

Crane Facts compiled by Christine Petrell Kallevig, 2014

1. All cranes are omnivorous, opportunistic feeders. Their diet varies based on the season and their location. It includes seeds, roots, vegetation, berries, amphibians, rodents, fish, insects, and even other birds.
2. Cranes are among the oldest living birds on the planet. Fossil records place cranes in Nebraska more than nine million years ago.
3. Cranes are also opportunistic fliers, relying on thermals and tail winds to carry them along. Many migrate up to 10,000 miles between wintering grounds and spring breeding wetlands. Cranes that live in Europe and Asia are able to reach the height of 32,800 feet while flying. Some flocks in Florida, Japan, and Africa are stationary.
4. Cranes can be found on all continents except Antarctica and South America. East Asia has the most crane diversity, with eight species, followed by Africa, which holds five resident species and wintering populations of a sixth. Australia, Europe and North America each have two species.
5. Adult cranes maintain lifelong pair bonds, but they will “divorce” if reproduction is unsuccessful and “remarry” if a mate dies. Pairs begin to form in the second or third years of life (when a crane has perfected its disco moves) but it may be several years before the first successful breeding season.
6. Crane nests are like soggy haystacks in shallow water, shaped like mounds 2-3 feet in diameter and 3-5 inches above the water. Nests are made from surrounding vegetation, such as cattails, sedges, and rushes.
7. Normally 2 eggs are laid 1 or 2 days apart. Eggs are about 4” x 2.5”. Both parents incubate the eggs for about a month. Colts hatch 1 or 2 days apart, but usually only one survives. Cranes fledge (take their first flight) in about 80 days, migrate with their parents, and stay with them throughout the following winter.
8. Adult cranes can’t swim, but colts can.
9. Adult cranes sleep standing in water, with one leg folded next to their bodies.
10. The average life expectancy of a wild crane is 7 years, but many live 20 to 30 years. A captive Siberian Crane lived 83 years.
11. Cranes are often confused with herons, but crane's are larger and have slightly shorter bills. Herons fly with a curved neck while cranes fly straight-necked. They both have long legs, long necks, and long wings.
12. Cranes are considered the most accomplished dancers in the animal kingdom. They bow, jump as high as 20 feet, flap their wings, toss sticks into the air or bounce about on stiff legs. Dancing serves several important functions, especially forming and maintaining pair bonds.
13. Cranes vary in size between 8.8 to 26.5 pounds in weight and between 3 and 7 feet tall. The smallest species of cranes are Demoiselle Cranes, the tallest are Sarus Cranes, and the heaviest are Red-crowned Cranes. Males and females do not vary in external appearance, but males tend to be slightly larger than females.
14. There are 15 living species of cranes in four genera:

SUBFAMILY BALEARICINAE - crowned cranes (Genus Balearica)

Black Crowned Crane, *Balearica pavonina*

Grey Crowned Crane, *Balearica regulorum*

SUBFAMILY GRUINAE - typical cranes (Genus Grus, Anthropoides and Bugeranus)

Common Crane, *Grus grus*, also known as the Eurasian Crane

Sandhill Crane, *Grus canadensis*

Whooping Crane, *Grus americana*

Sarus Crane, *Grus antigone*

Brolga, *Grus rubicunda*

Siberian Crane, *Grus leucogeranus*

White-naped Crane, *Grus vipio*

Hooded Crane, *Grus monacha*

Black-necked Crane, *Grus nigricollis*

Red-crowned Crane, *Grus japonensis*, also known as the Manchurian Crane and Japanese Crane

Blue Crane, *Anthropoides paradisea*

Demoiselle Crane, *Anthropoides virgo*

Wattled Crane, *Bugeranus carunculatus*

15. The official logo of Japan Airlines features a red-crowned crane. The estimated total population of this species is only 2,750 in the wild, including about 1,000 birds in the resident Japanese population. Of the migratory populations, about 1,000 winter in China (mainly at the Yellow River delta and Yancheng Coastal Wetlands) and the remaining winter in Korea. Red-crowned cranes are endangered and received this status on June 2, 1970.

Crane Folklore & Myths compiled by Christine Petrell Kallevig, 2014

1. Cranes are associated with good luck in many Native American tribes. Native fishermen used to consider it a good omen to see a crane while fishing. In some Native American folklore, Crane plays the role of peacemaker. In others, he is notable for his vanity. To the Anishinabe tribes, cranes represented leadership and skill at speaking, and the Cheyennes associated sandhill cranes with lightning. Cranes are also used as clan animals in some Native American cultures. Tribes with Crane Clans include the Chippewa (whose Crane Clan and its totem are called Baswenaazhi or Ajiijaak), the Menominee, the Hopi (whose Crane Clan is called Atokngyam), the Zuni (whose Crane Clan name is Kalokta-kwe) and other Pueblo tribes of New Mexico. Crane is an important clan crest in some Northwest Coast tribes, and can be found carved on totem poles. The Creeks and Chumash also have a Crane Dance among their tribal dance traditions.

The Merry Tales of Lox are Wabanaki tales where Crane is depicted as a vain character who is easily flattered. **The Crane and the Otter** is an Assiniboine legend telling how sandhill cranes got their brown feathers. **Frog Brings Rain** is a Navajo myth about Frog and Crane saving the first people from a great fire. **Race of Flitty Hummingbird and Flappy Crane** is a Cherokee legend about a race between Hummingbird and Crane.

2. Aristotle describes the migration of cranes in the **History of Animals**, adding an account of their fights with Pygmies as they wintered near the source of the Nile. Oddly, Finnish folklore has a story about Dwarfs fighting cranes on an island at the edge of the sky, on the southern edge of the Way of Birds (the Milky Way). Aristotle also describes how cranes carry a touchstone inside of them that can be used to test for gold when vomited up. Perhaps a crane was observed ingesting a gizzard stone in one locality and regurgitating it in a region where that stone was scarce.
3. Pliny the Elder (Gaius Plinius Secundus AD 23 – AD 79) wrote that one crane would stand guard while the others slept. It would hold a stone in its claw, so that if it fell asleep it would drop the stone and waken. A crane holding a stone in its claw is a well-known symbol in heraldry, and is known as a crane in its vigilance.
4. Geranos is Greek for crane, which gives us the Cranesbill, or hardy geranium. The crane was a bird of omen. In the tale of Ibycus and the cranes, a thief attacked Ibycus (a poet of the 6th century BCE) and left him for dead. Ibycus called to a flock of passing cranes, who followed the attacker to a theater and hovered over him until, stricken with guilt, he confessed to the crime. Greek and Roman myths often portrayed the dance of cranes as a love of joy and a celebration of life, and the crane was often associated with Apollo.
5. Throughout Asia, a crane is symbolic of happiness and eternal youth. In Japan, the crane is one of the mystical or holy creatures (others are the dragon and the tortoise) and symbolizes good fortune and longevity because of its fabled life span of a thousand years. In China, it is a symbol of immortality. Immortals are often depicted riding on cranes in art and literature. A mortal who attains immortality is carried off by a crane or sometimes has magical abilities to transform into a crane in order to fly on various journeys or adventures. A red-crowned crane is called “fairy crane” or “crane of the immortals”. The red-crowned crane is also a symbol of nobility. Depictions of the crane have been found in Shang Dynasty tombs and Zhou Dynasty ceremonial bronzeware. A common theme in later Chinese art is the reclusive scholar who cultivates bamboo and keeps cranes. An ancient Japanese legend promises that anyone who folds a thousand origami cranes will be granted a wish by a crane, popularized in the book by Elanor Coerr, **Sadako and 1,000 Paper Cranes**.

In **The legend of the White Crane**, a family lived in Fujian province, China, in a place where there were many cranes. The father knew the Southern Chinese martial arts and taught them to his daughter. One day, while his daughter was doing her chores, a crane alighted nearby. She tried to scare the bird off using a stick and the skills she learned from her father, but whatever she did, the crane would counter. She tried to hit the crane on the head, but the bird moved its head out of the way and blocked the stick with its wings. She tried to hit the crane's wings, but the crane stepped to the side and this time blocked with the claws of its feet. She tried to poke the crane's body, but the crane dodged backwards and struck the stick with its beak. From then on, she carefully studied the movements of cranes and combined these movements with the martial arts she learned from her father, creating the White Crane style of Fujian province. There are many versions of this legend, some in which the crane did not block the stick the daughter used, but instead evaded and countered. White crane fighting makes less use of physical strength, stressing evasion and attacks to vulnerable areas instead. White crane fighting elements are popular in women's self-defense because they don't depend on strength and women are better at imitating the pecking motion so common in the crane style of fighting.