

Sandhill cranes return to Platte River resort



Nebraskans who live near the Platte River know that spring is here when they see the sandhill cranes congregating in migration to northern nesting grounds.

The birds spent time between Grand Island west to about Lexington, forming the largest concentration of cranes in North America.

Also known as lesser sandhill cranes, the birds are smaller relatives of the famous and endangered whooping cranes that also visit Nebraska in early April. The sandhill cranes are gray, three to four feet tall and have a wing span of five feet.

They can be seen feeding in fields along the river during the day and returning to river islands at night.

"The most spectacular time to see them is toward sunset as they go back to the river," explains Paul Johnsgard, a professor in the School of Life Sciences and a professional ornithologist.

Gracefully suspended in flight over the waters of the Platte, these visitors seem to be performing a ballet for the wildlife lover. The imaginative spectator can see these dive bombers plunge into the still water. Whatever the image, the sandhill cranes emphasize the beauty of the Nebraska landscape.



Photos by Jerry McBride
Story by Martha Murdock

