

Whooping Cranes' Migration

By Jabes M. Lara

In North America the **Whooping Crane** is one of the tallest birds. They're about 5 feet tall with a wingspan that is almost 8 feet wide. In 1941 there were only 21 Whooping Cranes alive. You could say that they were close to **extinction**. Today there are less than 300 in the wild, and in captivity there are around 100 cranes. There is one flock that contains 194 cranes that migrates from Canada to Texas. It takes them weeks to do this long journey of 2,700 miles. **Migration** is a journey that some animals do every year



from one place to another and back again to avoid competition for food, to reproduce, or for other reasons that help them survive. Some, but not all, birds, fish and butterflies migrate.

You must be wondering how Whooping Cranes became **endangered**. Some reasons that they became endangered are hunting, habitat loss, and the construction of power lines. When people were moving west across the United States, they began to hunt them for their feathers to use as decoration. Sometimes these hunters also mistook Whooping Cranes for other birds, such as swans, and shot them by accident. Another way humans have accidentally hurt these birds is by building power lines in their migration path. In their long journey of migration they have many opportunities to fly into power lines. When a crane flies into an electrical power line it can be electrocuted and will probably die.

Habitat loss was the biggest reason they became endangered. Whooping Cranes need wetlands and fields. Here they find food and shelter. As wetlands continue to be destroyed by humans, the Whooping Cranes' food source also disappears.

During the time when there were as few as 21 of them, they had some trouble navigating during the migration. Young cranes learn how to navigate from older cranes. Because there were just a few adult cranes alive, it was hard for the young ones to travel to the right place. Like other birds, the Whooping Crane uses the position of the sun like a compass. By knowing where in the sky the sun is they can tell where they are going.

Why do they travel such a long way you ask yourself? They travel a long distance because they can't lay their eggs in Texas. Since Texas has a warm climate all year long, there are more predators that might kill the baby Whooping Cranes. They find a nice, warm climate in Canada in the summer where there are fewer predators because of the extreme cold in the winter. They return to Texas in the winter. In Canada they reproduce and raise their young ones. In Texas they eat and rest. It is hard for them to survive in this migration and their shrinking habitat. Let's hope that all the efforts to help the Whooping Cranes are successful!