

# Sandhill Crane Spectacular

A Special Trip for The Nature Conservancy's  
Legacy Club to Nebraska

## Itinerary

Dates: March 20 – 26th, 2010

Cost: \$2335, Single occupancy rate: \$310 additional

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## Overview

Sandhill Cranes on the Platte River and Prairie  
Chickens and Grouse on the Sandhills Nebraska  
wildlife spectacle.

View two spectacular wildlife events; the gathering of migrating sandhill cranes and the courtship displays of prairie chickens and sharp tailed grouse. Visit prairie chicken and grouse "leks" up close on a working ranch in the central Sandhills. In addition, become immersed in the gathering of thousands of waterfowl and up to 500,000 sandhill cranes (and a few whooping cranes) along the Platte River. The tour begins and ends in Omaha, Nebraska.

- . 2 nights in a modern bunk house on a working ranch
- . Discover the famous Sandhills
- . Watch both greater prairie chickens and sharp tailed grouse on their leks
- . 2 naturalist guides
- . View morning flights of cranes from a Nature Conservancy blind
- . Visit preserves in the Rainwater Basin
- . Visit the Rowe Sanctuary of the National Audubon Society
- . Out the back door birding at our hotel in Grand Island
- . Visit the Hastings Museum
- . Search for whooping cranes
- . Numerous raptors and shrikes

Highlights: 500,000 sandhill cranes, prairie chickens and sharp tailed grouse courtship displays, huge flocks of waterfowl, raptors, and perhaps whooping cranes.

### **Day 1 - Saturday, March 20th**

Arrive Lincoln, Nebraska and transfer to the Hampton Inn Airport for the first night. We will have an orientation and group dinner after getting settled into the hotel.

Overnight Hampton Inn airport, Lincoln, Nebraska

### **Day 2 - Sunday, March 21st**

Assemble at 8 a.m. in the lobby of the hotel in Omaha, and then travel to our lodging at a guest ranch overlooking the Calamus Reservoir near the Sandhills town of Burwell. We will stop at several natural areas and preserves for wildlife watching and natural history interpretation. After settling in and relaxing at our Sandhills retreat, we will enjoy a ranch cooked dinner and later retire to our private rooms (with private bath) in one of the modern bunk houses.

Overnight at Calamus Lodge, Switzer Ranch City

### **Day 3 - Monday, March 22nd**

Trek to the Lek-(stop grousing). This will be a very early event to view prairie chickens and sharp tailed grouse performing their ancient courting rituals on the open prairie. We will be in unheated blinds and must stay quiet and refrain from taking photographs. We will also visit the leks in the late afternoon. Between our morning and afternoon "lek treks" we will loaf about the ranch and explore nearby birding sites. You may choose an optional trail ride for a horseback view of the Sandhills and perhaps more prairie chickens and grouse viewing.

Overnight at Calamus Lodge, Switzer Ranch City

### **Day 4 - Tuesday, March 23rd**

After breakfast, we will depart the Switzer Ranch and travel to the Platt River. Our route is along lightly traveled state roads and we may have an opportunity to view a variety of raptors. Mid-afternoon, we will visit the Rowe Sanctuary operated by the National Audubon Society in the heart of the sandhill crane area. Late in the day we will travel to Grand Island and our lodging with cranes, waterfowl, shorebirds and other wildlife right out the backdoor. As the backdoor cranes depart for their evening roost, we will settle down to dinner at our evening roost and early to bed, because....

Overnight at Holiday Inn, Grand Island, Nebraska

**Day 5 - Wednesday, March 24th**

...we will be up and on the road before dawn's early light as we travel to our observation blind overlooking the Platte River. Thousands and thousands of cranes will depart the sandbars of the river and fill the skies as they disperse to their feeding grounds. After the morning liftoff, our entourage will return to the hotel for a short break and then we will be cruising the back roads crane watching and hoping to see the occasional whooping cranes that may be mixed with the sandhills. Later we will experience the extravaganza of the sandhill crane sunset roosting flight along the Platte River.

Overnight at Holiday Inn, Grand Island, Nebraska

**Day 6 - Thursday, March 25th**

After a short, optional, bird walk just outside the hotel door, we will have breakfast and then continue our exploration of the area seeking not just cranes but a variety of waterfowl. The nearby Rainwater Basin is one of the major assembly points of the Central Flyway and each year 7-9 million ducks and up to 5 million snow and white fronted geese utilize the area we will be exploring.

Overnight at Holiday Inn, Grand Island, Nebraska

**Day 7 - Friday, March 26th**

Slurp your coffee and say goodbye to the cranes as we travel to meet our flights at Lincoln. Please do not make your airline reservation earlier than 2:00 p.m.