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25th Annual CraneFest Celebrates Sandhill Crane Migration Art, food, animals and more featured at event

BELLEVIEW, MI — Grab a chair or blanket and settle in next to Big Marsh Lake to watch as thousands of migrating Sandhill Cranes fly in to roost during the 25th Annual CraneFest on Oct. 12–13.

Hosted by Michigan Audubon in partnership with the Kiwanis Club of Battle Creek, CraneFest is a free event held at the Kiwanis Youth Conservation Area in Bellevue which overlooks the lake and Michigan Audubon's Baker Sanctuary.

From noon to dusk, the event features guided nature hikes, activities for kids, live animal exhibits, food vendors, nature-themed artisans, conservation organizations, and concludes with the highlight of the day, optimal viewing of Michigan's largest bird coming in to roost for the night.

Sandhill Cranes will fly into and out of the marsh all day with the highest concentration of birds arriving around dusk. More than 2,500 cranes were viewed each night during the 2018 event.

"It is such a gift to witness and celebrate the migration of Sandhill Cranes, a species that is more than 2.5 million years old, right here in Michigan," said Michigan Audubon's Executive Director Heather Good. "There is something for everyone at this conservation-minded festival. Please join us as we watch their impressive fly-in and acknowledge the conservation success story of a bird that was once almost extinct due to hunting and habitat loss."

Saturday's live animal exhibits will feature Michigan reptiles and amphibians from Nature Discovery from 1–6 p.m. On Sunday, festival-goers can enjoy the Binder Park Zoomobile from 1–3 p.m. and live birds of prey demonstrations by Michigan Avian Experience from 3–5 p.m.

Children's activities will include crafts, the migration game, a crane scavenger hunt, and more, as well as storytime at 1 and 3 p.m. and kids' habitat walks at 2 and 4 p.m.

Sandhill Cranes are believed to be the oldest living bird species, having existed for more than 2.5 million years. They measure up to five feet tall with wings spanning six feet in length. In the 1930s, habitat destruction and hunting left only 17 pairs of Sandhill Cranes in Michigan. Today, conservation efforts have led to a steady increase in populations with an estimated 30,000 cranes living in Michigan.

Admission to CraneFest is free. Parking is \$7. The festival is located at the Kiwanis Youth Conservation Area, 22300 Fifteen Mile Rd., Bellevue, MI 49021.

For more information, visit www.cranefest.org or call 517-580-7364.

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About Michigan Audubon

Michigan Audubon connects birds and people for the benefit of both, through conservation, education, and research efforts in the state of Michigan. As a non-profit conservation organization, Michigan Audubon has 18 sanctuaries, more than 30 local chapters throughout the state, and manages Whitefish Point Bird Observatory. Visit www.michiganaudubon.org for more information.