

SIGHTINGS OF THE CUBAN SANDHILL CRANE (*GRUS CANADENSIS NESIOTES*)  
IN PINAR DEL RÍO, CUBA

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THE SANDHILL CRANE (*Grus canadensis nesiotes*) is a clear example of how an increase in sampling effort can provide more accurate knowledge of a formerly underestimated population. Since the beginning of the Crane Conservation Program in November 1994, 11 populations of the Cuban Sandhill Crane have been recorded in Cuba. The status of this species in Pinar del Río province, however, has remained unclear, with only one confirmed report from the region of Macurije, a small town near Matahambre, 48 km from Viñales, accounting for the presence of the largest Cuban bird in this province (Gálvez 1996).

During a field trip to San Diego de los Baños, Pinar del Río (Fig. 1), a pair of Sandhill Cranes was heard calling at dusk on 11 March 1999. The calls were recorded with a Senheiser microphone and Sony professional tape recorder. At 07:10 hr on 12 March, we observed a pair of cranes flying from the area where the birds had been heard the previous evening. We returned to the site on the morning of 13 March and again a crane was heard, although we could not see it because of the dense vegetation at the site. Finally, when we were returning to San Diego del los Baños, a crane was heard at about 11:00 hr at the same site.

A special conservation effort for the crane is needed in this area. That effort should be extended to include the several endemic and threatened Cuban birds there. During our stay we heard gun shots in the area and we encountered two hutia (*Capromys* spp.) hunters carrying a shotgun. These incidents suggest intensive hunting occurs in this zone. Because of their large size, Sandhill Cranes are often shot as game and for food in Cuba, and are in need of further protection measures.

After our observations, a fire burned an area of several thousand hectares in the Macurijes region in late April 1999. The cause of the fire and the extent of the damage caused to the forest and other ecosystems remain unknown, but the crane population there may have suffered from this catastrophic event. Further research is needed to determine the status of the crane population in Pinar del Río province.

LITERATURE CITED

GÁLVEZ AGUILERA, X. 1996. Technical report on the results of the preservation program of the crane (Nov. 1994-August 1996) in two islands of the Cuban archipelago. IUCN (CAMP).

FIG. 1. Location of Cuban Sandhill Crane observations, San Diego de los Baños, Pinar del Río, Cuba, 11-13 March 1999.