

SANDHILL CRANE SPOTTING

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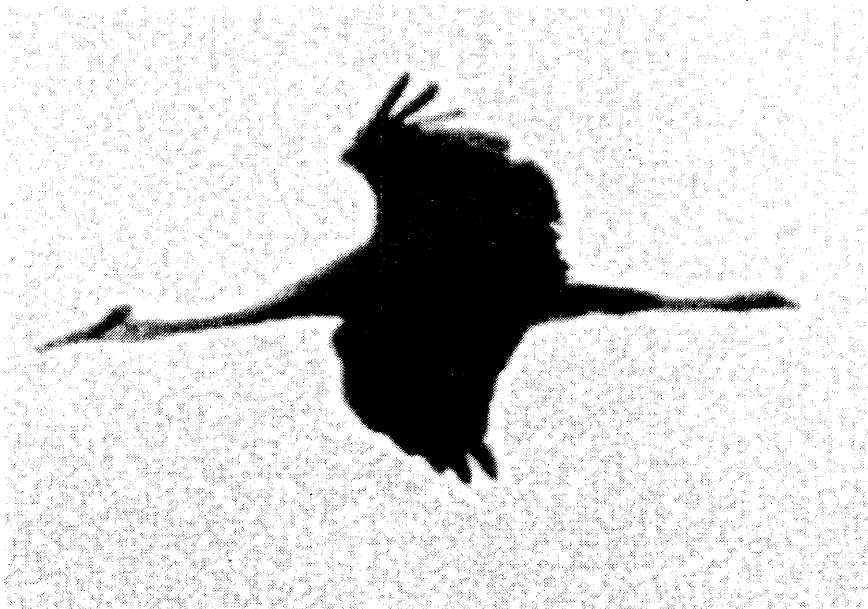
On April 15th at about 10:30 AM while birding with Jeff Novick in the Big Reeds Pond area at Montauk, L.I., I noticed a very large and unusual bird . The bird approached from the southwest and passed directly overhead at an altitude of about 150 feet. As the bird came into clear view through an opening in the trees it was instantly recognizable as an adult Sandhill Crane!!! After re-engaging my dropped jaw I was able to alert Jeff and we both observed the bird as it flew away from us toward the northeast. We were fortunate to hear the crane call once as it passed by.

Still in shock from the encounter we progressed another 300 feet through the woods in the hope that the crane had landed somewhere on the pond. As we came to an opening in the woods overlooking a large span of phragmites to the east, we noted a sizable kettle of vultures about 1200 feet away. A closer inspection of the kettle found it to consist of 9 **Black** Vultures and only 1 Turkey Vulture!!!

We were now beside ourselves...Our late morning search for Pine Warblers and Swamp Sparrows had turned up an amazing spectacle and we were totally unprepared to document it. We raced back to the parking lot to grab a spotting scope and camera. As I was putting my 600mm lens and 1.4X teleconverter on the tripod, I noticed yet another kettle of vultures. This kettle had several Turkey Vultures and at least two Black Vultures. Just as I was focusing on the group another Sandhill Crane flew through my viewfinder!!! Fortunately I was able to get a few distant, but diagnostic, images of the crane as it flew by at a distance of about 200 yards.

Now much relieved to have some evidence in hand, Jeff and I relaxed in the parking lot and enjoyed the rest of a remarkable spring raptor migration that included five juvenile Red-shouldered Hawks, several Sharp-shinned Hawks, many Red-tailed Hawks, a couple of Ospreys and a single male Northern Harrier.

The time between our first encounter with the crane and the second was only about fifteen minutes. Also, the distance between the crane sightings was considerable and they were both heading in the same northeasterly direction. None of the other soaring birds we observed were noted to circle around us. The crane would have had to circle the entire peninsula to get in position for us to see it a second time. I think it possible, if not very probable, that there were two different Sandhill Cranes at Montauk that day



Sandhill Crane

Montauk, NY

15 Apr 2001

Photographed by Michael Stubblefield