



AOK Hosts A Celebration of Cranes at Quivira National Wildlife Refuge November 1-3, 2019 *Michael L. Donnelly*

The big event on the fall calendar for Audubon of Kansas is the three-day Celebration of Cranes, scheduled for the Quivira National Wildlife Refuge from Friday, November 1 through Sunday November 3.

Early in October last year, Ron Klataske, AOK Executive Director, conceived the idea of sponsoring a day at Quivira at the height of crane migration to introduce a larger public to this amazing annual event, and the marsh on which it takes place. Back in 1971, while still working for the National Audubon Society, Ron organized the first Audubon event encouraging people to experience the spring staging of nearly half a million Sandhill Cranes on the Platte River in Nebraska. The organization of annual Spring River Conferences and Crane Festivals followed, until today, the gathering of Sandhill Cranes on their early spring epic migration has become one of Nebraska's greatest wildlife tourism attractions.

With less than a month to plan last year, AOK put together a day at Quivira, hosting van tours of the marsh to introduce a larger public to the spectacular concentrations of Sandhill Cranes and the occasional rare and endangered Whooping Cranes (as well as thousands of three or four species of geese and abundant other kinds of waterfowl and wildlife).

As late as the Wednesday before the scheduled weekend, Ron expected fewer than fifty people, and early in the week had only about twenty signed up, so he cancelled a second van that had been ordered. But over the weekend Michael Pearce, who works with KDWPT to promote this kind of thing, got wind of the event, called Ron Saturday night after a duck hunt to get details, and called papers Monday in Hutchinson and Wichita. His articles on the planned event were published Thursday and Friday. The result was an inundation of calls to Quivira headquarters, which was wholly unprepared to deal with so much interest. On Saturday, probably one hundred fifty people turned up, and van tours took place all day (though the best viewing times for cranes are right after sunrise through early morning, and late afternoon until the big flocks finish returning to their roosts just after dark). AOK volunteers also drove visitors in their own cars, pointing out wildlife and marsh ecology, and setting up spotting scopes along the Wildlife Loop. Visitors enjoyed the exhibits at the Quivira Visitors Center and comparing notes about their tours or anticipating what they might see while waiting for a van to return for another trip.

On the whole, the event was an unexpectedly great success, acquainting a larger public with the spectacular concentration of migrating birds and the unique habitat of the saltmarsh; but AOK also learned a lot from this experience. We decided that the one-day event in 2018 should be a pilot program for a larger, better organized three-day event in 2019, and immediately began the business of planning and scheduling.

This year as a result of extensive preliminary planning by members of the AOK Board and volunteers, five tours are planned (Nov. 1, 2, 3). Early morning hours starting at dawn and sunrise are the best hours to view Sandhill Cranes and Whooping Cranes, waterfowl and many other birds and wildlife. Most of the cranes and waterfowl (particularly geese) leave their night roosting areas to feed in agricultural fields surrounding the refuge. They usually return in greatest numbers near sunset

Members of AOK and visitors at last year's Celebration of Cranes viewing Whooping Cranes and other waterfowl with spotting scopes and binoculars from the Wildlife Loop at Quivira National Wildlife Refuge.



and dusk. During the day, there will be many other waterfowl to see, of course. We will have spotting scopes and share binoculars at the main viewing areas (usually near the north end of refuge), but participants are encouraged to bring their own. There is no guarantee the Whooping Cranes will be present, but historically this is a good time, and in any case, there is much to see and learn at Quivira.

This year we are excited to have three experts giving presentations:

Rex Buchanan, Director Emeritus, Kansas Geological Survey. "Water and Geology at Quivira National Wildlife Refuge"? Buchanan and Jim McCauley co-authored the book *Roadside Kansas*, a guide to geological landmarks across the state. After 37 years with the Kansas Geological Survey, Rex retired as interim director in June 2016.

Anne Lacy, Crane Research Coordinator. "The Trumpet in the Orchestra of Evolution: The Story of the Sandhill Crane in North America." After completion of her M.S., Anne accepted a full-time position at the International Crane Foundation as a research associate in the Field Ecology Department (now the North America Program), working on an ongoing long-term study of Sandhill Cranes. She began working with the Whooping Crane Eastern Partnership in 2009 to study the ecology of the newly reintroduced Whooping Cranes in Wisconsin.

Elizabeth H. Smith, Ph.D. International Crane Foundation, "A Long and Narrow Flyway: Whooping Cranes and Trans-continental Migration." Elizabeth is North America Program Director and Texas Whooping Crane Program Leader, International Crane Foundation. The Texas coast plays an integral role in the recovery of this federally endangered species, as the Whooping Crane relies on large expanses of quality coastal habitat each winter within and around Aransas National Wildlife Refuge. Her research on effects of sea-level rise and storm surge on coastal habitat change is critical to the promotion of community advocacy for conservation planning and protection.

Refuge staff and members of the Friends of Quivira will be on hand to answer questions. Barry Jones, Visitor Services Specialist, Quivira National Wildlife Refuge, and Mike Oldham, Project Leader, USFWS, Quivira National Wildlife Refuge, will also be on hand to greet participants and introduce the salt marsh.

Deadline for registration is Oct. 28, 2019.
Register at audubonofkansas.org

If unable to use online registration you may

a) download the pdf form, print, then mail to Audubon of Kansas, Inc., 210 Southwind Place, Manhattan, KS 66503, making checks payable to Audubon of Kansas

or b) contact AOK office - email aok@audubonofkansas.org or call 785-537-4385.

Audubon of Kansas will provide hot cider and light refreshments at the visitor's center, and there will be live music during the lunch hour Saturday.

Van tours \$12 each, children under 12 free, reservations required for the van seats. This fee is to help pay for the van rental, and therefore is not refundable. Please arrive 10 minutes prior to your chosen tour time.

Box lunches available for \$8 on Saturday only (*must be pre-ordered*)

For more information contact AOK, email aok@audubonofkansas.org or call 785-537-4385.

PLEASE do not call Quivira National Refuge Visitor's Center.