



# NEBRASKA FLYWAY

THE GREAT SANDHILL  
CRANE MIGRATION



## 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.

[NebraskaFlyway.com](http://NebraskaFlyway.com)



# 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

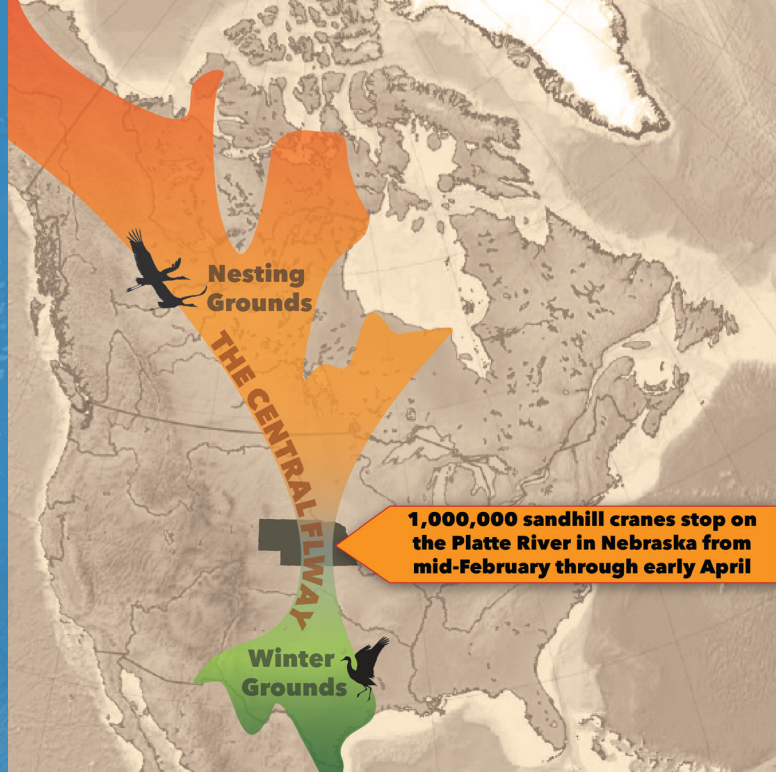
## The Birds of the Rainwater Basin

### 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+



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!

219 N. Hastings Avenue | Hastings, NE 68901  
[VisitHastingsNebraska.com](http://VisitHastingsNebraska.com)

### LODGING

- 🏨 12 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
- 🦶 Prairie Loft Center for Outdoor & Agricultural Learning





Fort Kearny Hike Bike Bridge

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; attractions; the Archway, spanning I-80, is a one-of-a-kind museum celebrates U.S. history, the Classic Car Collection displaying 200+ restored vintage automobiles, restored vintage automobiles, or the Nebraska Firefighters Museum, which is dedicated to the courageous firefighters of our state—past, present and future..

1007 2nd Avenue | Kearney NE 68847  
VisitKearney.org

### LODGING

- 🏨 23 Hotels
- 🏕️ 7 Campgrounds

### DINING

- 🍴 125 Restaurants

### WINE/BREW

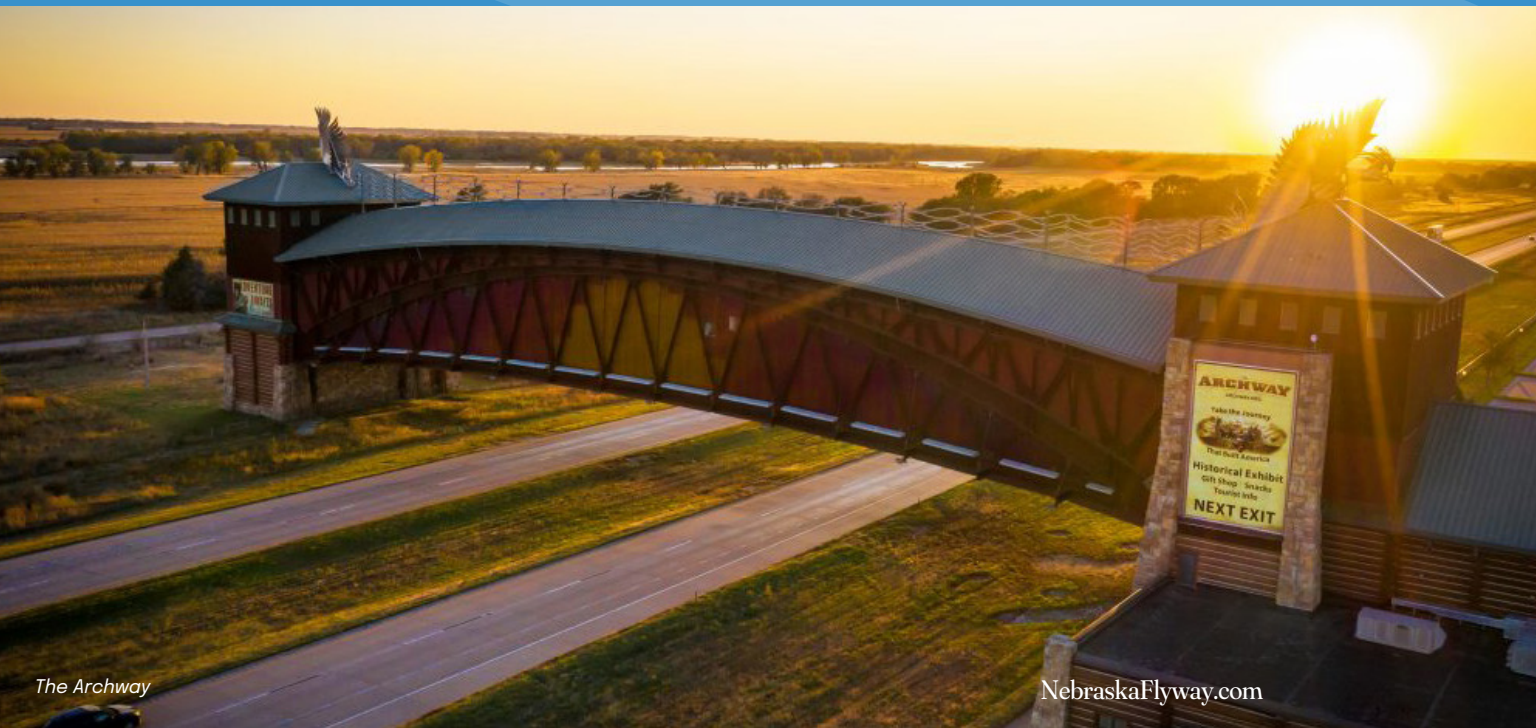
- 🍷 2 Breweries

### CRANE RELATED EVENTS/EXHIBITS

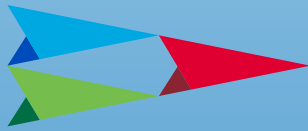
Audubon's Rowe Sanctuary offers a variety of crane 101 classes throughout the season and they host the annual Crane Carnival.

### ENTERTAINMENT/ATTRACTIONS

- 🚗 The Archway
- 👁️ Fort Kearny State Historical Park and Recreation Area
- 🏠 Historic Downtown Kearney
- 👣 Trails & Rails Museum
- 🦋 Rowe Sanctuary



The Archway



# Grand Island Tourism



Kinkaid Brewing Co.

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 of the Prairie Pioneer) 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, and an operating 1930s movie theater.

201 W. 3rd Street | Grand Island, NE 68801  
[VisitGrandIsland.com](http://VisitGrandIsland.com)

## LODGING

-  24 Hotels
-  7 Campgrounds

## DINING

-  130 Restaurants





## WINE/BREW

-  3 Breweries
-  3 Wineries

## CRANE RELATED EVENTS/EXHIBITS

- Stuhr Museum of the Prairie
- Pioneer's Wings Over the Platte Art Exhibit

## ENTERTAINMENT/ATTRACTIONS

-  Crane Trust Nature and Visitor Center
-  Fonner Park Thoroughbred Horse Racing
-  Raising Nebraska
-  Stuhr Museum





The Cedar Room

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.

101 Halligan Drive | North Platte, NE 69101  
[VisitNorthPlatte.com](http://VisitNorthPlatte.com)

### LODGING

- 🏨 21 Hotels
- 🏕️ 11 Campgrounds

### DINING

- 🍴 60 Restaurants

### WINE/BREW

- 🍷 2 Breweries
- 🍷 1 Winery

### ENTERTAINMENT/ATTRACTIONS

- 🎪 Dusty Trails Outdoor Specialists
- 🏪 Fort Cody Trading Post
- 🏰 Golden Spike Tower and Visitor Center
- 🎨 Prairie Arts Center



Golden Spike Tower

# Ian Nicolson Audubon Center at Rowe Sanctuary

44450 Elm Island Rd (Kearney, Nebraska)

308-468-5282 | [rowe.audubon.org](http://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 viewing opportunities to see the Sandhill Cranes on their river roosts for a fee. Dates are from early March through early April.

## **More About Audubon's Rowe Sanctuary**

Audubon's unique outdoor, experienced-based education is at the heart of what we do. All ages can experience the Platte River and its wildlife through hands-on programs. Trails are available most of the year.

## **Overnight Experience**

Rowe offers overnight blinds to view Sandhill Cranes that provide a unique experience for any nature enthusiast. Call 308-468-5282 for more information.



# Crane Trust Nature & Visitor Center

9325 S Alda Rd (Grand Island, Nebraska)

308-382-1820 | [CraneTrust.org](http://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 Blind Tours

The Crane Trust offers public viewing blind tours and handicap accessible bridge tours during the month of March.

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 | [Facebook CraneCabinRetreat](https://www.facebook.com/CraneCabinRetreat)

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 spring migration of the Sandhill Cranes, multiple viewing blinds are available, and the owner will act as a guide if you would like one.

[NebraskaFlyway.com](http://NebraskaFlyway.com)





# Dusty Trails Outdoor Specialists

2617 N Buffalo Bill Ave (North Platte, Nebraska)

308-530-0048 | [DustyTrails.biz](http://DustyTrails.biz)

Dusty Trails is Nebraska's premier destination for outdoor adventures, including the incredible spring Sandhill Crane migration.

## **Sandhill Crane 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.

## **Morning and Evening Viewing 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.

Combine multiple tours for a complete Nebraska birding experience.



# Other Birds to Look For

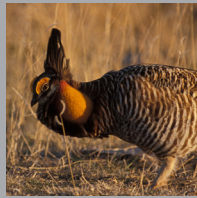
## EAGLES

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.



## 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, Rowe Sanctuary, or Dusty Trails Outdoor Specialists for viewing opportunities.



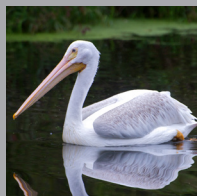
## DUCKS AND SNOW GEESE

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. Best viewing is in the Rainwater Basin and along the Platte and Missouri Rivers.



## 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, and sometimes on large lakes during the summer.



## 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.



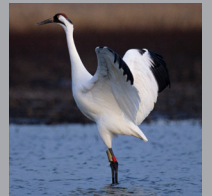
## TRUMPETER SWANS

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.



## 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.





## Public Viewing Sites

**The Central Platte Natural Resources District** manages and provides free viewing decks located along the Platte River in 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.

There are additional roadside turnouts, shown on the map on the next page, to enjoy safe daytime viewing.

**Central Platte Natural Resources District**  
308-385-6282 | [CPNRD.org](http://CPNRD.org)

### **Alda Viewing Deck @ Roadside Turnout**

2 miles south of I-80 Exit 305 (Alda)

### **Plautz Viewing Deck**

1.5 miles south of I-80 Exit 285 (Gibbon)

### **Rowe Viewing Pullout**

1 mile west of Rowe Sanctuary (Kearney)

## Viewing at Nebraska State Parks

Fort Kearny State Recreation Area (SRA) offers excellent over-river viewing of cranes. An old railroad bridge is located approximately 300 yards from the parking area and spans the Platte River to make a perfect spot for sunrise or sunset viewing. Dress accordingly as the bridge is open to the elements. Camping and other wildlife viewing opportunities are available at Fort Kearny SRA. A Nebraska state park permit is required and is available at the entrance or Fort Kearny Historical Park visitor center. The visitor center shows an 18-minute video about the area wildlife. Staff can answer questions and direct you to the best viewing locations.

### **Fort Kearny Historical Park**

1020 V Road | 308-865-5305 | [OutdoorNebraska.gov/fortkearny](http://OutdoorNebraska.gov/fortkearny)

### **Fort Kearny State Recreation Area**

2196 30 Road, ¼ mile east of the Historical Park

### **Mormon Island State Recreation Area**

Northeast corner of I-80 exit 312 | 402-471-1414

### **North River Wildlife Management Area**

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

### **Windmill State Recreation Area**

1/4 mile north of I-80 exit 285

# Community Information Centers

## Grand Island Tourism

201 W. 3rd Street | Grand Island, NE 68801  
308-382-4400  
VisitGrandIsland.com

## Hastings/Adams County Convention & Visitors Bureau

219 N. Hastings Avenue | Hastings, NE 68901  
402-461-2370 | 800-967-2189  
VisitHastingsNebraska.com

## Kearney Visitors Bureau

1007 2nd Avenue | Kearney, NE 68847  
308-237-3178  
VisitKearney.org

## North Platte Visitors Bureau

101 Halligan Drive | North Platte, NE 69101  
308-532-4729 | 800-955-4528  
VisitNorthPlatte.com



Photography courtesy of NEBRASKAland Magazine/Nebraska Game and Parks Commission, Diana Robinson, and Brad Mellema.