

Sandhill Cranes – Tips for successful hunting

Coordinating access with land owners – Getting permission to hunt fields is essential to crane hunting in southeastern Arizona. Most of the birds that winter here eat grain left over in fields after harvesting or target new sprouts in fields so that's where you can expect to find them most of the time. Don't be afraid to knock on doors and talk to folks to ask for permission to hunt private fields. If you are granted permission, be respectful and clean up everything in the area after the hunt so it's like you were never even there. Also, expressing genuine thanks to land owners after a hunt goes a long way.

One of the largest landowners in the multi-unit hunts is the Coronado Dairy. To date, they have been extremely cooperative in allowing hunters to enter and hunt sandhill cranes on their properties, but access requires coordination with the Dairy at least 2 weeks in advance of your hunt. See the following link to request access for hunting on the Coronado Dairy: <https://www.azgfd.com/wildlife-conservation/on-the-ground-conservation/cooperative-programs/landowner-relations/landowner-compact-overview/coronado-dairy-and-farm-access/>.

Ranches and landowners in all the hunt areas may offer opportunities if contacted in advance by hunters who practice ethical, responsible, and respectful hunt practices to keep access open to all hunters.

Scouting – This is the single most important thing you can do to help your success. You will want to know where and which fields the birds want to be in so you can put yourself as close as possible to them. While birds aren't always consistent in their habits, there's a very high likelihood that if you saw them feeding in that spot today, they'll want to be close to that same spot tomorrow. Also, scouting gives you a lay of the land when you see some birds heading to different fields in case you need to move for the next day's hunt.

Stay Hidden and Don't Move a Muscle – Being camouflaged and hiding in a blind is very important because cranes have some of the best eyesight of any game bird. Whether you build a blind or bring one with you, you'll want to use or add native vegetation to make sure it blends in and does not look out of place. Tumbleweeds are a great start or addition. And don't forget to have a little bit of cover overhead as birds can and do fly directly over you. Be sure to remove anything that is shiny or reflective that might give away your hide (e.g. sunglasses, headlamps, etc.). And don't forget to not move around, even with your face to try and get a look at them coming in. Wait until the last possible moment when they are in range to take your shot.