



## SYMPOSIUM 'REINTRODUCING MIGRATORY BIRDS'

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### Re-introduction of Whooping Cranes (*Grus americana*) in North America

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Reintroduction of new populations has been an important strategy for the conservation for Whooping Cranes in North America. The success of re-introduced populations is closely tied to current criteria for the down-listing Whooping Cranes out of endangered status, under the US Endangered Species Act. Four different attempts to create new populations of have been attempted, however none of them is producing young at a rate that sustains their population; two reintroduced populations are currently receiving birds and two efforts have been abandoned.

Re-introduction efforts began in 1975 with a program to place Whooping Crane eggs under nesting Sandhill Cranes (*Antigone canadensis*) at the Gray's lake national wildlife Refuge in Idaho. A non-migratory flock was started in 1993, in central Florida, by releasing fledglings produced by captive Whooping Cranes. For various reasons, these populations are no longer active projects and do not receive birds or eggs. Re-introduction of an eastern migratory population began in 2001 and was established by training fledgling Whooping Cranes to follow an ultralight aircraft and using the ultralight to teach them a migratory habit and route in the first autumn of their life. The most recent attempt (2010) has established a new non-migratory population in southwest Louisiana, using methods like those used in the establishment of the population in central Florida. The status and current challenges of these two active re-introduction programs will be discussed. All the methods depend on the production of eggs or chicks from captive Whooping Cranes, hence the management of cranes in captivity and proper training chicks for release is an important aspect of the Whooping Crane reintroduction program. The future of re-introduction as a strategy for Whooping Crane conservation is an area of active discussion.