



All About Cranes #1

Do cranes return to the same nest site?

Sandhill Cranes generally mate for life, return to the same nesting territory every year, and may reuse the same nest sites. (I have read that they sometimes do get a new partner, especially if one is killed.) A nesting pair of cranes at Mariner's Lagoon nested in the same vicinity in 2010 and 2011, but did not use the same nest site. Kachemak Crane Watch and the International Crane Foundation are conducting a three-year nesting ecology study. One of the things they will be observing is whether the cranes utilize the same nest location. Looks like the IRP cranes are going to use the same spot. They are spending time there.

Cranes in the Homer area will nest in a variety of habitat types, including upland areas. Nests found in wetland sites are generally built of the dominant vegetation in the immediate nest area, whereas nests constructed in upland areas are minimally prepared. The nesting pairs of Sandhill Cranes in Homer are currently building their nests in preparation for egg laying and chick rearing in the next few weeks.

What happens to the colt(s) when the family returns to Homer?

To put it bluntly, when the Sandhill Crane family returns, the colts get the "boot." The adults fiercely defend their nesting territories from all crane intruders. Once the family lands at the nesting area, the adults will drive the young away, sometimes not very gently. In the case of the family on Inspiration Ridge Preserve, the adults just stood apart from the colt when they arrived. Although they did not stay long that first time back, the colt somehow got the message. The adults took off in one direction, heading toward the nearby nest area, and the colt headed toward the roost the family used last summer. Mavis Muller says the pair that has nested on her land for 14 years "chases away the colts immediately upon their return." No more coddling for the youngsters. They now have to go join the non-breeders that gather in flocks around Homer during the summer.

An update on the story about "The Goose who Thinks he is a Sandhill Crane." The last week of April, Kachemak Crane Watch received a report from two cooperators that they had seen "Homer." Kachemak Crane Watch received photos of the goose and discovered it was an imposter--a Greater White-Fronted Goose rather than a Lesser Canada Goose. A couple days later, another person said they were sure they saw a Canada Goose with a flock of about 50 cranes. The person assured Kachemak Crane Watch that she knows what a Canada Goose looks like. Sent a mug shot of "Homer" and another of the Greater White-fronted Goose, they fingered the Canada as the type they saw. So, without photographic evidence, it is still inconclusive whether "Homer" has returned with the Sandhill Cranes, wherever he went!