

OUR NEIGHBORS – THE FLORIDA SANDHILLS!

by Dan Pemble, Kissimmee, Florida – Revised February 12, 2022

The Florida sandhill crane is 1 of 6 subspecies of sandhills in the United States. The Florida species are non-migratory birds and are therefore permanent residents within the Kissimmee Bay Country Club residential sub-division! Compared to the hundreds of thousands of birds that exist in some of the other subspecies of sandhills (they are hunted in many states.), the current Florida sandhill subspecies population is only approximately 5000; accordingly, they are under protection by Florida state & federal law (Endangered Species Act).

In Florida, it is illegal to feed these birds. This law was passed in 2002 because cranes can become aggressive towards humans *when fed by humans*. Human feeding of cranes leads to too close a familiarity, causing cranes to be injured by passing cars, property damage when a crane mistakenly attacks its own reflection in a territorial dispute, and some young cranes have died from pesticide exposure encountered during feeding in lawns.

According to a *Florida Fish and Wildlife Commission's* article, humans should:

- Never provide food for cranes and discourage neighbors from feeding them!
- Cover automobiles, windows and glass doors so that the birds cannot see their reflections, and make the mistake of thinking their territory is being encroached upon!
- Put up a fence. You can mount a string on stakes a couple feet off the ground around the areas that the birds are damaging.
- Be willing to accept some digging in your yard. Cranes sometimes do minor damage to lawns and gardens when they are digging for food. This should actually be viewed as a good thing, however, as they are providing a natural control of some common pests such as mole crickets and beetle larvae.



Photo by Sadhana pemble

The following page, copied from a web site, has an article about migratory sandhills.

Sandhill Crane Migration In Nebraska

(copied from a web site by Dan Pemble, February 12, 2022)

For some reason, some 10,000 years ago, a flock of sandhill cranes chose an area in central Nebraska as a rest stop as they continued their journey north after spending the winter in southern North America. The annual sandhill crane migration has become a historic event and lasts between six to eight weeks every spring.

Some 500,000 cranes descend on a 100-mile section of Nebraska called Central Flyway. It's located between Grand Island, Kearney, and North Platte. It's believed that the Platte River's sandbars provide natural protection for the birds as they huddle together, recharging.

One recommended area for viewing is the Fort Kearny State Recreation area. Here you'll need a state-issued parking permit. It's recommended that you visit around sunset, as this is when the sandhill cranes come in to roost each night. As the sun sets, the sky is filled with thousands of cranes. Keep your ears open for the bugle-like calls.

