

# At the Quivira National Wildlife Refuge

Elizabeth Schultz

## WHOOPING CRANES

*\*In 1541, Coronado was lured by tales of the “Seven Cities of Gold” to find Quivira. He discovered instead settlements of hard-working farmers.*

*\*Fifteen Whooping Cranes in the 1940s have, as the result of avian conservationists’ dedicated work, now become 500.*

The treasure we sought in Quivira was in the air: Whooping Cranes, endangered, majestic, iconic, elusive as Coronado’s gold, their precious weight in white feathers, light filled, uplifting.

Eyes and ears alert, binoculars and scopes ready, we scanned for that white signal among skeins of Snow Geese and Sand Hill Cranes unraveling across the sky, migrants dissolving borders, their calls drifting down and around us. Shaped suddenly out of air, from among the other birds, seven white cranes came into being. We identified them, and they became ours. We circumscribed them in our lenses as they settled along a distant marsh, folded their wings against their bodies, origami in reverse, nobody’s treasure but their own.

*Waterfowl at Quivira, by Chod Hedinger*

## SAND PRAIRIE

Here where white-tailed and mule deer mingle, where Mountain Bluebirds fly with Grasshopper Sparrows, here the prairie’s muscles flex and ripple, stretch toward horizons, east, west. Supple dunes swell, marshes sweat and glisten. The chest heaves, sighs as winds pass through asters, tickle bluestem, buffalo grass, blue grama. clusters of honey locusts, cottonwoods, and sand plums form barrettes securing these flowing grasses. Beneath: the earth’s body, quickening.

## AT HOME IN QUIVIRA

A family of deer stand sentinels on the edge of a road. A single coyote, savvy, sassy, saunters through grasses, ears peaked, muscles flexing, alert to cars, to humans, waiting for birds to settle into grasses, for badger to arrive with entertainment. Pocket gopher tunnels into sand, hollows out a cozy bedroom, reaches up for sand to cover her digs. Woodrat stacks sticks, branches, constructs a wooden teepee, hunkers inside, waiting for the next storm to deliver more lumber. Red ants percolate in their pot of sand.



**This Edition of Prairie Wings  
is Devoted to Friends and  
Partnerships**

[friendsofquivira.org/about-friends-of-quivira](http://friendsofquivira.org/about-friends-of-quivira)  
[www.audubonofkansas.org/](http://www.audubonofkansas.org/)