



THE SECRETARY OF THE INTERIOR  
WASHINGTON

CITATION

**PARTNERS IN CONSERVATION AWARD**

**OPERATION MIGRATION**

In recognition of Operation Migration for their efforts to re-introduce a self-sustaining population of Whooping cranes into their historic range in eastern North America.

Whooping cranes learn their migration behavior and the location of the wintering grounds by following the parent generation. In 1870, between 500 and 1,400 whooping cranes inhabited North America; by 1941, the migratory population had dropped to 16 individuals. Active intervention by the U.S. and Canadian governments, as well as conservation groups has helped this flock recover. In 1967, the Whooping crane was listed as endangered. There was no method of restoring the historic Eastern North America flyway once the last bird was extirpated from that range. Throughout the 1990's Operation Migration conducted a series of self-funded migration experiments with three avian species. By 1998, they were able to demonstrate to the International Whooping Crane Recovery Team that ultralight aircraft could be used to imprint a small flock of birds and lead them on their first migration. When 72 percent of experiment birds returned on their own to the training site the following spring, they demonstrated it was possible to teach a migration route to precocial birds. In 1999, Operation Migration was a founding member of the Whooping Crane Eastern Partnership, a coalition of nine public and private agencies that were organized to reintroduce a self-sustaining population of Whooping cranes (*Grus Americana*) into their historic range in eastern North America. This new flock would augment the only naturally occurring population that nests in Wood Buffalo National Park in northern Canada and winters at the Aransas National Wildlife Refuge on the coast of Texas. Since the reintroduction began in 2001, eight generations of Whooping cranes have been taught to migrate. There are now 88 birds in the eastern population with more added every year. Before this population can be considered self-sustaining, it must contain a minimum of 125 individuals including 25 breeding pairs. The target could be achieved in another three to five years. For their long-standing dedication and exceptionally collaborative efforts to establish a self-sustaining population of Whooping cranes in eastern North America, Operation Migration is granted the Department of the Interior's Partners in Conservation Award.