








Ohio Sandhill Crane Count 2026 - Volunteer Guide and Protocol

Volunteer Responsibilities Overview (5-10 hours):

1) Pre-survey:

-  Review protocol and online training videos prior to volunteer Q&A session in late March/early April (3 hours):
-  Attend online volunteer Q&A session in late March/early April
-  Learn how to identify sandhill cranes by sound and sight prior to survey, see: <https://www.savingcranes.org/species-field-guide/sandhill-crane/>
https://www.allaboutbirds.org/guide/Sandhill_Crane/id
-  Observers are encouraged to create/have a free eBird account* <https://ebird.org>
-  Download and learn how to use the eBird mobile app, or the eBird web data uploading portal (<https://ebird.org/submit>); see “Data Submission: eBird Data Entry Protocol” (p 3)
-  *Note: observers not using eBird should consult their County Coordinator for the “Alternate Data Entry Protocol”
-  If time allows, scout your area sometime prior to the survey to become familiar with potential sandhill crane habitats, identify safe roadside pull-off areas for survey, etc. (2-4 hours)

2) Day of Survey: Survey assigned block for the 2 hours (630-830 AM) on the day of the count (April 18, 2026)

3) Post-survey: Submit data via eBird (0.5 hour) and share with **obcinet**. We **strongly prefer** that you use eBird but if not possible, use the Crane Count Data Entry Form – please contact your County Coordinator for more information.

4) Breeding Confirmations: Revisit areas with possible breeding pairs 3-4x through July and submit data through eBird (or work with your County Coordinator)

April Count Survey Protocol:

Be within the survey block and ready to survey by 6:30 AM (prior to sunrise at 6:45 AM)

Stay along roadways and respect private property boundaries

Visit areas with potential crane breeding habitat within the survey block (10 square miles; the same blocks used for the Ohio Breeding Bird Atlas project) in the period between 6:30 – 8:30 AM. You may survey longer, but note that on your eBird checklist or data sheet.

At each stop within your survey block:

- Count the number of sandhill cranes. You may hear a single crane calling, or hear a pair duetting, or “unison calling”. These sounds indicate a minimum number of cranes. Be aware that the cranes can move during your survey period, so please use your judgement in counting.
- Estimate the distance and direction of the cranes from your survey location
- Include any breeding behaviors for the cranes, including: courtship behaviors (duetting/unison calling or a pair dancing), nest building (NB), or occupied nest (ON). Use the highest level of breeding code. See: <https://support.ebird.org/en/support/solutions/articles/48000837520-ebird-breeding-and-behavior-codes>

- Keep track of any other birds detected by sight and sound that you can identify, including numbers and breeding codes; use the highest level of code

If you see a banded sandhill crane on the day of survey, please do your best to identify the alphanumeric code and any colors of markers. These will be located on the upper leg of the bird. If possible, take a photograph of the bird. Please report to Laura Kearns at laura.kearns@dnr.ohio.gov.

Health and Safety Precautions:

- Wear an orange safety/hunter vest – this is important to alert other drivers and other recreationists. In some areas, youth turkey hunting season will be open.
- Dress appropriately for the weather.
- Watch out for ticks. Disease-carrying ticks are becoming more prevalent in Ohio. Wear tick repellent clothing and check for ticks when you get home, especially if you are out walking in vegetated areas.
- Work in pairs if possible. It’s safer and improves detectability rates of the birds.

Crane Count Etiquette - <https://savingcranes.org/counter-information/>

- Please give cranes the respect and distance they need and do not approach birds on foot within 200 yards. If you are in a vehicle, remain in your vehicle and do not approach any closer than 100 yards.
- Please remain concealed and speak in quiet voices to minimize disturbances to the cranes and other wildlife.

Ohio's survey will differ from ICF's typical Midwest Crane Count in that:

- We will be using Breeding Bird Atlas Survey Blocks as our survey units. We are only visiting sites with known or probable sandhill crane breeding habitat. Archived Atlas materials can be found here: <http://ohiobirds.org/obba2/> in case you are interested in the survey block design.
- We will also be contributing our data to eBird as much as possible: www.ebird.org
- Maps of Ohio's survey locations are available at <https://obcinet.org/get-involved/ohio-crane-count/>
- For additional information see:
 - <https://obcinet.org/get-involved/ohio-crane-count/>
 - <https://savingcranes.org/learn/annual-midwest-crane-count/counter-information/>

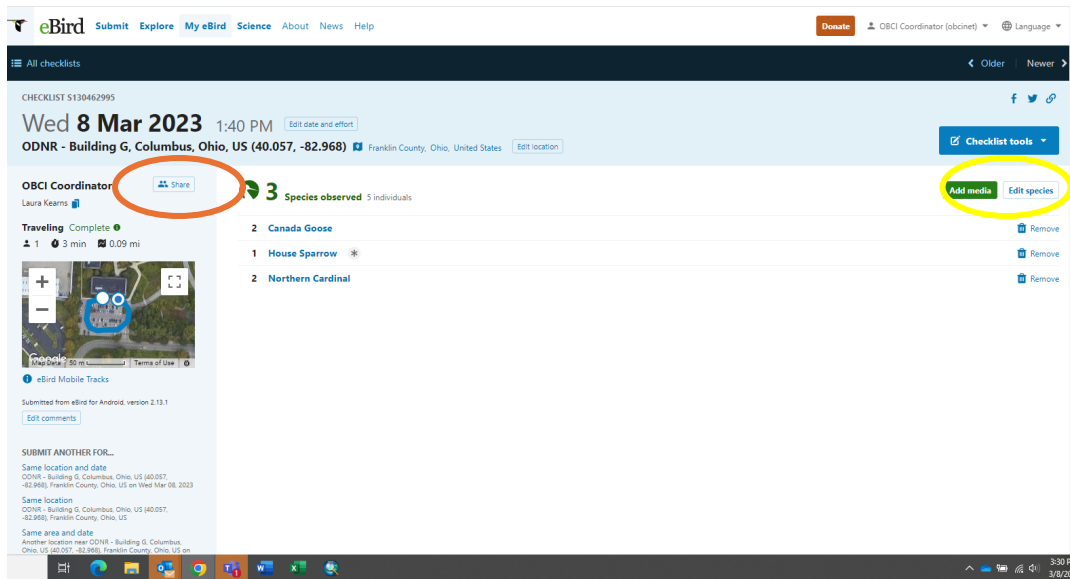
Data Submission: eBird Data Entry Protocol

In the field use eBird Mobile with the following protocols:

- Please enter counts of individuals, and breeding codes, for as many species as possible. For sandhill cranes, remember to include estimated distance and direction from your survey location.
- Use the stationary count protocol (you will have multiple stationary checklists for each block).
 - Spend a minimum of 5 minutes at locations where you suspect you will detect cranes. You may spend more time at the site if you have not yet detected any cranes (budget your time accordingly to try and hit sites in the block where cranes are likely to be).
- Select a hotspot if appropriate, otherwise create a new personal location.
- Enter 2 for the number of observers if in a pair, 1 if alone.
- **Share your checklist with obcinet** and any additional eBird accounts of your survey partners (if you enter “2” or more in the step above it will automatically prompt you for who to share it with in the app, otherwise see instructions for how to do this back home).
- In the checklist notes field, enter “Ohio Crane Count” and the ID number of your survey block.
- If possible, please submit **a complete checklist**.

Back Home:

- In your eBird account, under “My eBird/Manage Checklists”, click on your individual checklists,
 - Make any needed edits to your checklists for the day and add photos and/or sound recordings for each species (especially cranes!) as applicable (see below- yellow circle)
 - If you were unable to share your checklist in the field, **share with obcinet** using the “share” button (see below- orange circle)



Alternate Data Entry Protocol

Prior to the Survey:

Review, download, and print copies of the Midwest Crane Count Data Entry Form - https://savingcranes.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/02/crane_count_data_sheet_2021.pdf

You can add up to 4 stationary observation sites per form.

Post-survey:

Work with your County Coordinator to submit your data.

Breeding Confirmations Protocol (mid-April – end of July):

Only for locations where crane pairs are possibly breeding (not yet “confirmed” – nest or chicks not observed), and were counted on the Count, or were highly suspected of being missed.

Visit location(s) of possible breeding pairs 3-4x, once per month between April and July following protocols used for the Ohio Crane Count. You can go out any time of day, but crane activity may be slightly higher in the summer during cooler temperatures of the morning or early evening.

- one additional time in April after the official count then 1x month May through July until breeding is confirmed (i.e., chicks/colts observed with pair)
- record via eBird using the breeding confirmation codes

- Optional but Recommended: submit any photos through eBird to help confirm sighting and count of young (1-2 is typical)

Reminders: Please keep your distance from breeding pairs and colts, and especially nests. Cranes are still a state threatened species. If you can't get a good photo within a safe distance of where you are viewing the bird, please don't worry about it.

Please work with your county coordinator if you have questions. Thank you for helping to survey Ohio's sandhill cranes!