## All About Cranes #2 by Kachemak Crane Watch

## Is it ok to feed corn to Sandhill Cranes?

First, people should not hand feed wild animals. A Sandhill Crane carries a dangerous weapon--its roughly 4 inch beak! If you have small children or small pets, keep them away from cranes as they can become aggressive if bothered. Scattering a small amount of corn for cranes in a big yard can provide a nutritional boost in spring after their long migration, as well as in the fall just before they leave. Cracked corn is best for colts that cannot handle whole corn. During the height of summer, cranes do not need extra corn as they can and should be foraging for natural foods which supply much needed protein and other nutrients. Also, scattering too much corn can attract bears, so only put out just enough for visiting cranes to clean it up quickly.

If a large flock is gathering in a small yard to eat corn, several questions should be considered. Is the yard very close to a very busy road? Is the yard very close to overhead electrical lines? Is your yard full of crane excrement? If you answer yes to any of these, consider not putting out corn. Cranes will often spook and fly off in a panic when eagles or loose dogs appear. A panic flight could cause them to fly into electric lines, injuring or killing the crane. They might fly into the path of a vehicle, causing an accident. A yard full of concentrated excrement is also a potential hazard for transmission of avian diseases among the flocks. It is wise to err on the side of caution and not feed or reduce the amount of feed if your yard has a potential hazard.

Some people have asked whether genetically modified (GM) corn is bad for cranes. About 85% of corn grown today has been genetically altered in some way. There is not enough research to really know if genetically modified corn is bad for cranes. Mass marketed grain corn for animal feed is likely to be some sort of GM corn, but given the current research on detrimental effects of GM foods, it is hard to give a definitive answer.

## Do loose dogs kill or injure Sandhill Cranes?

Yes. Loose dogs have killed cranes in the Homer area. Not only do dogs kill Sandhill Cranes (both adults and young), they also can injure cranes, raise stress levels preventing adult pairs from mating, chase cranes away from their nesting areas causing them to abandon their nests, attract other predators to their nesting area due to commotion of being harassed, and steal and destroy the eggs.

Additionally, dogs can be injured by cranes. Cranes have long, sharp beaks which they use to defend themselves and their young. Keep your dogs under control to avoid such injuries to either the cranes or dogs.