

Spotting of common crane in Nebraska creates stir

GRAND ISLAND (AP) — A bird that normally flies with a flock in Asia probably took a wrong turn in Siberia to turn up in Nebraska.

The sighting of the common crane hanging out with a flock of sandhill cranes in south-central Nebraska has created quite a stir among bird watchers. The news has shown up on bird alerts on the Internet, and bird watchers hoping to add the bird to their "life lists" of personal bird sightings have been calling bird watchers here to inquire.

Don't let its name fool you. The common crane, also known as the Eurasian crane, is common only on its home turf of Europe and Asia, said Gary Lingle, habitat manager for the Platte River Whooping Crane Maintenance Trust in Grand Island. Only about 10 sightings have been recorded in North America outside of Alaska.

"In the bird world, this is quite an event," said Craig Faanes, a former Grand Island resident who now works for the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

in Arlington, Va. He has seen 1,665 different birds in North America but never a common crane.

Bob Janssen, a Minnesota ornithologist and author of "Birds in Minnesota," spotted the common crane Saturday. It was in a field about six miles east of Prosser near the Adams County-Hall County line.

Bird watchers are drawn to Nebraska each spring when an estimated 500,000 sandhill cranes stop here to rest and feed before going north to their summer nesting grounds.

About 40,000 to 60,000 sandhill cranes nest each summer in Siberia.

Common cranes' summer nesting grounds extend to Siberia. Lingle said the local common crane probably became mixed up with the wrong group last fall in Siberia.

Lingle said he expected the common crane would bring quite a bit of economic activity to the state from bird watchers.

"This is like the golden crane," he said.

UNL aid applications delayed

By Joshua Gillin
Staff Reporter

Students who applied for financial aid for the 1996-97 academic year may have to wait awhile, according to the director of UNL scholarships and financial aid.

John Beacon said mailing delays, software glitches and the federal government shutdowns all had contributed to a delay in processing the Free Application for Federal Student Aid.

Mailing delays caused by bad weather and problems with a new software program have set back applications by up to 70 percent, Beacon said.

And, he said, "The employee furloughs that were given (during the government shutdown) didn't help matters any."

As of March 22, Beacon said, fewer than half of the 3.3 million applications had been entered into

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the federal disbursement system.

"We've (UNL) only got about 4,400 students processed now, compared to the 8,800 we had done about this time last year," he said.

But Beacon said the staff members in federal data-processing offices were going full-speed trying to catch up — three shifts a day, seven days a week.

Beacon said receiving informa-

tion regarding federally awarded money for education was vital for the distribution of award notes for UNL students.

"The set deadline for getting all of the applications processed for next year is April 15," he said. "After we get the federal information, we can start sending out award letters."

He said students who had applied for financial aid should not worry or resubmit applications. Money will be awarded based on the order in which applications were received.

Beacon said he wanted UNL students to know that the fault lies with the system, not the university.

"Almost every school in the country has to wait for the Department of Education to send out its figures," he said.

"Basically, we're all in the same boat when it comes to waiting."

Property

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said. "This does not affect 292CA a bit. It only lets the voters approve what's already in statute."

By keeping levy levels in state statute and not putting it in the constitution, Sen. Jerome Warner of Waverly said LR29CA would keep some flexibility by not requiring a constitutional amendment to change levy levels in future adjustments.

If it's put into the state constitution, he said, "you will have locked into the constitution that ag land will be taxed at 80 percent of market value. Period."

When senators voted on the Schrock amendment again, they defeated it 21-22.

In other property tax related action Tuesday:

School districts in rural Nebraska won't get a "gentle little nudge" to consolidate after an amendment was put down by lawmakers earlier in the day.

By a 13-18 vote, senators rejected Lincoln Sen. Chris Beutler's amendment asking rural school districts to look at the possibility of merging.

The amendment would have been part of one of the Legislature's property tax relief bills, LB1085.

Sen. Bob Wickersham of Harrison opposed the amendment and said the bill focused on encouraging local governments — not schools — to merge or consolidate.

"If we include schools, should we then expand it so it deals with community colleges, NRDs (Natural Resource Districts) and the airport authority?" he asked. "I don't think so."

School districts already had the incentive to consolidate in another bill awaiting final reading, Wickersham said, and didn't need the prompting of the Legislature.

One of the few supporters of the bill, Sen. Carol Pirsch of Omaha reminded senators the schools were the biggest users of the property tax levies the Legislature would be cutting.

"I hate to put a mandate on schools," she said, "but I don't know any other way to make sure they do this."

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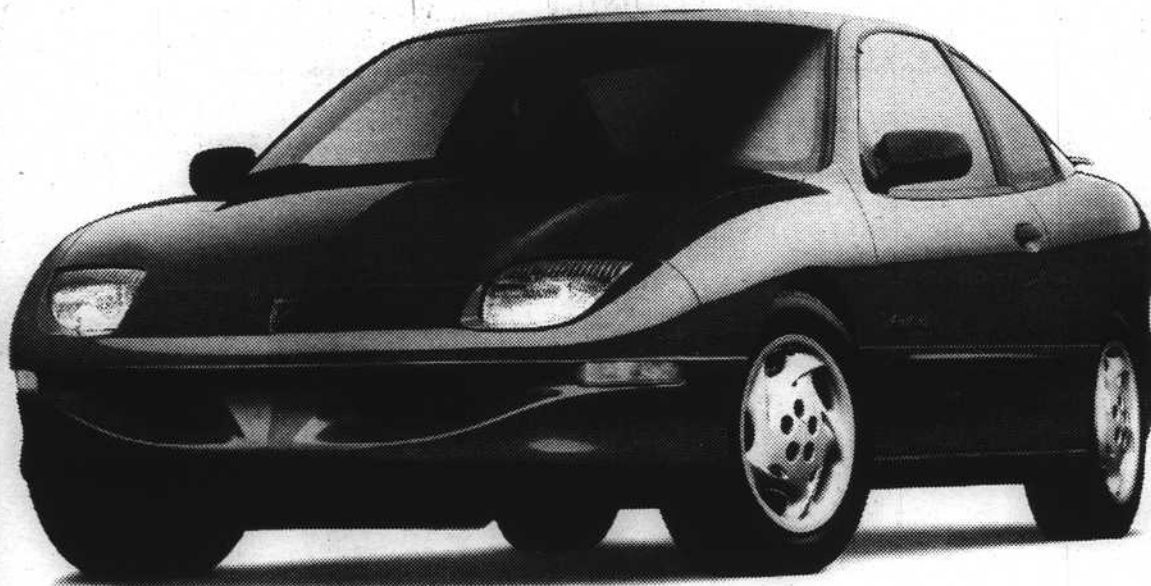
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