



Sandhill Crane Trip – 2017 Report

[URL: <http://www.earlham.edu/vicki-penziner-matson-field-trips/>]

It's 7:00 in the morning and people were gathering in the new Center for Science and Technology (CST) lobby. This Fall's Vicki Penziner-Matson Sandhill Crane and Indiana Dunes Field Trip took place on Saturday and Sunday November 11-12. The temperature outside was 33F and it remained in the thirties to low forties for the day. The group was ready and layered up for the trip. It was sunny for part of the day Saturday and cloudy for the rest of it.

Participants included faculty, alumni, students, and Earlham family and friends for a total of 36 people. Most of us traveled in rental vans, but some drove their personal cars. Everybody had fun getting to know each other. There is no better place or time to make friends than outside experiencing nature and sharing a home.

Five alumni and three Earlham families joined us this year. Their energy and enthusiasm was an important component of this year's Sandhill Crane trip.

After short introductions we packed our vans and left Earlham at 7:30am. After 2h30min drive we stopped close to the Meadow Lake Wind Farm to talk about farming, wind energy, and the impacts of both endeavors in our lives and nature. We then drove further North to Jasper-Pulaski State Fish and Game Area Indiana to rendezvous with the rest of the group at around 10:45am. The leaders gave introductions on how to use binoculars, talked about the formation of this area (all the way from glaciation to reclamation of the Kankakee swamp area), and ended by sharing some great information about Sandhill Cranes, their natural history and their migratory habits. We spent some time in the observation deck parking lot where the group was able to experience first hand the crane's gathering and 'parachuting' as they landed on the ground close just in front of us (note the cranes in the background of the final group picture). This is actually the first time we have seen such a great gathering in the morning before they begin leaving to the adjacent farmland to feed. After enjoying this gathering display of the cranes, we slowly drove the rural roads outside the refuge to observe flocks of cranes feeding in agricultural fields. In contrast to previous years some of the fields had not yet been harvested, so we saw few groups of Sandhill cranes, in addition because of global warming the migration of the cranes is happening almost a month later than was in the 90's.

We then drove to our favorite parking/ lunch spot where we had lunch @ around 1pm. Afterwards, we drove for a few more miles and decided to go walking on a beautiful wide trail back around the marshes and lakes on the refuge. It was chilly but the group was ready. We were able to find some amphibians and reptile remains. After a conversation about natural history by John on these two species we moved further into the woods. Lynne (Earlham Alum) and Paul Pieper (husband) surprised the group during our hike. Lynne has worked for many years with John in the Bahamas, it was great to have them join our group. We had great looks at two Bald Eagles perched over the lake and we also saw a few other species of trees (sp...) and birds (Blue jays, Bluebirds, Downy woodpeckers). The almost frozen lake shore provided a time for group members to explore the amazing sounds that stones will make when bounced off the ice and participate in an ice throwing contest.

Around 4pm the group went to the public viewing platform to watch the cranes aggregate on a large pasture and the nearby cornfields. There were ~ 5000 cranes arriving from feeding areas in all directions. Many flew right over our heads. The cranes gathered a bit further from the platform than most years, but people were still able to

"In every walk with nature one receives far more than we seek..." John Muir



grasp the magnitude of the group while also being able to observe individual cranes with the spotting scopes. Several folks on the trip had never seen this aggregation. We also observed the interaction between a herd of deer, the cranes, and a small pack of coyotes.

After experiencing this amazing display the group drove to our night accommodations. We had a great meal that night (thank you night cooks and chefs), followed by an amazing breakfast (thank you morning cooks and chefs). After breakfast the following day, we headed north to the Indiana Dunes National Lakeshore. We were fortunate to have Noel Pavlovic and wife Sarah, both Earlham alums, joining us. Noel has worked in the dune area for more than 25 years and his enthusiasm, love, and knowledge of nature in this area was amazing and contagious. After hiking this amazing naturalscape and learning about some amazing natural history and succession stories, the group had a quick snack time and headed back to Richmond.

We'd like to give a big thanks to Michael Penziner, Laurence Matson and other family contributors for making this trip possible! **

We also wish to extend thanks to the wonderful group of people that went on the trip this year. Everyone's enthusiasm and good attitudes made this experience delightful. We hope that everybody had as much fun as we did.

Keep an eye out for other Penziner-Matson field trips!!!

Wendy Tori, Andrea Ball, Jose Ignacio Pareja, John Iverson

**Expenses for the trip (e.g., rental vans and food) were covered by the Vicki Penziner-Matson Fund. Vicki's love of the natural world inspired her parents and friends to establish this fund, after her unexpected death near the end of her senior year at Earlham nearly 40 years ago. The income from the fund is dedicated to offering natural history field trips. These trips are community-wide events, open to staff, faculty and students (alumni, emeriti, etc.) alike.



Selected comments from some of our participants.

"This weekend I felt so lucky to have so many special experiences: the endless flocks of sandhill cranes landing in front of us were one of the most magnificent things I have ever seen, I gained a new appreciation for Indiana geology while visiting the dunes, and I found myself developing new friendships with other Earlhamites. I will remember this weekend forever!" Lilly



"As a freshman, this trip was a great opportunity to get to know my professors and other students. I got to see many of the concepts in the field that we have discussed in the [EcoBio] classroom, and I would highly recommend any student to take this opportunity." Sam

"...I appreciated this trip because of many factors. I loved the people who were on this trip. That's so special about Earlham: even when you don't know people you will make friends so quickly and everybody is so friendly! Moreover, I enjoyed learning a lot of new facts! It was so cool that so many people shared their wisdom with the group. And of course I enjoyed being outside in nature! Thank you so much!" Megan

"I am a freshman here at Earlham College, and thanks to you I got the opportunity to go on the the Sandhill Crane trip. From the bottom of my heart, I thank your family for doing something this amazing. Coming from a country where biodiversity, conservation, and environmental issues are not the priority it is very difficult to have such experiences. This trip made me consider Biology and the topic of species conservation as a career in the future. I learned so much and most importantly, I enjoyed it. It was a wonderful weekend and all because of you." Drenushe.

"Hi! I am thankful for the opportunity to grow closer to friends and meet wonderful new people I wouldn't have otherwise met. This experience helped me through a rough week and I feel very lucky to be able to have seen such a magnificent sight. Wow! What an experience! From hearing the Sandhill cranes for the first time to climbing the dunes of northern Indiana, likewise, for the first time, it is hard to pick one experience from a long list of wonderful experiences on this trip. The connection to nature and the connection with people stand out. As does the wealth of knowledge shared by the facilitators of the trip. This trip highlighted, for me, the absolute necessity of the connection between humans and nature. I felt always the spirit of what I felt to be the intention of the trip—to allow humans to experience the beauty of the earth and the vital connection to one another. Thank you so much for allowing me to participate." —Mary Frances

"I appreciated seeing and talking with alumni. It was awesome to witness people reconnecting, and knowing that the earlham community extends out into many places in the world." Cait

"I really appreciated this trip because I think it is important that we learn about the natural history of our current environment. As an Earlham student I want to know more about the beauty that exists in our backyard and is worth preserving, and this trip allowed me to do exactly that! I also gained the experience of seeing the Indiana Dunes and a major bird migration for the first time ever and these are memories that will stay with me forever. Finally, it is amazing to see how the community comes together in these events. I was able to spend time with friends, meet current students I hadn't known before, and spend time with Earlham alumni as well. I value the time spent sharing every part of this experience together, as we came together for our mutual appreciation of nature. I am incredibly grateful to have had this experience! Thanks so much again." -Olivia

Thank you so much for allowing me to join you and the Earlham contingent on the Sandhill crane trip. It's been quite some time since I have been immersed in an educational environment with students who are anxious to learn. I enjoyed it immensely, especially because the professors involved are SO knowledgeable and enthusiastic learners themselves. The passion for biology and the environment is readily evident...and incredibly contagious. The

*students on the trip were a joy to be around. Everyone was friendly and helpful. It's great to be a part of such a diverse and symbiotic gathering. I know, you just wanted one sentence...I couldn't help myself. Again, thank you for the experience! Sincerest regards,
Steve Ball*

I loved learning from all of the experts on this trip about everything we were able to see on this trip! Madeline

... For dinner Saturday night Jose asked us all to pick a word and my word was genuine. I chose this word because that is exactly how I felt on this trip. Everyone and everything was so raw. I have never experienced anything like that and because of that this trip made a huge impact on my life. It reminded me to live in the moment, to take in all your surroundings, and be grateful every moment of the day. Educationally, I learned so much about the conservation processes, birds, and biology which excited me to keep working hard during class and homework time. I thank you for your continuous support and donations because you have impacted my life. Yours in service and passion, Alexis Warren

Thank you so much for the opportunity to experience such an astonishing phenomenon! It is so wonderful that you provide students, faculty, and families with the ability to see the wonders of the natural world. It was really special to share the trip with my parents!-Andrea

...I enjoyed the entire trip, I thought I was very privileged to be able to go on this trip for free and spend time with such amazing and wise people. Sincerely, Evan



LIST OF FAUNA AND FLORA

Avifauna:

Canada Goose

Mute Swan

Mallard

Pied-billed Grebe

Great Blue Heron

Turkey Vulture

Bald Eagle

Northern Harrier

Red-tailed Hawk

American Kestrel

Sandhill Crane (4500+)

Ring-billed Gull

Rock Pigeon

Red-bellied Woodpecker

Blue Jay

American Crow

Carolina Chickadee

Eastern Bluebird

American Robin

European Starling

American Tree Sparrow

Red-winged Blackbird

Common Grackle

American Goldfinch

House Sparrow

Downy Woodpecker

Red-bellied Woodpecker

Distinctive trees and shrubs of the area:

Black Oak, Pin Oak, White Oak, Quaking Aspen, River Birch, Winterberry Holly and Buttonbush.

Herps: Midland Painted Turtle and Bull frog