound. You have probably heard this unique call, which can be heard several miles away. They are omnivorous, feeding on seeds, grain, berries, insects, earthworms, mice, small birds, snakes, lizards, frogs, crayfish, but do not “fish” like herons.



Sandhill Cranes breed with only one mate. Experiencing their courtship “dance”, which features jumping, running, and wing flapping is a wildlife treat. They are a non-migratory species that are often seen in very small groups or pairs. They nest in freshwater ponds and marshes and inhabit freshwater marshes, prairies, and pastures. Females lay two eggs that incubate for 32 days. The offspring – called “Colts”- will begin traveling from the nest with their parents just 24-hours after hatching. At ten months old juveniles are able to leave their parents. While a Crane family is beautiful to see strolling together, they are very protective of their young Colts and each other – so don’t get too close as they can be aggressive.

FUN FACT: *Why are Sandhill Crane young called “Colts?”* People are surprised the baby crane designation is the same as a horse. With their long legs, Sandhill Crane colts are able to get up and leave the nest within hours of being born - similar in concept to horse colts. Colts are a bright orange color for the first couple of weeks after they hatch. They are a delight to see with their little fuzzy bodies and very long legs.

Protect their Habitats. Sandhill Crane populations are being threatened by degradation, habitat loss, and overhunting. Watch out for these big birds when driving around town – because they enjoy walking, their gray color can be hard to see in the shadows by the road. Let’s keep our ponds and preserves healthy and attractive for these wonderful Sandhill Cranes and other wildlife friends. We can enjoy their beauty and enhance our quality of life, plus keep our property values strong.



(Sandhill Crane & Colts photos by Sheila Pies.)

Enjoy the amazing P&P Wildlife Photo Gallery at www.rivendellcommunity.com/ponds.