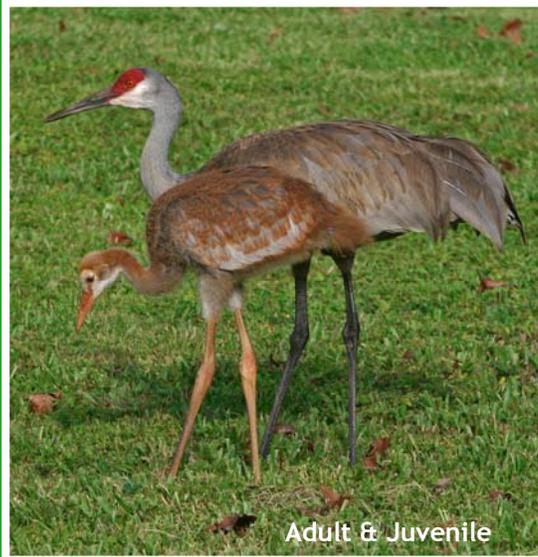


BC's Coast Region: Species & Ecosystems of Conservation Concern

Sandhill Crane (*Grus canadensis*)

Global: G5 Provincial: S4B COSEWIC: NAR BC List: Yellow, Identified Wildlife



Adult & Juvenile



Chick ("Colt")

Notes on *Grus canadensis*: A long-lived species of the family Gruidae (cranes), a group of birds known for elaborate and noisy courtship displays or "dances". Formerly broken down into three subspecies in BC, "Lesser, Georgia Depression Population" and "Greater" Sandhill Crane, only one species is now recognized.

Description

Height 1-1.2 m Wingspan: 1.6 m across. Perhaps the 'tallest' bird in BC, individuals which nest in temperate latitudes are the largest form. Plumage and body size are similar for both sexes (males in a breeding pair are slightly larger than the female). Body and wing feathers are varying shades of grey. In some regions where certain soils types occur, birds will preen iron rich mud into their feathers, creating an overall rust tinge. Bald, red skin covers the forehead and crown. Feathers on the face, chin, upper throat, and nape are white to pale grey. Adults have a white cheek patch. Legs and toes are dark grey to black. A cluster of large curved feathers or "bustle" characteristic of cranes, cover the lower back and tail feathers. Juvenile plumage changes from cinnamon brown to gray as the bird matures during the first year.

Diet

Cranes are omnivorous, feeding on a variety of plant roots, grasses, grains, small vertebrates (rodents, reptiles and amphibians), and invertebrates. Chicks forage primarily on a diet of insects during early flightless stages. In some areas this species exploits commercial grain crops and can cause significant damage and conflicts with farmers.

Look's Like?

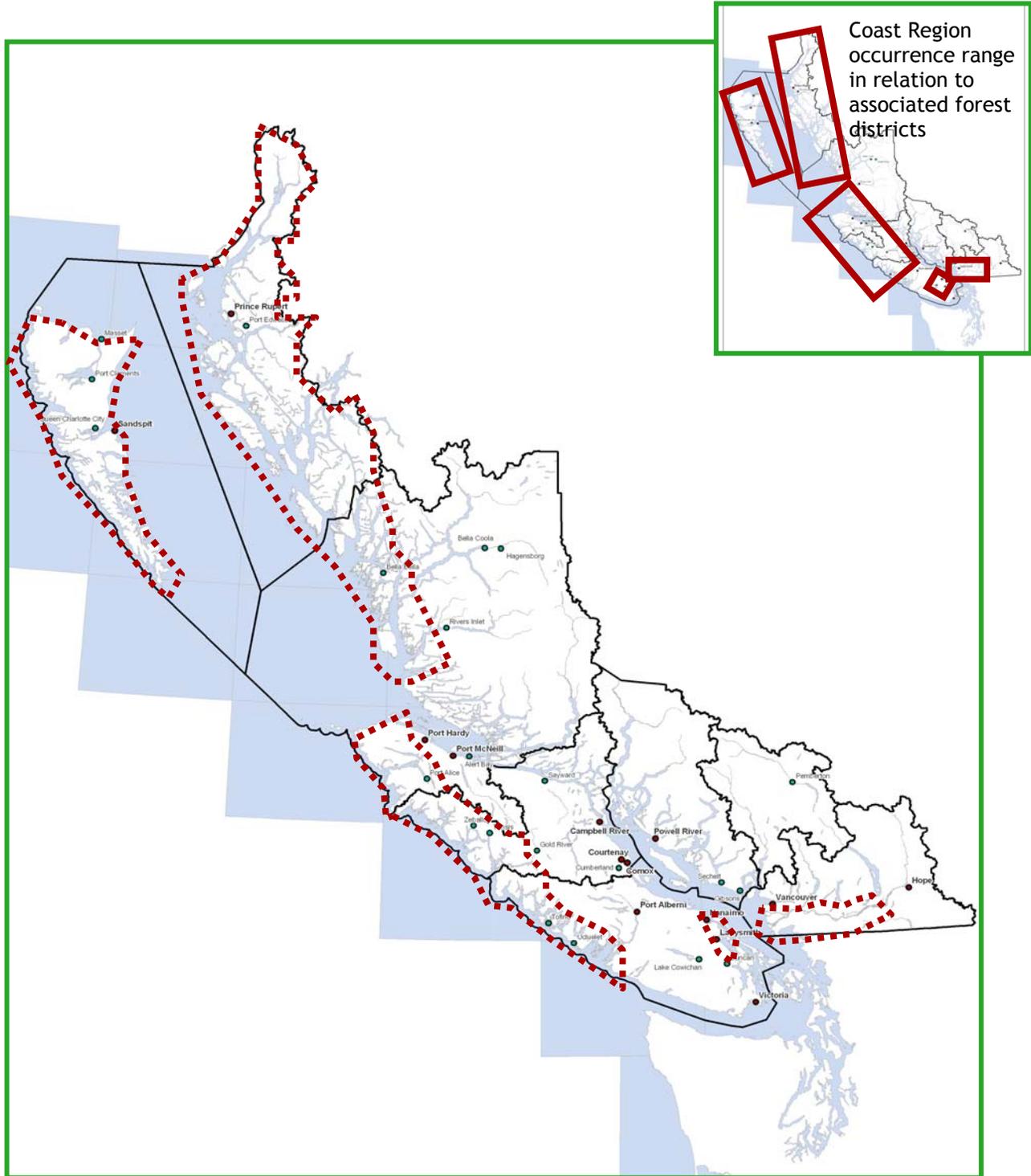
Great Blue Heron has similar body size and habitat preferences to Sandhill Crane. However the heron's plumage, especially in mature birds and flight profile distinguish the two species. As well herons have a harsh croaking call while cranes produce a melodic trumpeting sound.



Great Blue Heron

Distribution

Elevation: Breeding <1220 m, non-breeding <1510 m. Sandhill Crane populations suffered significant declines in the early part of the 20th century due to hunting and land use change disturbances, but breeding pairs have been making a comeback in some areas along the Coast Region. Coastal breeding occurrences range from Haida Gwaii and the Central Coast, northern Vancouver Island (2 recent occurrences), as well as several pairs in the Fraser Lowlands of the South Coast (Reifel Island, Burns Bog, Lulu Island Wetlands area, Blaney Bog and the Pitt Polder area). Breeding areas around Comox and the Oyster and Quinsam watersheds have not been active since 1931.



Sandhill Crane (*Grus canadensis*), potential occurrence range for the Coast Region

Habitat Preferences

Emergent wetland vegetation including cattail, bulrush, willow, hardhack, Labrador tea, sedges and grasses provide cover, nesting material and food sources. Foraging habitat is more varied, including intertidal areas, agricultural fields and grasslands.

Critical Features

Large, isolated and undisturbed wetlands (>1 ha) surrounded by some form of forest cover are most often utilized. Nest mounds are made of sticks, emergent sedges, reeds, grasses, and mosses and raised 15-20 cm above the water, giving adults and an unobstructed view of surrounding areas. Clearcuts are occasionally used for nesting but not considered a suitable habitat alternative. Sandhill Cranes, unlike most British Columbian wetland-associated birds, frequently use coniferous forests adjacent to nesting areas for escape cover and possibly when resting and foraging with young. These features are especially critical for birds nesting in small wetlands (1-10 ha).



Sandhill Crane has a strong association with wetlands (e.g. bogs and marshes), especially for nesting. Nests (left) are constructed on raised vegetative mounds usually surrounded by water to avoid predators.

Seasonal Life Cycle

Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
				Nesting, 1-3 eggs laid							
Overwintering outside of BC – return early April				Chicks leave nest 1 day after hatching, forage with parents				Overwintering outside of BC leave mid-September			

Egg clutches may be replaced if lost in the first 20 days of incubation. Only one clutch is laid per year, with usually only one chick surviving. Birds mature in their third year.

Threats

- ◆ South Coast breeding distribution coincides with areas undergoing significant urbanization and habitat loss especially wetlands, riparian forests and old-field. Though presently Yellow-listed and demonstrating a level of population stability and or recovery, this species may once again suffer declines if current threats and activities in urbanizing areas of their range continue.
- ◆ The growing renewable energy field (i.e. wind farms) in areas supporting breeding pairs is a potential new disturbance threat. Collision with transmission lines has been an issue in other areas. Mortality effects for BC are unknown and could increase as new transmission corridors are developed to service new projects.
- ◆ Generally only one clutch is laid per year and rarely does more than one chick survive. Long-term persistence of local breeding pairs can be negatively affected if these survival factors combine with natural fluctuations in food resources, habitat conditions and ongoing disturbance factors.
- ◆ Road construction and road access in areas used by Sandhill Crane can increase the potential for disturbance as well as increasing nest predation opportunities from native and introduced species (e.g. on Haida Gwaii, introduced predators such as Raccoon are impacting nesting success for many bird species).
- ◆ Impacts of forestry activities have not been adequately investigated in BC. Forested areas adjacent to wetland nesting sites are critical refugia components and adequate buffers may not be considered in harvest plans.

Conservation & Management Objectives

- ◆ Apply conservation and management objectives as set out in the Accounts and Measures for Managing Identified Wildlife - Accounts V. 2004 Sandhill Crane *Grus canadensis*. Integrate complimentary management recommendations as set out in “Status of the sandhill crane in British Columbia” and Provincial Develop with Care Guidelines for Urban and Rural Development as well as provisions to reduce impacts from wind energy projects as found in “Sandhill Cranes Breeding On Northern Vancouver Island, British Columbia.”
- ◆ Assess, inventory and monitor using methodology set out in the RISC standards # 18 Inventory Methods for Waterfowl and Allied Species (Version 2.0)

Specific activities should include:

- ◆ The minimum amount and distribution of core areas needed to maintain a stable, self-sustaining population distributed throughout the species’ natural range is required. There is little information specific to British Columbia regarding factors affecting breeding ecology, productivity and survivorship.
- ◆ Priorities for research should include examining the impact of forest harvesting on breeding habitat use and taxonomy work to resolve whether subspecies occur and their distribution.
- ◆ Recruitment in British Columbian breeding locations, as well as site fidelity of British Columbian populations and their respective wintering grounds are topics that all require further research.
- ◆ Encourage landowners to create conservation covenants to buffer and protect nesting sites and adjacent foraging areas such as wetlands and riparian habitat on their property. Narrow riparian buffers used to protect streams and wetlands for fishery resources are insufficient for most wildlife dependent on intact, connected forested riparian ecosystems.
- ◆ Increase awareness about the sensitivity and value of this species and the wetlands, riparian and forest ecosystems it depends upon.

This species is subject to protections and prohibitions under the Federal Migratory Birds Convention Act and BC Wildlife Act and is Identified Wildlife under the Forest and Range Practices Act. Habitat for this species may also be governed under provincial and federal regulations including the Fish Protection Act and Federal Fisheries Act as well as Regional and local municipal bylaws.

Content for this Factsheet has been derived from the following sources

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Every effort has been made to ensure content accuracy. Comments or corrections should be directed to the South Coast Conservation Program: info@sccp.ca. Content updated August 2010.

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