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## Observations of Late Fall Migratory Sandhill Cranes, Platte River, Nebraska

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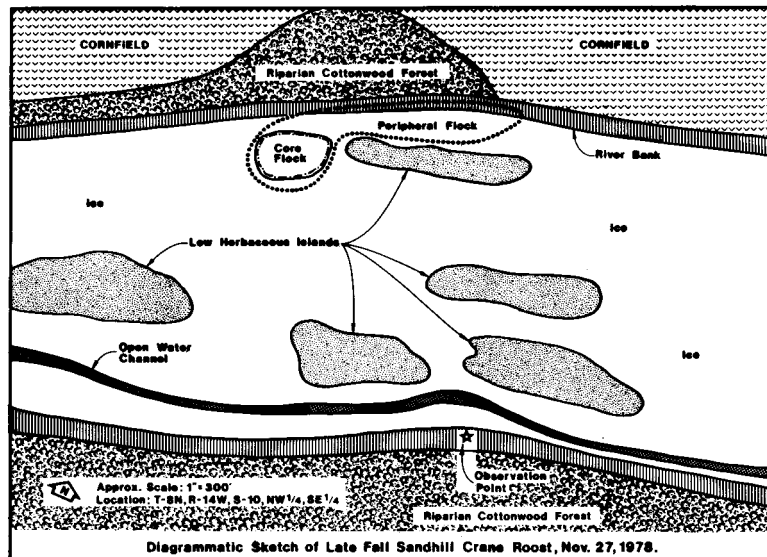


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### OBSERVATIONS OF LATE FALL MIGRATORY SANDHILL CRANES, PLATTE RIVER, NEBRASKA

Observations of migratory Sandhill Cranes (*Grus canadensis*) were made on the Platte River near Kearney, Nebraska. On 26 November 1978, night roosting in the Platte River occurred on thin ice (less than 2 cm) in open areas which were protected by riparian vegetation from cold north winds (35-40 km/hr-NNW, -10°C). Roosting Cranes were spaced very closely (less than 0.5 m) during evening and early morning hours, with increased spacing (about 1.0 m) occurring during late morning. A diagram of the roost area was prepared. The roost was located near the northern river bank in a river stretch characterized by low, herbaceous type "sandbar islands" (vegetation about 1 m or less in height). No roosting occurred on islands, but some

Cranes at the periphery of the flock roosted in the lower one-half of the northern river bank, which supported vegetation from 1.2 to 2.4 m tall, primarily sparsely spaced willow trees and sunflowers.

In the morning (27 November), overflights by Golden Eagles within 250-300 m of the estimated 1200-bird flock caused alarm, resulting in brief flights downstream (and downwind) by the Cranes. A core of a few hundred birds remained on the roost in the most open area of the river. Displaced Cranes returned to the roost area after repeated disturbances by the Eagles. Snow and ice cover prevented feeding activity in the area, and Cranes remained on the roost throughout the day. Last migrants moved south from this area on 8 December, 1978, according to local observers.

In fall 1979, Sandhill Cranes were reported arriving in this area of the Platte River on or about the first week in November. According to local observers, peak numbers were reached about 5 December, and the last migrants left the Platte River near Kearney about 17 December. Unusually warm weather during this period probably accounted for the delay in southward movement from the Platte.

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