Florida's Sandhill Cranes: A Familiar and Fascinating Sight

If you live in Central Florida, chances are you have encountered one of our most recognizable native birds—the Florida Sandhill Crane. These tall, graceful gray birds, easily identified by their distinctive red crowns, are a familiar sight in open fields, pastures, wetlands, and even suburban neighborhoods.

Unlike their migratory relatives, Florida's resident Sandhill Cranes remain here year-round. They favor freshwater marshes, wet pastures, and developed areas where water is readily available. They are often seen traveling in pairs or family groups and can live for as long as 20 years.

Family Life and Nesting

Sandhill Cranes are monogamous, typically remaining with the same mate throughout their lives. Their nesting season generally extends from December through June, with nesting activity most common in late winter and spring. They construct their nests from aquatic vegetation, usually in shallow water, and their young chicks can often be spotted in early spring.

What's on the Menu?

These birds are opportunistic feeders with a varied diet. They forage for seeds, roots, insects, snakes, frogs, and even mole crickets. Their feeding habits help them take advantage of the variety of food sources found throughout Florida's natural and developed landscapes.

A Voice You Won't Forget!

One of the most remarkable characteristics of Sandhill Cranes is their call. Their loud, rattling, bugling sound is unmistakable and can often be heard long before the birds come into view.

Although they may appear calm and approachable, Sandhill Cranes can become surprisingly aggressive when protecting their nests or young. It is important to give them plenty of space, particularly during nesting season. Feeding them is also illegal in Florida.

A Protected Florida Treasure

The Florida Sandhill Crane is a protected species. It is designated as a Threatened species under Florida's Endangered and Threatened Species Rule and is also protected under the federal Migratory Bird Treaty Act.

The next time you see a pair of Sandhill Cranes strolling through a pasture or standing in a shallow wetland, take a moment to appreciate these remarkable birds. They are an important part of Florida's natural heritage, and protecting their habitat helps ensure that future generations will continue to enjoy their beauty and unmistakable calls.