

January 26, 2025

# Wins in Texas conservation

I recently returned from a trip to the Gulf Coast where my husband and I were privileged to see multiple whooping cranes. These majestic birds are the tallest bird in North America, at nearly five feet. It got me to thinking about two conservation success stories based in south Texas.

The last wild, self-sustaining flock of whooping cranes breed and spend their summers in Wood Buffalo National Park in Canada; in the late fall, they migrate to the Aransas Pass National Wildlife Refuge (and surrounding areas) on the Gulf coast, returning to Canada in April, a migration route of over 2,400 miles.

The ones we saw were in a cow pasture near Goose Island State Park and in the front yard of a nearby home. The handy app eBird told me where to find them.

Whoopers nearly went extinct in the 1930s. The population hit an all-time low in 1938, with only 15 birds. An intensive and ongoing conservation effort led to a sustained population increase.

According to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS), "During the 2022-23 wintering period, the (wild) population size was an estimated 536 birds."

There are additional birds in reintroduced populations and in captivity. The San Antonio Zoo is one of only two zoos that raise whooping cranes. You can find them in the Big Lake section of the park.

In addition to preserving the nesting and wintering grounds for these birds, FWS also works with partners to conserve land along the birds' migration route.



"The ongoing recovery of this whooping crane population is perhaps one of the greatest endangered species success stories. A wide variety of local, state, federal and private conservation organizations are actively involved in planning and implementing whooping crane conservation efforts," per the FWS.

Another conservation success story is centered on the Kemp's ridley turtle, the smallest sea turtle at about two feet and 70-100 pounds. According to NOAA Fisheries, it's endangered throughout its range (primarily the Gulf of Mexico).

The NOAA website states, "The population crashed ... to a low of only several hundred females nesting in the 1980s. Intensive conservation actions were implemented on nesting beaches and through fisheries management," the NOAA states. "The number of nests reached a record low of 702 in 1985, representing fewer than 250 nesting females. Due to intensive conservation actions, the Kemp's ridley began to slowly rebound during the 1990s."

Nearly all of the nesting occurs in the state of Tamaulipas, Mexico, but nests can also be found in the dunes on Padre Island. Visitors to beaches on the island see frequent signs with a phone number to report any nesting sites.

When the eggs hatch, the very small juveniles (about the size of your hand) must make their way

from the dunes, across the beach and into the water, a journey that takes them between 20-45 minutes. Every summer (usually mid-June through August), the National Park Service publishes dates for scheduled hatchling releases on Malaquite Beach at the Padre Island National Seashore south of Corpus Christi.

Barricades are erected to protect the part of the beach the juveniles will traverse, and visitors can watch hundreds of hatchlings as they make their way down the beach and into the water. The releases attract over 1,000 visitors annually.

We close with a remembrance for Cecile Richards, who died of brain cancer on Jan. 20. She founded the Texas Freedom Network (TFN) and was a fierce advocate for women's rights and social justice.

TFN President Felicia Martin said, "Cecile has created generations of troublemakers who will never stop fighting for the Texas we deserve and the communities we love."

My favorite Cecile quote: "It's not hard to imagine future generations one day asking, 'When there was so much at stake for our country, what did you do?' And the only acceptable answer is, 'everything we could.'"

Thank you, Cecile, for your inspiration.

Thanks for reading. To find out more about how to get involved with local Democratic activities, visit [www.kcdems.us](http://www.kcdems.us)

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