

A TRIAL TRANSLOCATION OF SANDHILL CRANES¹

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ABSTRACT:

Wild-trapped sandhill cranes (*Grus canadensis pratensis*) captured and moved to habitat occupied by cranes 152 miles away did not return "home" and were seen near the release site up to 20 months later. The frequency that the translocated birds were seen near the release site indicated that dispersal had been minimal and that restocking in suitable habitat might be done with relatively few wild-trapped cranes.

Dispersal behavior is an important factor in restocking success with wild-trapped animals and determines the minimum number of individual animals required. To measure dispersal behavior in sandhill cranes in anticipation of future restocking efforts, we trapped and moved cranes from high population areas to other occupied crane habitat.

We thank M. J. Fogarty and D. W. Peterson for help in capturing some of the cranes.

METHODS

Table 1 shows capture sites, dates, release sites, and the number of subsequent observations. Figure 1 shows the capture and release sites.

The birds were leg-banded and marked with colored patagial streamers (Knowlton et. al. 1964). Some were also marked with colored plastic leg bands. Distinctive markings were used to identify the year and location of release. All were captured with alpha-chloralose (Williams and Phillips 1973), transported by automobile while narcotized, and released the following day.

The 26 cranes from Manatee County were in flocks, rather than in pairs, during the mating season when nesting adults were on territories. According to Walkinshaw (1949:3 & 48) such groups are composed of sub-adults. The three Highlands County cranes were probably sub-adults, judging from their underdeveloped combs and smaller than average size.

The release sites (Fig. 1) were on areas where other studies were in progress, facilitating year around observations of the color-marked cranes. The Paynes Prairie release site was checked almost daily for about one month after each release and occasionally thereafter. The capture site in Manatee County was checked for marked cranes on five occasions. Some data on the movement of resident cranes on both study areas were obtained in connection with other studies.

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RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Fifty-four observations have been made of translocated cranes within three miles of the Paynes Prairie release site, representing groups released in each of the three years of the study. Twenty-nine observations were made more than five months after the release; nine were more than one year after the 1971 release. On different occasions 3, 4, 5, and 6 translocated birds were seen together or in widely separated places near the Paynes Prairie release site suggesting that several of the translocated cranes were being seen rather than only one or two of them being seen repeatedly.

On five post-release visits to the capture site the cranes that were seen were not marked or wearing bands.

Of the 13 cranes moved to Fisheating Creek, three were observed in the area up to 10 days after release and two were seen about 10 miles west one day after release. Fewer searches for marked birds were made at Fisheating Creek than at Paynes Prairie. That may in part account for the fewer observations of marked birds at Fisheating Creek. Another possible factor is that the translocated sub-adults were released in occupied nesting territories at Fisheating Creek and were driven away by the nesting birds. There is a considerable amount of good quality crane habitat at Fisheating Creek where the translocated cranes might easily go unobserved. The amount of suitable habitat near Paynes Prairie is smaller and restricted and was more effectively checked for marked birds.

Some factor related to the shorter distance between the capture site and fisheating Creek (60 miles S.E.) versus Paynes Prairie (152 miles N.) may have contributed to dispersal from the release site at Fisheating Creek, but we do not believe that the cranes released at Fisheating Creek returned to the capture site because no marked or banded crane has been seen or recaptured there.

Evidently, few if any of the cranes we moved to Paynes Prairie attempted to return to Manatee County. This sedentary habit has also been noted in resident Florida sandhill cranes that have been captured, distinctively marked, released at the site of capture, and subsequently seen repeatedly near the capture site for up to four years.

CONCLUSION

When moved to suitable habitat more than about 100 miles away, sub-adult Florida sandhill cranes did not disperse widely or attempt to "home". This behavior will enhance the likelihood of successful restocking with wild-trapped cranes and may permit restocking to be done with relatively few birds.

I. Translocated sandhill cranes.

Capture Site	Date	Number Released	Release Site	Number of Subsequent Observations	Longest Period After Release
Avon Park (Highlands Co.)	9-15-71	3	Paynes Prairie (Alachua Co.)	7	20 months
Cloverdale Farm4-5-72 & (Manatee Co.)	4-12-72	8	Paynes Prairie	45	15 months
Cloverdale Farm4-12-72		3	Fisheating Creek	0	--
Cloverdale Farm3-21-73 & 4-3-73		8	Fisheating Creek	5	7 days
Cloverdale Farm4-3-73		4	Paynes Prairie	2	20 days

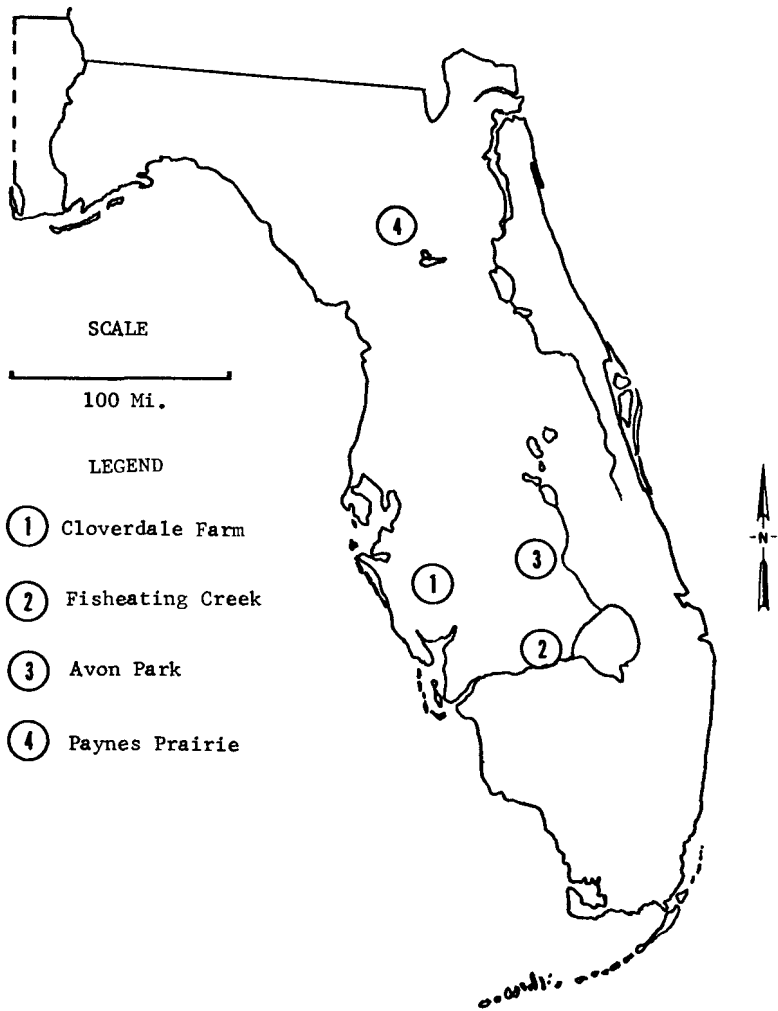


Figure 1. Location of capture and release sites.

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