EXCITEMENT IS GROWING at Audubon Park Zoo, because two of the whooping cranes, thanks to zoo director John Moore's efforts, have formed a pair bond and are making attempts at nesting. The pair, pictured here with their nest, and a third one kept elsewhere in the zoo, are offspring of the famous Josephine, and the only first-generation captive whooping cranes in existence.

Audubon Cranes Attempting to Nest

By CORNELIA CARRIER

Nothing ever drew such national attention as a whooping crane to the Audubon Park Zoo named Josephine.

It was during the 1950's and early sixties of the non-migratory period when Josephine, last of the whooping cranes, lived and hatched eggs in captivity. Thanks to Josephine, the Audubon Zoo could boast the first and only successful captive pairings of whooping cranes.

Josephine died Sept. 13, 1968. But if zoo director John Moore's hunch is right, Josephine's children may be getting ready to continue her good work and draw still more attention to the New Orleans zoo.

When Moore came to the zoo last June, he was told the zoo's three whooping cranes were all males. Consequently they were confined in separate enclosures. But Moore suspected that one of them was a female, because it was smaller than the other two and the colored area on its wing was a paler red.

So the director began moving the cranes around, putting them together in every possible combination. But each combination resulted in serious fighting.

"I figured since they had been separated for so long, they had become territorial in their pens and couldn't tolerate another crane infringing on their space. So we moved them to an enclosure that was entirely new to them, and that seemed to work.

"The new pen was close to our other crane species so the whooping cranes had a chance to see other mates and dance together as they do.

"After the third day, the one I originally thought was the female and one male began fighting the other male. Evidently, these two had formed a pair bond, so we took them and put them back in one of the original enclosures.

"He described how the two had made a number of courtship displays -- bowing to each other, spreading their wings, leaping up in the air and dancing around. Sometimes, the male will throw a stick up in the air and try to catch it in his bill, Moore added.

About three weeks ago, straw was put in their enclosure. Since then both birds have been putting sticks on the nest and sitting on it. They have made what Moore calls "some fairly good nests," but they have torn them up.

Of course, Moore admits the proof will be in the laying, but there is plenty of time. The birds, he figures, although the records are incomplete, should be about 16 years old. Some of the cranes are said to breed at 3 years old, others have been 26 years old before they laid eggs. There are records of cranes living 40 to 50 years -- so long in fact, that the Japanese white crane, very similar to the whooping crane, is a symbol of longevity in that country.

"If we can just get them started, we can have them going for a number of years," Moore said.

He talked about the plight of the whooping crane and why Josephine's successful captive breeding and the possibility of more births are so important.

Cranes Endangered

According to Moore, the whooping crane whose scientific name is Grus americana, has never been a terribly common species since the arrival of the white man in America, "in fact, practically all cranes are now endangered," he said.

In the early days, the whooping cranes were often shot by hunters, but their de-