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## USGS Counts Cranes With Unmanned Aircraft



USGS used the Raven RQ-11A UAS to determine if the Raven's sensor package could detect the cranes' thermal signatures.

When U.S. Geological Survey (USGS) biologist Leanne Hanson answered a "call" in 2009 for interested USGS scientists to learn to operate drones, she knew it would be uplifting work—literally. Recently, as a newly trained and certified pilot, she spent a week flight-testing a small unmanned aircraft system (UAS) as a noninvasive way to conduct aerial counts of sandhill crane populations.

The collaborative project Hanson is working on is called "proof of concept," meaning they test the drones to see if they will be an effective means of conducting aerial counts of skittish creatures like migrating sandhill cranes.

"It was really interesting," reports Hanson, a biologist with the USGS Fort Collins Science Center in Colorado. "We flew the UAS over the cranes when they were roosting, feeding, and loafing to see how they reacted. They sat still for us when they were roosting and loafing, but birds flushed during feeding. We will plan missions during roosting and loafing times, when their behavior is not affected."

[Click here](#) to view a detailed description of the project.

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