

Southern Appalachian Creature Feature Podcasts

Whoopers in Western North Carolina

Greetings and welcome to the Southern Appalachian Creature Feature.

Whooping cranes are one of the rarest animals in the world, with only between 525 and 550 remaining. Of those, two recently touched down in Western North Carolina. Biologists recently confirmed the presence of a pair of whooping cranes in Clay County, North Carolina, marking the first time the birds have been documented wintering in Western North Carolina.

The two birds in Western North Carolina are part of an experimental eastern flock of birds which biologists are trying to establish that would migrate between the upper Midwest and the southeast.

The cranes are a male/female pair, and biologists anticipate they'll mate when they return north in the spring. Like all members of the eastern population, the birds have identifying leg bands. The male goes by the number 28-08, meaning he was the 28th chick hatched to the eastern population in 2008. The female is 5-10, the fifth chick hatched in 2010.

It remains to be seen whether the pair will make Western North Carolina their annual wintering ground. It may depend, in part, on the behavior of Western North Carolinians. Biologists recommend not approaching the birds on foot within 600 feet; not approaching in a vehicle within 600 feet or, if on a public road, within 300 feet; remaining concealed and not speaking loudly enough that the birds can hear you; and not trespassing on private property in an attempt to view whooping cranes.

For WNCW and the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, this is Gary Peeples.