



NEBRASKA FLYWAY

THE GREAT SANDHILL
CRANE MIGRATION

NebraskaFlyway.com

The Great Migration

Each spring, something magical happens in the heart of the Great Plains. 80% of the world's population of Sandhill Cranes converge on Nebraska's Platte River Valley in North America's Central Flyway. After wintering in northern Mexico, Texas, and New Mexico, the cranes stop in the river valley to rest and refuel on their journey to breeding grounds in Canada, Alaska, and Siberia.

The shallow, braided channels of Nebraska's Platte River provide safe nighttime roost sites. Nearby farm fields and wet meadows provide food needed to continue their migration. During their stop in Nebraska, Sandhill Cranes gain approximately 15% of their body weight.

Plan your visit to see this migration for yourself using the information on the following pages of this brochure or visit NebraskaFlyway.com.



Central Nebraska
Regional
Airport (GRI)



Grand Island

visitor center
201 W. 3rd St.

Crane Trust
Nature
Center

Mormon Island
State Rec
Area



Locust St.

312

314



Platte River

Doniphan

Platte River Rd.

CPNRD
roadside
pulloffs

Crane
Viewing
Corner
pulloff

34

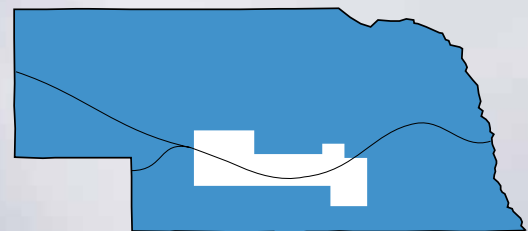
281



Hastings
Campground
and RV Park

Hastings

visitor center
234 N. Lincoln Ave.



Map not to scale

Nebraska's Platte River Valley

The **Platte River** gets its name from French explorers who called it the flat river. Snow melt from the Rocky Mountains forms this slow moving and shallow river.

Over time, the Platte River Valley developed into an agricultural and industrial powerhouse, placing strains on wildlife habitats. The modern river is very different from pre-settlement times with dams for flood protection, irrigation, and electricity. Water flow is diminished compared to historic amounts, but the river still provides a much needed habitat for birds—perhaps, most notably the Sandhill Crane and Whooping Crane. The birds roost on the same place year after year. As crane populations increase, roost sites are spreading into previously unused portions of the river.

In Nebraska, there is little federal or state-owned land along the Platte River. A patchwork of conservation efforts led by landowners, nonprofits, and government agencies manage the various demands on the water and wildlife.

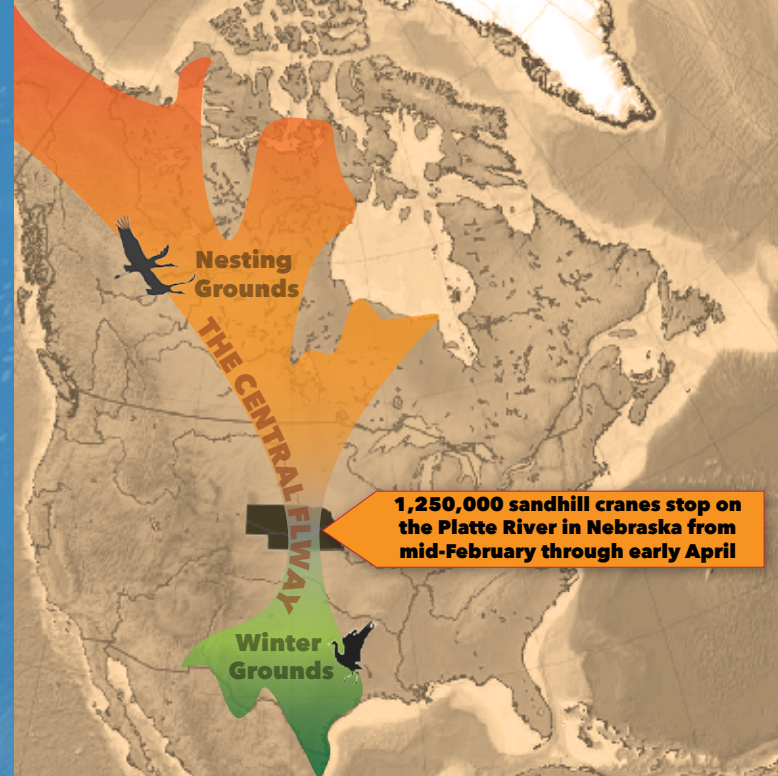
The Birds of the Rainwater Basin

Rainwater Basin Visitor Center

73746 V Road (Funk, Nebraska) | 308-263-3000
[FWS.gov/refuge/rainwater_basin_wmd](https://www.fws.gov/refuge/rainwater_basin_wmd)

The Rainwater Basin is a series of wetlands in central Nebraska providing roosts and food for millions of migrating birds. It's common to see 200,000 waterfowl on a single wetland during the spring migration. Historically, bison and wildfire kept the wetlands clear of perennial vegetation. Today, the wetlands are managed to maintain the habitat, a much smaller area than it used to be.

Most birds can be viewed from your car. Information on prime viewing is available by calling 308-263-3000 or by visiting with area nature centers. All viewing in the Rainwater Basin is free.



The Central Flyway



Cranes of Nebraska

	SANDHILL CRANE	WHOOPING CRANE
Height	3-4 feet	5 feet
Wingspan	6 feet	7.5 feet
Weight	8-12 lbs	14 lbs
Coloration	Gray	White
Migration	170-450 miles/day	200-500 miles/day
Flight Speed	38 mph	47 mph
Nesting Area	Northern U.S.A, Canada, Alaska, Siberia	Wood Buffalo National Park, Canada
Mating	Begins at 3-4 yrs	Begins at 5 yrs
Eggs	1-2 per year	2 per year
Lifespan	20-25 years	20-25 years
Central Flyway Population	1,000,000+	500+



Public Viewing Sites

Central Platte Natural Resources

District (CPNRD) manages and provides free viewing decks located along the Platte River south of Alda and Gibbon. These decks offer a safe and bird-friendly way to view cranes during their spring migration as well as view other waterfowl throughout the year. Free parking is available at each of the decks.

Central Platte Natural Resources District
308-385-6282 | CPNRD.org

CPNRD Alda Viewing Deck

South of Alda, 2 miles south of I-80 Exit 305

Crane Viewing Corner Pulloff

South of Alda, 3 miles south of I-80 Exit 305

North Platte City Viewing Blind

North side of North Platte, West 18th Street

CPNRD Plautz Viewing Deck

South of Gibbon, 1.5 miles south of I-80 Exit 285

Rowe Viewing Pulloff

South of Gibbon, 1 mile west of Rowe Sanctuary

Viewing at Nebraska State Parks

Camping, hiking, and other wildlife viewing opportunities are available in the Nebraska Flyway at the state recreation and wildlife areas in the list below. A Nebraska state park permit is required and is available at the larger parks, sporting goods stores nearby, or online.

Nebraska Game & Parks
402-471-0641 | OutdoorNebraska.gov

Fort Kearny Historical Park

South of Kearney, 1020 V Road

Fort Kearny State Recreation Area

South of Kearney,
2196 30 Road, ¼ mile east of the Historical Park

Mormon Island State Recreation Area

Northeast corner of I-80 exit 312, south of Grand Island

North River Wildlife Management Area

North of Hershey
4 miles north of I-80 exit 164, 1 mile east on W. Wildlife Road

Windmill State Recreation Area

South of Gibbon
1/4 mile north of I-80 exit 285

Hastings Nebraska

Hastings, Nebraska is a city with small town charm and is full of unique gems of attractions, twenty beautiful city parks, home of the Nebraska Bigfoot Crossroads of America Museum and Research Center, a host-city to many sporting activities, and is the Birthplace of Kool-Aid. Exploration and enjoyment are at your fingertips! Our historic Downtown Hastings is the heart of the city. You will find locally owned restaurants, breweries, coffee shops, boutiques, upper-level living and more! The Sandhill Crane migration is easily deemed one of the most magnificent migrations to witness in the entire world – and you can experience this here in Hastings!

Visitor Center
234 N. Lincoln Ave.
VisitHastingsNebraska.com



Odyssey restaurant

LODGING

11 Hotels
2 campgrounds

DINING

60 Restaurants

WINE & BREW

2 Breweries

CRANE RELATED EVENTS & EXHIBITS

Hastings Museum has the largest grouping exhibit in Nebraska of the Sandhill Cranes and the Whooping Cranes.

ENTERTAINMENT & ATTRACTIONS

Bigfoot Crossroads of America Museum and Research Center
Hastings Museum
Historic Downtown Hastings
Prairie Loft Center for Outdoor & Agricultural Learning



Hastings Museum

Kearney Nebraska

Known as the Sandhill Crane Capital of the World, Kearney offers friendly, mid-western hospitality, top-notch hotels, and a wide variety of restaurants. Conveniently located right off I-80, Kearney offers multiple public viewing locations and options for guided tours, making it the perfect spot to stay during your crane viewing adventure.

In-between birdwatching you can find museums, unique shopping, and outdoor recreation. Visit some of Kearney's top attractions: The Archway, spanning I-80, is a one-of-a-kind museum that celebrates U.S. history, the newly renovated Museum of Nebraska Art which houses the state's art collection, and the historic Downtown district for shopping, dining, galleries, theatres and murals.

Visitor Center
220 11th Ave.
VisitKearney.org

Visit
KEARNEY



Downtown Kearney

LODGING

21 Hotels
7 Campgrounds

DINING

125 Restaurants

WINE & BREW

2 Breweries

CRANE RELATED EVENTS & EXHIBITS

Audubon's Rowe Sanctuary offers a variety of tours, classes, and crane-centered special events. Crane art exhibits can also be found throughout March and April.

ENTERTAINMENT & ATTRACTIONS

The Archway
Fort Kearny State Historical Park and Recreation Area
Historic Downtown Kearney
Yanney Heritage Park



The Archway

Grand Island Nebraska

Grand Island, a city of 50,000 in central Nebraska, is home to the Spring Migration of the Sandhill Cranes and the Nebraska State Fair. Our economy is rooted in agriculture, and annually hosts national livestock events and the Husker Harvest Days farm show. We're proud of our living history museum (Stuhr Museum) and the Heartland Public Shooting Park – a shooting range unmatched for 1,000 miles in any direction. The Railside district, our historic downtown, offers unique shopping and dining, breweries, a free summer concert series, and an operating 1930s movie house.

Fly into Central Nebraska Regional Airport through Dallas, Phoenix, or Las Vegas for your sandhill crane viewing experience.

Visitor Center
201 W. 3rd St.
VisitGrandIsland.com

simply
GRAND
Grand Island, Nebraska



Prairie Pride Brewing in the Railside district

LODGING

26 Hotels
7 Campgrounds

DINING

130 Restaurants

WINE & BREW

2 Breweries
3 Wineries

CRANE RELATED EVENTS & EXHIBITS

Crane Trust Nature and Visitor Center

ENTERTAINMENT & ATTRACTIONS

Fonner Park Thoroughbred Horse Racing
Grand Island Casino Resort
Railside downtown district
Raising Nebraska
Stuhr Museum



Stuhr Museum

North Platte

Nebraska

We invite Sandhill Crane migration visitors to experience North Platte's heritage of hospitality first exhibited by Buffalo Bill and later exemplified at the North Platte WWII Canteen where six million service men and women were served. Here, visitors will find warm, welcoming residents who are excited to share the beauty of the season.

Whether you experience the Sandhill Cranes with a local guide or opt for a self-guided adventure, North Platte makes the perfect home base for your experience.

Visitor Center
101 Halligan Dr.
VisitNorthPlatte.com



The Cedar Room

LODGING

23 Hotels
12 Campgrounds

DINING

60 Restaurants

WINE & BREW

3 Breweries
2 Wineries

CRANE RELATED EVENTS & EXHIBITS

Prairie Arts Center

ENTERTAINMENT & ATTRACTIONS

Historic Downtown Canteen District
Dusty Trails Outdoor Birding Tours
Fort Cody Trading Post
Golden Spike Tower and Visitor Center
Lincoln County Historical Museum



Golden Spike Tower

Ian Nicolson Audubon Center at Rowe Sanctuary

44450 Elm Island Rd. (near Kearney, Nebraska)
308-468-5282 | Rowe.Audubon.org

Audubon's Rowe Sanctuary lies right in the heart of the spring staging area for migrating Sandhill Cranes. Come experience one of the last great wildlife migrations on the planet!

Crane Tours

Rowe provides guided crane tours for visitors to view cranes from river viewing blinds, and our photography tours are a unique experience for any nature enthusiast! Tour dates offered from early March to mid-April.

Educational Experiences

Audubon's outdoor, experienced-based education is at the heart of what we do. Throughout Crane Season, Rowe offers events like our wildly popular 'Crane Behavior Basics.' Visit us online to see the Events calendar!

More About Audubon's Rowe Sanctuary

Our newly renovated Visitor's Center and gift shop offer a unique introduction to the Platte River and crane migration. All ages will enjoy our interactive exhibits, ADA-accessible trails and wetland boardwalk along prairie, river, and woodland habitats. Call 308-468-5282 for more information.



Guided viewing

NebraskaFlyway.com

Crane Trust Nature & Visitor Center

9325 S. Alda Rd. (near Grand Island, Nebraska)
308-382-1820 | CraneTrust.org



The Crane Trust Nature & Visitor Center welcomes guests to our lowland tallgrass prairie, and also to the great Sandhill Crane migration in the spring.

Viewing Tours

The Crane Trust offers public viewing blind tours, daytime driving tours, and handicap accessible bridge tours during March.

Overnight VIP and photography opportunities are available which include multiple viewings, lodging, and meals.

More About The Crane Trust

Visitors to the nature center will find information on local and migratory wildlife, an art gallery, gift shop, miles of prairie trails with views of the river, wildlife including bison, and butterfly gardens with native vegetation.

Gideon's Crane Cabin Retreat

308-383-6913 | NebraskaCraneViewing.com

For a unique bird viewing experience on the Platte River, rent the Crane Cabin Retreat. Featuring a comfortable cabin on one of the busiest sections of the river during the spring migration, multiple viewing locations are available and the owner will act as a guide if you would like one.

Dusty Trails Outdoor Birding Tours

Office: 2617 N. Buffalo Bill Ave., North Platte
Birding Tours: 101 Halligan Dr., North Platte
308-530-0048 | DustyTrails.biz

Dusty Trails is Nebraska's premier destination for outdoor adventures, including the incredible spring Sandhill Crane migration. Combine multiple tours for a complete Nebraska birding experience.

Sandhill Crane Daytime Bus Tour

Each tour throughout the North Platte River valley will linger wherever there are large groups of Sandhill Cranes feeding, dancing, and singing so that you can experience the spectacle from the comfort of the bus.

Sandhill Crane Morning and Evening Blind Tours

A blind on the North Platte River offers the remarkable experience of being near a large roost of Sandhill Cranes. Experience each of these unforgettable adventures.

Prairie Chicken Dance Tours

In the spring, the hearts of the Nebraska Greater Prairie-Chickens turn toward love, and that urge manifests itself into a beautiful dancing ritual. This tour will take visitors to one of the largest leks in Nebraska.



Other Birds to Look For

Eagles

More than 1,000 Bald Eagles (and some Golden Eagles) visit the Platte River, the Rainwater Basins, and Lake McConaughy each winter and spring, feeding on fish and migratory waterfowl. Viewing sites include the Johnson No. 2 hydropower plant south of Lexington (308-995-8601) and the Kingsley Dam (308-284-2332) north of Ogallala.



Great Blue Heron

These birds approach four feet in length with wingspans of six feet. Herons can be seen along most bodies of water with a fish population. They nest in groups in tall trees. View them statewide in the spring and fall, or in the western and central part of the state during breeding.



Ducks and Snow Geese

Millions of ducks and geese migrate through the central flyway in the spring. A wide variety of duck species can be seen throughout the state. Snow Geese mesmerize onlookers with their wide, swirling descents in very large groups down onto a lake. The best viewing is in the Rainwater Basin and along the Platte and Missouri Rivers.



Trumpeter Swans

Sandhills lakes may be home to up to 700 permanent resident swans, while wintering swans totaling in the thousands can be found in the Platte River Valley. Birdwood Creek north of Sutherland is an important wintering area for swans and other wintering waterfowl. Trumpeter swans are the largest waterfowl in the world and the heaviest flying birds in North America.



American White Pelicans

These large birds top five feet in length with wingspans of nearly nine feet. They can be seen statewide in the spring and fall, sometimes on Nebraska Sandhills lakes during the summer, and an increasing number of them overwintering at Sutherland Reservoir near the west end of the Central Flyway.



Whooping Cranes

Approximately 500-plus Whooping Cranes migrate through the Platte River Valley and Rainwater Basins, mainly during April and October/November. One of the most endangered birds in North America, the Whooping Crane is also the tallest bird on the continent at 5 feet tall. Its imposing stature, angel white plumage, black mask, and red crown are striking. Report Whooping Crane sightings to 308-382-1820.



Prairie Chickens

Greater Prairie-Chickens and Sharp-Tailed Grouse can both be found in central Nebraska. Greater Prairie-Chickens are more common and gather on courtship grounds (leks) in the spring, putting on an amazing display of foot-stomping, booming calls, and the occasional skirmish with other males. Most leks are on private property; contact the Crane Trust Nature & Visitor Center, Prairie Wind Birding Tours, Nebraska Game & Parks regarding their NCORPE partnership, or Dusty Trails Outdoor Specialists for viewing opportunities.



Prairie Wind Birding Tours

15 minutes northwest of Kearney

Our spacious viewing blinds are perfect for bird enthusiasts and photographers alike with room for extensive camera equipment while still providing a unique, intimate birding experience. Our tours were designed with your comfort in mind with padded, adjustable seating, quilts, and hand warmers to help keep you warm, a storage area for camera equipment, and room to set up tripods. After viewing the birds, coffee and refreshments will be provided as well as an opportunity to sit and visit with others about your experience. Seating is limited and sells out quickly during the viewing season of March and April.

PrairieWindBirdingTour.com
308-627-7692



Other birding

A just-for-fun bird checklist

Frequently
seen

- American Crow
- American Goldfinch
- American Kestrel
- American Robin
- American Tree Sparrow
- Bald Eagle
- Baltimore Oriole
- Barn Swallow
- Belted Kingfisher
- Brown Thrasher
- Brown-headed Cowbird
- Cliff Swallow
- Common Yellowthroat
- Dickcissel
- Eastern Meadowlark
- Great Blue Heron
- Great Crested Flycatcher
- Greater Yellowlegs
- House Finch
- Killdeer
- Mallard
- Northern Bobwhite
- Northern Flicker
- Red-winged Blackbird
- Sandhill Crane
- Snow Goose

Occasionally
seen

- American Avocet
- Baird's Sandpiper
- Black Tern
- Burrowing Owl
- Cooper's Hawk
- Green-winged Teal
- Harris's Sparrow
- Loggerhead Shrike
- Osprey
- Piping Plover
- Rose-breasted Grossbeak
- Swainson's Hawk
- Trumpeter Swan
- White-breasted Nuthatch
- Whooping Crane

Rarely
seen

- Burrowing Owl
- Eastern Whip-poor-will
- Lark Bunting
- Peregrine Falcon



See
artwork
on
map
spread