

The Carrizo Plain National Monument is
cooperatively managed by:

The Nature Conservancy

California Department of Fish and Game

Bureau of Land Management



For more information contact:

Goodwin Education Center

805-475-2131

Seasonally Open December - May

Thursday - Sunday

9:00 am to 4:00 pm

Bureau of Land Management

Bakersfield Field Office

3801 Pegasus Drive

Bakersfield, CA 93308

661-391-6000

Monday - Friday

7:30 am to 4:00 pm

<http://www.ca.blm.gov/bakersfield>



Sandhill Cranes



lesser sandhill crane

Carrizo Plain National Monument
San Luis Obispo County, California

Sandhill Cranes

Sandhill Cranes (*Grus canadensis*) are one of the most popular avian attractions of the Carrizo Plain. The Carrizo Plain provides an opportunity to watch these birds in their wintering habitat.

Two subspecies of Sandhill Cranes, the Lesser and the Greater, migrate through and winter in California. The Sandhill Cranes seen in the Carrizo Plain are thought to be primarily the Lesser, with a few Greaters mixed in. The Greater Sandhill Crane is listed by the State of California as a Threatened species.

Description: Sandhill Cranes are large birds with long legs and necks, and a bustle-like rear. The adult wingspan averages 73 inches. The adults are gray with a distinctive bold red cap on the crown and forehead. Immature birds lack the red cap on the head. Preening with muddy bills sometimes stains the feathers on the upper back, lower neck and breast a rust color. The rust color is due to the iron contained in the mud. Cranes fly with their necks and legs outstretched. Groups of cranes will fly in a "V" formation.



Voice: The common call is a trumpeting, rattling, repeated gar-oo-oo, audible at great distances. Cranes may call while flying or on the ground. The call is often heard

well before approaching birds are visible.

Habitat and Range: Although Lesser and Greater Sandhill Cranes are thought to winter in mixed flocks on the Carrizo and in the Central Valley, the summer nesting grounds differ. Greater Sandhill Cranes nest in northeast California, southeast Oregon, and British Columbia. The Lesser Sandhill Crane travels farther north to the Arctic, where they nest on tundra marshes and sedge-grass meadows in Alaska.

Behavior: Sandhill Cranes roost at night on shallow bodies of water with sparse vegetation, enabling the birds to spot predators. Soda Lake and the associated sinks provides this type of night roosting habitat. Early in the morning the cranes fly off to feed in the nearby agricultural fields that provide grain and invertebrates. At midday the cranes leave the fields and fly off in small groups to nearby loafing areas. Here they rest, preen and drink fresh water.

Sometimes cranes may be seen dancing. This interesting behavior may be seen at any time of the year. Dancing or strutting birds may jump several feet in the air. Wing flapping, raised wings over the back and calling are components of dancing behavior. Birds may perform singly or facing another bird, then afterwards resume their previous activity. During the late winter and early spring, dancing may be a courtship display. At other times it

may be a release of energy or observed during agonistic encounters. At dusk, the cranes fly back to the night roosting spot.

Where to spot Cranes: The best place



to see the Sandhill Cranes is at or near the roosting site at Soda Lake. Soda Lake Overlook, along Soda Lake Road, or along Simmler Road, are good places to look and listen for cranes.

When are the Cranes here: The arrival of Sandhill Cranes is dictated by the quantity and timing of the winter rains. Generally, cranes winter on the Carrizo from mid-December to the end of February. Sandhill Crane numbers on the Carrizo have averaged between 2,000 to 6,000 birds annually in the past. Due to fewer agricultural fields, the number of cranes has varied greatly in more recent years. In some years no cranes are seen.

The best times of the day to observe the cranes are at dawn and dusk, when they are leaving or returning to their roost site. Remember to listen for their call as a clue to their location.

For other areas to view cranes please contact the Kern and Pixley National Wildlife Refuges.