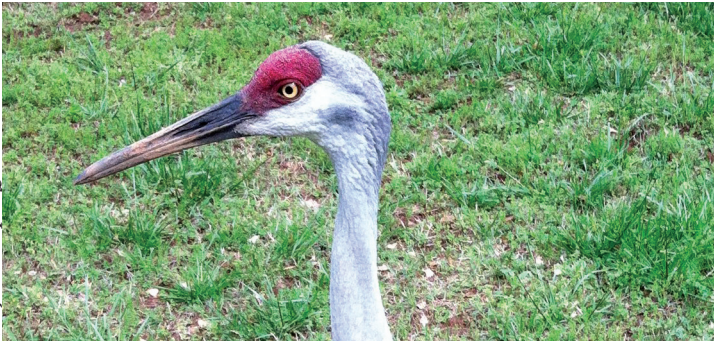


(Taylor Piephoff)



## Gruidae the CRANES

Cranes are large, heavy-bodied, long-necked, and long-legged birds that can live 30 years or more in the wild. There are 15 species distributed across all continents, except South America and Antarctica. Cranes are often confused with herons, but they are easily distinguished from herons in flight because cranes fly with their neck stretched straight out. They also often make loud calls in flight, while herons are generally silent. Cranes also always land on the ground and never perch in trees—as herons often do.

Only two types of cranes are regularly found in North America: the Sandhill Crane and the endangered Whooping Crane (*Grus americana*). Only the Sandhill Crane has been regularly found in the Carolina Piedmont. The Whooping Crane is an extremely rare species that is discussed in the Supplementary Bird List.

Throughout history, the lively courtship dance of the crane has inspired many cultures around the globe, including American Indians. An essay titled “The Crane Dance,” carried in *The Charlotte Observer* in April 1897, described the crane’s strange dance in great detail and concluded: “No purely imitative dancing could fail to gain by being an exact copy of the performance of the long-necked, spindle legged sandhill crane. Its steps are not only grotesque, but they are of a kind to make the gravest onlooker lose his dignity and laugh like a delighted boy at the circus.”