

# Lesser Sandhill Cranes Observations in the Homer Area Summer 2012

By Kachemak Crane Watch

Despite the late spring and near record snowfall, Homer's Sandhill Cranes arrived on schedule with the first report received by Kachemak Crane Watch on April 11. By April 18, a flock of 100 plus was reported at Beluga Slough area.

**First Reported Arrival Dates**

<b>2012</b>	<b>April 11</b>
<b>2011</b>	<b>April 21</b>
<b>2010</b>	<b>April 18</b>
<b>2009</b>	<b>April 9</b>
<b>2008</b>	<b>April 3</b>
<b>2007</b>	<b>April 2</b>
<b>2006</b>	<b>April 7</b>
<b>2005</b>	<b>April 13</b>
<b>2004</b>	<b>April 17</b>
<b>2003</b>	<b>April 20</b>

Activity for the summer was similar to previous years with flocks seen along Morning Star Road (2.3 miles out East End Road from Paul Banks School), also about 14 miles out East End Road, on Diamond Ridge and West Hill roads, and in the North Fork area. Once again, observers reported that the flocks of non-breeders virtually disappeared from their traditional sites in June and July. It is still a mystery where the majority of these non-breeders or failed breeders go during this period. By mid-August, the non-breeding flocks started filtering back to the regular reporting sites around town.

This year Kachemak Crane Watch gathered data for the second year of its three-year Sandhill Crane Nesting Ecology Study that will include an online Sandhill Crane Atlas and observation database. Problems are still being worked out of this part of the project.

Biologist Michelle Michaud contacted landowners again about nesting cranes to determine location, numbers of colts, and nesting habitat. This year nesting

crane pairs laid their eggs between May 5 and May 27, 2012. Of the 35 known nesting pairs in the Homer/Anchor Point area, only 28 crane pairs are known to have nested in 2012. Of these 28 pairs, only 19 had successful nests (at least one egg hatched) producing 33 colts. Nest success was lower in 2012 (67%) compared with 2011 (93%). In 2011, only 3 of the 31 known nests failed – no eggs hatched, whereas in 2012, 8 of the 27 known nests failed.

Of the 33 colts hatched in 2012, only 23 fledged, whereas in 2011, of the 39 colts hatched only 24 fledged. Reproductive success in 2011 was lower (61.5%) than in 2012 (69.7%). Factors affecting nest success include potential predation from mainly eagles, coyotes, and dogs. One mated crane was killed by an arrow, but Troopers have not learned who killed the crane.

**Number of Reported Colts  
from Anchor Point south**

<b>2012</b>	<b>24</b>
<b>2011</b>	<b>21</b>
<b>2010</b>	<b>36</b>
<b>2009</b>	<b>34</b>
<b>2008</b>	<b>33</b>
<b>2007</b>	<b>35</b>
<b>2006</b>	<b>36</b>
<b>2005</b>	<b>29</b>
<b>2004</b>	<b>23</b>

Weather could also be a factor in reproductive success, as the Homer area experienced heavy snowfall in winter 2011/2012, and the summer was cool. Kachemak Crane Watch has posted a slide video last year about the Nesting Ecology Project with photos of the nests and habitat at [www.cranewatch.org](http://www.cranewatch.org) under the Videos tab.

The public was also involved in the population count, a citizen science project, by reporting crane sightings on August 23, 29, and September 4. From this information an observational estimate of the crane population for the Homer area

was made. The estimated total crane population, based on the counts, is 178. This estimate is based on the highest number of cranes observed at one location at a given time, plus the number of crane pairs and colts not included in that number, as well as C049 and his mate. C046, banded 4 years ago, was reported numerous times this year, as was C003 and C040. Kachemak Crane Watch estimates the total crane population in the Homer/Anchor Point area at 200 (pers. comm. Edgar Bailey).

**Largest Observed Flock Size  
(Skyline Drive monitoring site)**

<b>2012</b>	<b>120</b>
<b>2011</b>	<b>105</b>
<b>2010</b>	<b>61</b>
<b>2009</b>	<b>82</b>
<b>2008</b>	<b>90</b>
<b>2007</b>	<b>118</b>
<b>2006</b>	<b>80</b>
<b>2005</b>	<b>78</b>
<b>2004</b>	<b>55</b>
<b>2003</b>	<b>100+</b>

Once again, migration occurred on several different dates. On September 6 and 13, two different migrating flocks left Homer after staging at Inspiration Ridge Preserve. A small flock of about 15 cranes, including 3 colts was still being reported as of September 16. Several other families of 3 have been seen in town as well with the last report received on September 17. With the late spring, some colts appeared not ready to leave with the main migration. The parents will hold back until the colts develop enough strength for the rigors of a 2400 mile migration to central California.

Based on Kachemak Crane Watch data since 1999, the average departure date of most local cranes is on or about September 10, depending on weather conditions. Sandhill Cranes normally migrate during daylight with clearing skies and favorable tailwinds. They usually begin migration mid-day after foraging.

**Primary Crane Fall Migration Date  
(Skyline Drive monitoring site)**

<b>2012</b>	<b>9/6 &amp; 9/13</b>
<b>2011</b>	<b>9/9 &amp; 9/17</b>
<b>2010</b>	<b>9/8</b>
<b>2009</b>	<b>9/12</b>
<b>2008</b>	<b>9/11</b>
<b>2007</b>	<b>9/14</b>
<b>2006</b>	<b>9/10</b>
<b>2005</b>	<b>9/6</b>
<b>2004</b>	<b>9/12</b>
<b>2003</b>	<b>9/10</b>
<b>2002</b>	<b>9/10</b>
<b>2001</b>	<b>9/5</b>
<b>2000</b>	<b>9/7</b>
<b>1999</b>	<b>9/15</b>

A map of the cranes' migration route is available on the Kachemak Crane Watch website. Also, a brochure published by Kachemak Crane Watch and the International Crane Foundation entitled, "Annual Travels of Sandhill Cranes from Homer, Alaska," is available at Islands and Ocean Visitor Center, or a copy can be downloaded at [www.cranewatch.org](http://www.cranewatch.org).

New this year is a Brochure entitled, "Human Induced Threats to Sandhill Cranes in Homer." Information about how to be a responsible pet owner, threats created by feeding Bald Eagles, Sandhill Crane viewing etiquette, and what to do if dogs are harassing cranes can be found in this new brochure, also available on the website.

Kachemak Crane Watch also premiered its newest video, "Raising Kid Colt," which has been published on DVD by the International Crane Foundation (ICF). Copies can be purchased online at <http://www.savingcranes.org/cart/gifts/raising-kid-colt-dvd.html>. Proceeds from sale of the DVD benefit ICF's West Coast Sandhill Crane Program that protects Sandhill Crane habitat on the Pacific Flyway, of which the Homer population is a part

*Sandhill Cranes are enduring symbols of wilderness, their ancient trumpeting calls a reminder that constant vigilance is needed to preserve this magnificent species.*

*~Edgar Bailey, Co-founder, Kachemak Crane Watch*