



Kachemak Crane Watch

Homer, Alaska

All About Cranes #6

How did Sandhill Cranes come to be named with horse terminology?

The use of horse terminology to refer to Sandhill Cranes seems a bit archaic and many people don't know these terms now. According to several sources on the Internet, the fact that crane colts, also known as chicks, are precocious and able to run within 24 hours of hatching led to their being called "colts."

The male is often referred to as a "roan", which came from the somewhat similar bluish-gray color of a Sandhill Crane when it is not painting itself for nesting camouflage, a color that is similar to Roan horses.

No references were found on the origin of the term "mare, " but maybe for consistency with the horse analogy, the female was called a mare.

According to Gary Ivey, the Western Representative of the International Crane Foundation, "I remember reading that someone long ago observed cranes running and thought they galloped like horses and therefore called the males roans (presumably because of their color), the females mares (as in a female horse), and the chicks colts (a young horse)."

So then you might ask, is a crane flock called a "herd?" Internet references refer to a group of cranes as a sedge or siege or sometimes a herd. A sedge is a grassy or marshy habitat that cranes frequent and thus came to be associated with a flock of cranes.

A story related by Jo Michalski, who has a house in Homer, may explain how a flock of cranes came to be called a siege. *Two visitors in the area were in the marsh below with their labrador retrievers off leash. The neighborhood crane pair flushed from the grass calling frantically in distress. Their very young colts were still hiding in the grass where the adults sprang into the air to escape the approaching dogs. Very quickly a big flock of Sandhill Cranes flew silently into the area and landed near the dogs. They marched straight at the dogs, both of which turned tail and ran back to their owners. They*

leashed them and quickly left the area. The colts were safe! This behavior seems akin to a siege.

Kachemak Crane Watch's Nina Faust and Edgar Bailey have reported watching a flock of cranes march after a coyote and chase it right out of the field. They also watched a flock march after a black bear and chase it down the field and into the woods. There is some logic to these very archaic terms but they are rarely used. Most people just call a group of cranes a flock!

How long do Sandhill Cranes live?

Sandhill cranes can live for 20 years or more. Sandhill Cranes on the Malheur National Wildlife Refuge have lived over 35 years, according to former refuge biologist Gary Ivey. In captivity, Sandhill Cranes have lived as long as 61 years, according to an Audubon website.

Why do cranes peck at peoples' windows?

Sandhill Cranes, usually the males, peck at windows, mirrors, or any object in which they can see their reflection. This pecking activity occurs during the nesting period, when cranes are territorial. The cranes interpret their own reflection as another crane invading their nesting territory.

To deter cranes, do not place mirrors outside. Take a bar of soap and rub it over the window being pecked so the crane cannot see its reflection. If that does not work, tie a heavy monofilament fishing line or thick string to stakes so the string is mid-level with the crane's body. The string should be three to four feet away from the window. The crane should stop moving forward once it touches the line.

