

ABC News

## **Whooping Cranes Hatch Two Chicks in Wis. Pair of Whooping Cranes Hatch Two Chicks in the Wild in Central Wisconsin**

By JAMES A. CARLSON Associated Press Writer



*This photo released by Dr. Richard Urbanek shows two adult whooping cranes with their young at Necedah National Wildlife Refuge in Wisconsin in June 2006. A pair of whooping cranes has hatched two chicks in central Wisconsin, marking the first young of the species to be hatched in the wild in the eastern United States in more than 100 years. (AP Photo/Dr. Richard Urbanek)*

MILWAUKEE – A pair of whooping cranes has hatched two chicks in central Wisconsin, marking the first young of the species to be hatched in the wild in the eastern United States in more than 100 years.

That makes about two dozen young cranes including the first three conceived in the wild that will be added this year in the effort to establish a second migratory flock of the endangered birds in North America.

Operation Migration, the group coordinating the project, posted photos on its Web site showing two brown chicks being tended by their adult parents among thick grass of the Necedah National Wildlife Refuge.

Joe Duff, who heads Operation Migration, said the successful nesting was the second attempt by the adult pair this season. The adults had abandoned a first nest and then re-nested.

"Seems the first try was just practice for this grand event," he wrote on the Web page, while also cautioning that the parents still faced the challenge of keeping the young alive until able to fly.

Duff, reached by telephone Monday evening, said the chicks could be especially vulnerable to predators because the adults have never before had young to protect and must learn parenting skills. Crane chicks are also highly competitive, and when two hatch in the same nest, only one sometimes survives.

"If they both survive, it's going to be terrific," Duff said.

He said he expects the cranes hatched in the wild to migrate with their parents.

"They'll be afraid of the ultralight," unlike their parents and the other cranes that have been led south by the aircraft, Duff said.

As part of the project, now in its fifth year, cranes hatched in captivity at the Patuxent Wildlife Research Center in Maryland have been raised at the Necedah refuge and led south by ultralight aircraft in the fall to the Chassahowitzka National Wildlife Refuge near Crystal River, Fla. They migrate back north on their own in the spring.

The flock now numbers about 60 birds, with 22 newly hatched young ones being raised for release this coming fall.

Duff said this year's first group of young cranes from Maryland was shipped to Necedah Monday, and those eight cranes include another first a bird conceived in the wild but hatched in captivity.

Researchers in Wisconsin had collected two eggs after determining the parent whoopers weren't diligently tending their nest.

The eggs were incubated and flown to Maryland, where the cranes hatched out but only one survived, Duff said.

The only other migrating flock of whooping cranes has about 200 birds. They fly from Canada to winter on the Texas Gulf Coast.

The whooping crane, the tallest bird in North America, was near extinction in 1941, with only about 20 left.

On the Net: Operation Migration: <http://www.operationmigration.org/>

Copyright 2006 The Associated Press. All rights reserved.  
<http://abcnews.go.com/Technology/wireStory?id=2121604>