



Wildlife Window: The Sandhill Crane

Great News! Sandhill Cranes Still Enjoy Rivendell!

Sue Remy, Ponds & Preserves Committee

[Woodlands Word – September 2023]

Great news! A Sandhill Crane couple were spotted on Crane Pond in June. (How appropriate.) Many long-time Rivendell residents have remarked in recent years, they have missed seeing Sandhill Cranes around our community as often. Yet our Wildlife Weeks have indicated sightings of these magnificent birds are still fairly common in and around our ponds and preserves. In fact, Sandhill Cranes are so beloved in Rivendell, one is featured on the Ponds and Preserves Committee logo.

Let's learn more about these wonderful Sandhill Cranes (*Grus canadensis*). These large birds are long-legged, long-necked, gray, heron-like birds and 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).



(Thanks Shirley Fair for these 2 photos!)



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 do not get too close as they can be aggressive. Enjoy and take photographs from a distance.

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 and their gray color can be hard to see in the shadows and under trees by the road. Let's keep our ponds and preserves healthy and attractive for these wonderful Sandhill Cranes and our other wildlife friends. We can enjoy their beauty and enhance our quality of life, plus keep our property values strong.



(Photo: Nancy Dobias)

Click here to visit the Ponds & Preserves website: www.rivendellcommunity.com/ponds.